



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Bill and Peggy
Foote, 2014 February 16-17

Funding for this interview was provided by the Artists' Legacy Foundation.

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Bill and Peggy Foote on 2014 February 16-17. The interview took place in San Francisco, CA and was conducted by Mija Riedel for the Archives of American Art's Viola Frey Oral History Project. Bill and Peggy Foote and the Artists' Legacy Foundation have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations which appear in brackets appended by initials. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MIJA RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Peggy and Bill Foote, at Bill's office, on February 16th, 2014, in San Francisco, California for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is card number one.

So, good afternoon, and thank you both for coming. We'll take care of a little of this biographical information before we get going in earnest. So Peggy, when and where were you born?

PEGGY FOOTE: Philadelphia, 1935.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, what was the date?

MS. FOOTE: December 20th.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Would you describe your childhood and your family background a little bit? Growing up, what was significant or important?

[They laugh.]

MS. FOOTE: Oh my god.

MS. RIEDEL: Take your time. Anything that, especially as it pertains to art in general.

MS. FOOTE: You know, my family was not art-oriented. However, it was Depression times, and if there was anything free, we went to it. So they would take me or my brother Pete at that time, to the Philadelphia Art Museum, because it was free—

[They laugh.]

Yeah, things like that. And they enjoyed that. But basically, they were not art-oriented. And I don't think at that time, I was so much. I went to Catholic school there, and I was only in Catholic school there through the third grade, and we came out to California.

And in Philadelphia, there was one nun that would make us do little art projects. You know, like, carve pyramids—we were on Egypt at one time. So we had to do things relating to Egypt. So, we did. Things like that. But I don't think as far as art—I think the one person who may have helped me in that respect was my Uncle Joe. And I didn't get to know him until we moved to California.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you move here to San Francisco?

MS. FOOTE: No, this was in Stockton and Sacramento. He was more interested in music, but he was a good draftsman. I have a few of his things that he did.

I think his wife, who I don't really want to go into, is not a nice person—I think she threw most of his stuff out. But, he was—you know, not anything direct, but just influenced by being around him. Those kinds of things. But very much interested in music. He got me interested in classical music, which was good.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that fairly unusual in Stockton at the time? Or was it more common than one might think?

BILL FOOTE: Stockton?

MS. FOOTE: No, no, we came off the train, at the station in Stockton—I just looked at it, and said, "Mom, I want to go home." She did, too. But, my opinion hasn't changed.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a hard place to relocate to, coming from Philadelphia.

MS. FOOTE: Yes, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: So did you attend high school there as well?

MS. FOOTE: No, we moved back to—well yeah, eventually. We moved back to Philadelphia.

MS. RIEDEL: How old were you then?

MS. FOOTE: Well, I would have been about—oh, I was going into the fifth grade then, so how old are you in the fifth, nine?

MR. FOOTE: I think the fifth is about 12, I think? No, it was 10.

MS. FOOTE: Oh yes, I was a little bit early, I was nine. Because of the way they did birth dates then, in school.

MS. RIEDEL: You moved back to Philadelphia? Oh, my goodness.

MS. FOOTE: Moved back to Philadelphia, because there was no work out here, it was after the war. Dad lost his job, and so he went back to Philadelphia, he got work back there.

My brother developed a rheumatic fever, and—he was in what they call, I can't remember, it was a home in Atlantic City where they kept rheumatic children. And he was there for a year, poor kid. But the doctor said you better go back to California. So we did, back to Stockton.

And then, at that time, I spent, what—sixth, seventh, eighth grade, in public schools. So that's where I got more exposure to art. You know, art classes.

And then went back to a Catholic high school in Stockton, that had nothing much to offer at that time. Typing, shorthand, religion, Latin—it was a very small school, it was only a three hundred student body.

MS. RIEDEL: That is small. And when did you graduate?

MS. FOOTE: 1953.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you go on for a bachelor's degree?

MS. FOOTE: Well, let's see, I went into nursing school at that time, and they kicked me out because I got married. You're not allowed to be married, it was so strange. It was strange. You could not be married at that time.

I said, well, my husband—young husband—was in the Navy, and you know, we were both young and stupid. [Laughs.] But—I said, well, he's going to be overseas for the next six to nine months. Nope, out. You out.

But anyway, I continued on—I got an AA degree at that time and then I went to work for the phone company, and went down to San Diego for a while, worked there, came back up to Stockton, went to work at Stockton State Hospital.

And at that time, the nursing administration said, Peggy, do you want to finish your nursing school? I said, sure. Because that's one way I could earn enough money to go back to college.

And so I finished nursing school in Sacramento, and then came back—I continued sort of a spotty sort of education. College of [the] Pacific—Delta College, which was City College at that time, in Stockton. Then some work at College [of the] Pacific. Then Sacramento—then I met him at the State Hospital.

I was getting ready to sign—I was getting ready to finish my nursing master's degree at UCSF, but then we got married, and that changed that. But I went back to school—Bill can tell you more about the gallery, how the gallery came about. He was in partnership with the gallery, it was called Lincoln Square Gallery—and Bill, Pat—

MR. FOOTE: Pat Patton.

MS. FOOTE: And Shirley Hansen. Now Shirley knew Viola.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, she was the one that got Viola to enter the gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: So let's hold that thought just there for one moment, and let's get just Bill's quick biographical information, and then we'll jump into that. Does that sound good?

MR. FOOTE: Oh, okay fine.

MS. RIEDEL: So, same general questions, when and where you were born.

MR. FOOTE: Okay, I was born in Los Angeles, July 8th, 1937. And grew up in El Monte, Southern California, and then high school in El Monte, college at La Sierra College, then medical school at Loma Linda University. And then interned in San Diego, and then did my residency in Oakland, in psychiatry. At the very last rotation of my residency, that's when I met Peggy, at Napa State Hospital. That was my last rotation.

MS. RIEDEL: At which hospital, sorry?

MR. FOOTE: Napa State Hospital. And so, it was very interesting, I had decided to be a bachelor, and then when I heard her voice, I said, "Oh, no, another one of those," and six months later we were married.

MS. RIEDEL: Six months?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, six months later we were married.

MS. RIEDEL: And how long have you been married now?

MR. FOOTE: Since '67, so we're going to be on our 47th year.

MS. RIEDEL: Wow, congratulations.

MR. FOOTE: And so, when I was in my residency—I'd always loved art. And when I came up to San Francisco, my eyes were opened from L. A. Art in L. A. was Hollywood Boulevard and movie theaters. That was art.

And so, I got really educated with the museums, and then I got started in taking some personal—you know, Time-Life books on the history of art. So I started just looking, and my grandmother was an artist—

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. FOOTE: Well, an artist, she was good, but I was always—

MS. RIEDEL: Painter, photographer?

MR. FOOTE: No, painter. Oils. And she was a kind of renaissance woman of her day. Interesting. At age 80 she was still wearing spike high heels, about like this.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. FOOTE: Oh yes. Oh yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Back in the day she wore those?

MR. FOOTE: Oh yes, and she said, "I'm too short." And Gran was quite a huge influence on me. My grandmothers both were. My family was not interested—culture for them—I had never experienced a ballet, an opera, a symphony, nothing until I moved to San Francisco.

I could never go back down to L. A. again. It just was not my tribe anymore.

And so, before I met Peggy, I started having art shows at my home. I said, I'm going to do this. And so I went with—called a whole bunch of artists I met periodically, had an art show in my home, and I did pretty good.

MS. FOOTE: Did you—oh I'm sorry, did you meet them through Shirley? The artists?

MR. FOOTE: No, I didn't—I met Gloria Champion quite—

MS. FOOTE: Oh, Gloria, yeah—

MR. FOOTE: Gloria, I met Gloria just by circumstance, and I loved her work, and then I met Hiroshi Tagami in Hawaii, and he let me have two paintings done on consignment, and I sold both of them. And Pat Patton bought one, and we have the other one.

MS. RIEDEL: Pat—sorry?

MR. FOOTE: Pat Patton was our neighbor, who eventually—he and I joined Shirley Hansen in the gallery.

MS. FOOTE: The painting, you said you kept one.

MR. FOOTE: *Woman in Rainstorm*, Hiroshi Tagami, we have that one.

MS. RIEDEL: So you would just go and find pieces that were appealing to you, that you loved, and bring them to your home, and do sales out of your house? Operating as a dealer?

MR. FOOTE: Operating as a dealer. And I just wanted to make sure the artists got some money. You know, I didn't make that much money.

And I found some art at the [fence at the zoo in Honolulu -BF/PF] Hawaii, and that's where I met Hiroshi Tagami—a wonderful fellow. And so anyway, that's how it started—then I met Shirley at Lincoln Square [Gallery], and that's where I bought this painting. Eleanor Elsocht, right behind me on the wall.

Her husband was the biggie, Robert Elsocht. But I thought she was a far better painter. And then there's a whole bunch of other people in that gallery, and that's when Shirley introduced me, at the time, to the Vacaville artists. They were all—the inmates were doing a lot of art showing, so I went there, and I saw the art there.

MS. RIEDEL: In the institution?

MR. FOOTE: In Vacaville, yes—once a year they would have an open house art showing.

MS. RIEDEL: In the penitentiary?

MR. FOOTE: Yes, exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: Extraordinary.

MR. FOOTE: All the inmates were doing art.

MS. RIEDEL: This was in the '60s, the '50s?

MR. FOOTE: This was in the '60s, mid '60s. And that's where I got some—wow, and some of these guys were really good.

MS. RIEDEL: I bet.

MR. FOOTE: And so, it's like, okay. Then, the more I got to know Shirley—her two partners were going to be leaving her, and so she was stuck with the lease. And Shirley—how would I describe this—

MS. RIEDEL: Where was it? This was Lincoln Square Gallery?

MR. FOOTE: The Lincoln Square Gallery, in Oakland, right off of [Lincoln Boulevard -BF/PF], that area, and off of [Highway] 13 going to Berkeley, you got off at [Interstate] 580 there. It's—

MS. RIEDEL: Lincoln Square Gallery, how long had it been there? Do you know? Was it new?

MR. FOOTE: Oh, it had been there I think about two or three years before I got involved.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was her focus, or what was the gallery focusing on?

MR. FOOTE: The gallery focus was all local artists. Because they had connections with CCA [California College of the Arts]. That's where Viola [Frey] came from. Jack Laycox was there. Eleanor Elsocht, Richard McDonald, Louise Hoeing—somebody, a guy—his name was Brandon, I can't remember his first name.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah—boy, I can't remember.

MR. FOOTE: And Brandon somebody. [Brandon was the last name. -BF/PF] And there was some others. Mija, that goes a long—I can't remember all of them. But when I got involved, I was more, kind of like—okay, hammer, nails, hanging up this, hanging up that, and helping with this. And we, Pat and I, were more on the income. We'd search for artists and bring them in also, but Shirley was more the contact. And then—and I enjoyed it.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure. So you had a practice as a psychiatrist, and you were doing this on the side?

MR. FOOTE: No, I was still a resident at the time.

MS. RIEDEL: And in your spare time?

MR. FOOTE: In my spare time I was doing this.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my gosh.

MR. FOOTE: And, it was fun, but I learned an awful lot. And I also learned very early on, because I started—

Gloria Champion was a wonderful artist. And when I met her, she was all of a sudden—these dealers only on Geary Street were after her, and they were just—I could see what they were doing. I said, “I’m not going to be your agent, but I’m going to act like an agent.” I said, “They’re ripping you off.”

MS. RIEDEL: How so?

MR. FOOTE: Well, wanting her work for nothing, and selling it by 10, 20, 30 times more.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, really.

MR. FOOTE: That sort of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that’s extraordinary actually.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, I didn’t like that at all.

MS. RIEDEL: No, of course not.

MR. FOOTE: I can’t remember, what was the guy in Geary Street? He was just notorious.

MS. FOOTE: Well, didn’t he have a shop down on Ghirardelli Square or somewhere in that area?

MR. FOOTE: No, this guy was on Geary. There was also one in—yeah, but he was slick.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, I know who you mean. But Gloria Champion—

MS. RIEDEL: If that name comes, we’ll all try to remember that. That whole little Geary area, that’s still now?

MS. FOOTE: Years ago, it used to be.

MR. FOOTE: Years ago, he handled this guy called Cucaro. And I remember I went in there one time, I said, “Well, I saw one here and I really kind of liked it, it had more of a yellow—I don’t see it now.” “Oh wait a minute!” They open this store room door, and here were these yards of paintings. “We’ll find one.”

And I said, “No, thank you.” [Laughs.] I got the picture right then, and said, no, that’s not my cup of tea. And then he wanted to take Gloria, and he’d do the same thing with her. He made a fortune off Cucaro, I’m not so sure Cucaro made anything, and I didn’t want that to happen to Gloria.

And so, that was kind of my introduction. Then when I got married, we had the gallery and everything’s fine, and Shirley Hansen—her husband got transferred to Spokane, Washington, so I had to leave. And we said, “Ugh!” I was in practice, and a resident in the Navy, and Pat was a court reporter—well, all eyes went to Peggy, so Peggy inherited the gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: So what year did you come on and really start working in it?

MS. FOOTE: ‘68 I think.

MS. RIEDEL: ‘68. And you’d been involved for a year or two before that?

MR. FOOTE: I had been involved.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. But you, really not at all up until then.

MS. FOOTE: No, I was doing some art classes at the—in my spare time up at Napa Junior College. Just—you know, evening classes for drawing and painting and things.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you living in Oakland at the time, or Napa?

MR. FOOTE: Oakland.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, Oakland.

MS. FOOTE: No, I was living in Napa, he was in—

MR. FOOTE: Well when we met, Peggy was in Napa, I was in Oakland.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, and then when you were—once you were married—

MR. FOOTE: Oakland.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, I inherited the gallery and —Champion was very nice [and a talented and wonderful black artist -BF/PF].

MR. FOOTE: Well, she had [four -BF/PF] kids. I mean—

MS. FOOTE: I know, she was busy. So we had to run down all these artists. I didn't know where they were at.

MS. RIEDEL: How many artists were in the gallery, and what sort of work was it?

MS. FOOTE: Paintings, watercolors, no sculptural things—

MS. RIEDEL: No sculptures.

MR. FOOTE: Sculptures, not very many—we had small ones but not much.

MS. RIEDEL: And what sort of work, was it more traditional? Was it landscapes?

MS. FOOTE: I would say more traditional—

MS. RIEDEL: Any sort of abstract expressionists sneaking in there?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, Jack Laycox,

MS. FOOTE: Jack was a “paint by the yard” guy.

MR. FOOTE: He had a yard.

MS. FOOTE: He was very popular. And we sold a lot of his work. You know, it was just appealing.

MR. FOOTE: Well, we don't have any.

MS. FOOTE: And he was a very nice fellow.

MR. FOOTE: Very nice man, though, I liked him a lot.

MS. RIEDEL: So fairly traditional painting and drawing?

MS. FOOTE: Fairly traditional, yeah. Did we have Reginald Marsh at that time? I'm thinking of Reginald Marsh, but you know, Mason—

MR. FOOTE: Harold Mason? I think we got a few of Harold Mason's watercolors.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, he was a water colorist. Apparently he's up north, in northern Cal—I don't know where he's at now. But a nice regional artist. He was very competent, very good.

MS. RIEDEL: And a lot of these had been students at CCAC [California College of Arts and Crafts, now California College of the Arts] at the time? Or how were - where was the stable gathered from?

MR. FOOTE: Oh, the stable I think was Shirley's connection, and she also knew—her original partners were involved with CCA, so all these artists actually were coming through that funnel. And other areas, but that was mainly where it was coming from.

MS. RIEDEL: And still, coming from CCA, because it was CCAC at the time, still the focus was primarily painting and drawing. No three-dimensional work at all.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, those three, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so—

MR. FOOTE: No ceramics.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Interesting. So, how then did the shift begin to happen, and how did you first meet Viola?

MS. FOOTE: Well, he had to let Viola know that Shirley was gone.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, Viola was already in the gallery?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, she was already in the gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: But only her paintings or drawings?

MS. FOOTE: No, we were already selling her work.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. So how did you first meet her, both of you?

MS. FOOTE: We found out where she lived. I think Shirley did give us her address. And we went over to introduce ourselves, and that's when we first met Charles [Fiske]. Charles opened the door, and we introduced—no, we said, "Who are you?"

[They laugh.]

I didn't think he was going to let us in to talk to Viola.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, she was still living in the city [San Francisco], here?

MR. FOOTE: Yes, the city.

MS. RIEDEL: So was she in the Divisadero [St.] house at the time?

MR. FOOTE: Yes, she was. That's where we met her.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so that was it.

MR. FOOTE: Many, many meetings in that house.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, we'll have to talk about that.

MS. FOOTE: Well, you know, I don't know, things just start taking off. I'm not too sure how everything evolved, but it did, and—

MR. FOOTE: Well, we liked each other.

MS. RIEDEL: So there was an immediate connection between the four of you?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, yeah, we got along very well. Then, what year was it—the lease was up on the gallery. Pat Patton, he says, "I don't want to go on with it." Fine, it was just—I decided dealing with a bunch of artists is a bit much. And trying to, you know, trying to locate them, get work—

MS. RIEDEL: Were you having monthly exhibitions, or just work would come in, and as it sold—

MS. FOOTE: No, I would have exhibitions, but then I did have—mostly it was with Viola. And then—I'm trying to—because Viola—we had—

MR. FOOTE: We had other people, though. Remember Richard McDonald was there?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, Richard, but I don't know if I had a show for Richard.

MR. FOOTE: No, we did not.

MS. FOOTE: But the thing is—after I took it over, it was in the red, but I managed to get it in the black. No profit, but we didn't owe anybody.

MS. RIEDEL: That's no small feat back then.

MR. FOOTE: You know, thank god—as Peggy got it in the black, and we were able to get out of it.

MS. FOOTE: About that time the lease was up. But then I decided—

MS. RIEDEL: So you managed the gallery for a year? Two years?

MS. FOOTE: Almost two years.

MR. FOOTE: Almost two years.

MS. RIEDEL: '68 to '69?

MR. FOOTE: We had a great framer in Berkeley, Dow and Frosini.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, because in '70, that was the year I gave the show for Viola, and that we bought a big house up in the hills. And we had a really good show for Viola. Paintings and her ceramic work, which I loved. I really loved her ceramic work.

MR. FOOTE: That was a very successful show.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, it was.

MS. RIEDEL: What did you love about it? What drew you to it?

MS. FOOTE: Well, you know, at that time, she was doing china painting on ceramics. Which people weren't doing, and I loved it.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Bright colors—

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yes.

MS. FOOTE: Bright colors, and the motifs were wonderful, and—

MS. RIEDEL: Was this the bricolage work yet, or was it still sort of Endangered Species? Was it vessels?

MS. FOOTE: It was a little bit before the Endangered Species.

MR. FOOTE: She called these her Planetary Pots.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, she did a series called Planetary Pots.

MS. RIEDEL: And what did they look like?

MR. FOOTE: I'll show you.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, good.

MS. FOOTE: She did a lot—and they sold, beautifully.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah they did, they were beautiful.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I assume they were very reasonably priced at the time.

MS. FOOTE: At that time, 1970, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you recall what they sold for at all?

MR. FOOTE: Here's one of them.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, yes, exactly. So these are the vessels with the figures, the animals—

MR. FOOTE: The lids—

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Applique on top.

MR. FOOTE: And we have one other here—

MS. FOOTE: And also, she at that time—she had been doing a lot of [a farewell thing; a farewell to florals and more traditional subjects -BF/PF]. She had been doing a lot of wonderful florals and interiors, which I loved.

[... -BF/PF]

MR. FOOTE: And this is like a plate. It is all urn in relief.

MS. RIEDEL: Wonderful, maybe we can get visuals of these too.

MR. FOOTE: Oh yeah, these are our collection we have.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. FOOTE: We were going to—we still may put it into a book.

MS. RIEDEL: Great. How many pieces of Viola's do you have?

MR. FOOTE: Close to a hundred.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that's quite a collection. You still have all of them?

MR. FOOTE: Oh yeah, we do.

MS. RIEDEL: Extraordinary. Have you decided what you're going to do with them at some point?

MR. FOOTE: We don't know.

MS. FOOTE: Well, at our age—I think it's time to start disposing of things.

MR. FOOTE: These were the first two [large pots -BF/PF] we got from Viola, in the late '60s. [One of the pots was a memorial for Vietnam shown at the Chicago Art Institute and the other piece was like the Chabot College works, but was not exhibited in the show. -BF/PF]

MS. RIEDEL: So these are—

MR. FOOTE: This painting, this one and this one.

MS. RIEDEL: —of birds. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. FOOTE: They're stunning.

MS. RIEDEL: And they're 49 inches by 31, so a good size—and they were sold as a pair?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah. No, you bought them as a pair—

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, we bought them as a pair. No, that was a series, she was —

MR. FOOTE: That wasn't the series, though—

MS. FOOTE: No, that was—yeah, she did do a number of bird paintings.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: In the early '60s—

MS. FOOTE: It was a period, she was going through things—I think some of these things she started in the mid to late '60s, and got away from it because she did—those wonderful, you know, kind of almost monochromatic things. Birds, and landscapes. She had wonderful landscapes.

MR. FOOTE: We have lots of those.

MS. FOOTE: They're like the dry California hills. Dry, arid looking things, but they're beautiful.

MS. RIEDEL: And these were what medium?

MR. FOOTE: Oil.

MS. FOOTE: Oil, or no—acrylic. She used acrylics. And then—

MS. RIEDEL: And so this is what you were showing at the gallery?

MS. FOOTE: I had some, and then there were a couple pieces that were before that, that were more brightly colored.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yeah, we have several of those.

MS. FOOTE: Again, they were landscapes.

MS. RIEDEL: And so was she—it seems as if from the very—

MS. FOOTE: They're abstracts, they look like abstractions, you know?

MS. RIEDEL: Did you see a distinct change in style or medium? Or was she constantly working in multiple styles or mediums?

MS. FOOTE: Well, she was a workaholic.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, right.

MS. FOOTE: And you know, she'd be finishing—like, finishing one series up and starting another. Like, after the Planetary paintings—was it after, or just before? She did the Flea Market series.

MR. FOOTE: Flea Market was after that.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, I think she called it the Flea Market series, and we do have one large bowl, where she shows a flea market, with groups of figures, and objects and all sort of crowded together. Oh yeah, we have a picture of it.

MS. RIEDEL: This is great.

MS. FOOTE: And—that didn't last that long, but it was wonderful. And in the meantime, she was doing these—sketchy—we have several sketchy little things that she did with either very loose acrylics, or watercolor. And they're just almost ethereal, you know, they're just outlines of things.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, my goodness, okay.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, that's silver leaf.

MR. FOOTE: It's silver leaf. And this is all on a plate. The plate is 15 something inches. It's a beautiful piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] This is interesting, I've never seen anything—it's flat, and it's just treated like a canvas.

MS. FOOTE: No, it's a bowl.

MR. FOOTE: It's a bowl.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, but it is a bowl, so it's bowled, but there's no relief. So it's just treated like a canvas.

MR. FOOTE: No, no relief, it's flat.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So this is from roughly what year, do you have any idea?

MR. FOOTE: That has to be the '70s. Mid '70s I would think.

MS. RIEDEL: So it's a painting on a plate of the flea market.

MS. FOOTE: She was still—

MS. RIEDEL: In china paint.

MS. FOOTE: She was still in San Francisco.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, because after that was the Hank Baum Gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, Wenger [Gallery] maybe.

MR. FOOTE: Wenger, then the Hank Baum.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. FOOTE: And Wenger, that gallery, that's—

MS. FOOTE: The first half of the '70s sometime.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, it was the first half.

MS. FOOTE: The thing is, I'm at fault. I didn't date anything.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, that's the thing, I know. Or we'll put dates without the years.

MR. FOOTE: We just collected because we liked it.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. And so from the very beginning, were you collecting her work?

MS. FOOTE: Pretty much. I think I had the first thing that I really—well Bill had one—actually, was that a landscape, or a floral thing?

MR. FOOTE: No, no. The first thing we got was the birds. Oh, no—

MS. FOOTE: No, no, no. I bought that little, small painting.

MR. FOOTE: See if we can find it.

MS. RIEDEL: So it seems that you were interested in the whole range of her work. No matter what she did, you seemed to find it really engaging.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yeah, I'd—we'd go nuts, we'd—oh, we want that. And then Charles was so funny—one time, we walked in, he says, "Well, we can't—we're running out of room, would you guys like these?"

[They laugh.]

There was these two. Here. You can see how large they are.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. 80.5 by 18.5—

MR. FOOTE: Mm-hmm [affirmative], it's a triptych.

MS. RIEDEL:—are the central panels, or the side panels. And the central is 80.5 by 52.5.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, and then there was another one.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yeah. I haven't seen anything like these. Oh, it looks like geese, or sandhill cranes—geese, yeah.

MR. FOOTE: And this—this is a stunner. They both are stunning, but you need a big wall. They cover—

MS. RIEDEL: You still have all of this work?

MR. FOOTE: Yes, we do.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my—is it all up?

MR. FOOTE: Oh, no.

[They laugh.]

No.

MS. RIEDEL: I was gonna say! So it's all mostly in storage right now.

MS. FOOTE: Right, now it is. Yes.

MR. FOOTE: All right, there's a piece in here that I consider the transition piece for the Wenger Gallery, and I can show it to you.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, let's look at that.

MR. FOOTE: Because even Gary [Knecht] and Squeak [Carnwath] says, "Oh my god, that is the transition piece." Because when I saw it, I said that—Peggy was working with Viola, to help her at that time when I saw parts of this going up—

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, I studied. I went to CCAC.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you went to CCAC? To study?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, and did ceramics, and drawing, and some other classes there.

MS. RIEDEL: So did you take classes then with Vernon [Coykendall], or with Charles? Was Charles gone by then? Who did you study with?

MS. FOOTE: No, Viola and Charles.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, Viola and Charles.

MS. FOOTE: And Art Nelson was there. Yeah, we had a number of Art's pieces, too.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, Art Nelson. Well, honey, was Art Nelson in the gallery?

MS. FOOTE: No, he was not in the gallery. We didn't know Art at that time. No.

MS. RIEDEL: Are there any other artists that you've collected in the same depth that you've collected Viola?

MS. FOOTE: No, I think—

MR. FOOTE: We have some of—a few pieces of—help, come on, [sighs]. Graham. Ellwood Graham.

MS. FOOTE: Oh, Ellwood Graham. He's an older artist, I think he's dead now.

MR. FOOTE: He's passed away now.

This is the transitional piece. Yeah, when I saw it I says, I'm buying—we're buying this, Viola. I put the red dot on it. It's in three pieces—the lid, the pot—and they called it the *Wedding Cake*.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Absolutely.

MR. FOOTE: When I saw all these figures, I said, this is where the beginning of the huge things—

MS. RIEDEL: And the scale of this was 36 inches high, and 15 by 17. And it has the base, right? It has its sort of pedestal form, and then the vessel, and then the figures—

MS. FOOTE: This is when she started getting into really monumental pieces, if you will.

MS. RIEDEL: And was this the first that we really saw of the three-dimensional? Well, you'd seen them a little bit on the vessels, right.

MS. FOOTE: No, on the Planetary Pots.

MR. FOOTE: You'd seen them on the vessels, but this was the first—you knew where it was going. And then we also knew, we're not going to be able to collect these big pieces. You know, too big, number one, and not in the budget. Because they deserve those price tags. We had to have this one, though.

MS. RIEDEL: That's extraordinary. And it's interesting too, because this is completely white. No color on there whatsoever. Interesting.

MR. FOOTE: There's a person who—who was the guy in Davis? He was really upset I bought it.

MS. FOOTE: Oh—Hugh Arnold.

MR. FOOTE: Hugh Arnold, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: He's a collector of ceramics. And he was a professor of mathematics at Davis, and he was an old devil. He talked me out of a piece that was in the exhibit at the De Young. Remember, I wanted that piece? From the gal from L. A.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, Laura Andreson. Yeah.

MS. FOOTE: And he gave me a sad story, and so I fell for it. And he got the piece. And then Viola said, "Did you fall for that?"

[They laugh.]

I said, "Yeah, I did."

MR. FOOTE: And this was one of our very first pieces, which is in the early '60s.

MS. FOOTE: Now, this is a show—

MS. RIEDEL: Headless stand, yes. [May refer to a stand with a head of a woman on it, all in ceramic. -BF/PF]

MS. FOOTE:—from Chabot College.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, okay, yes.

MR. FOOTE: This was all Chabot.

MS. FOOTE: There was a show at Chabot College. We got a number of those pieces. And it was a wonderful show.

MR. FOOTE: Must have been a memorial then. [Not a memorial. -BF/PF]

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, you bought a number of pieces from that show.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, we did.

MS. RIEDEL: That was her first solo exhibition, if I'm correct, in '68, correct?

MS. FOOTE: Oh, it was before '68—no, was it '68? I think it was. [Don't know if it was her first solo exhibit. -BF/PF]

MR. FOOTE: '68, it was, it was sometime around '68. It was around that time, yeah. Because we went to that show, I remember that.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, I know we went to the show, and there was that wonderful floor piece she made, was it a little woman and a dog?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, we wanted it but we—

MS. FOOTE: But it sold already. It was a great piece.

MS. RIEDEL: So had you done solo exhibitions for Viola before that exhibition?

MS. FOOTE: No, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, but you did after. Because I do think I've seen—

MR. FOOTE: Only one.

MS. RIEDEL: Only one.

MR. FOOTE: And then we referred her people—to her. Viola.

MS. RIEDEL: So there was one solo show for her, at Lincoln Square Gallery.

MS. FOOTE: No, this was at our home.

MS. RIEDEL: This was at your home, okay.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, we had a bigger space in the house.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. And that was your home in Oakland?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And what prompted this? What prompted an exhibition of her work there?

MS. FOOTE: You know, she was working hard, and I think she was holding two or three jobs at the time.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I know she was working at Macy's, right?

MS. FOOTE: Yep, Macy's, she was in the accounting office I think, and—

MS. RIEDEL: And she was maybe part-time at CCAC at the time?

MS. FOOTE: No, she was teaching then.

MR. FOOTE: Teaching, Macy's, and doing her ceramics.

MS. FOOTE: No, she had another job, but I don't know where it was. I heard she had three jobs. Anyway, but we decided she was accumulating so much stuff, and I said, "Oh, let's have a show."

So she had a lot of—privately, a lot of people that knew her and knew her work. So, we got their addresses and all, and then invited our friends. And it was really a very, very good show, very successful.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was what year, 1970?

MR. FOOTE: '70, '71, something like that I think.

MS. FOOTE: '70, I think. Anyway, I have a list of the people that bought things. Unfortunately I don't have all their addresses, but—

MS. RIEDEL: And, would you just describe that exhibition, what it was like? Did it take place over one day, or multiple days?

MS. FOOTE: No, it was one day. It was one day, all day.

MS. RIEDEL: And, you installed things in the house, outside?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah. We had tons of wall space.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, we had a lot of wall space, and shelving, so—and she had a lot of older, more functional ceramics she wanted to get rid of. And they were beautiful, I really liked them.

MS. RIEDEL: I've seen one photo, they were exquisite. Really very masterful.

MR. FOOTE: I'll show you our housewarming present.

MS. FOOTE: Anyway, that—set up a big table in our living room so she could—'cause she did a book of what she called her drawings—actually they were sketches, watercolor or acrylic sketches, in this big book. She says, but sell them individually. So I did buy some of those.

MR. FOOTE: We have those here, too.

MS. FOOTE: I don't know what she—I think she broke the whole book apart. I don't think—

MR. FOOTE: I think she did. This was our housewarming gift for our house, for our kitchen.

MS. RIEDEL: Beautiful. So three lidded jars.

MR. FOOTE: Those, and those.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah. Oh, those are gorgeous.

MS. FOOTE: Now, those were done before we knew her.

MR. FOOTE: And then there's a brown one, this one—

MS. FOOTE: Now those—we didn't know her at that time. That one, that one covered pot—she did a series of those, and she did a series of casseroles, and they all cracked in the oven. She said it was the clay body. It was never good.

MR. FOOTE: This is the Hank Baum Gallery.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right, the camels. Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: Peggy did the tile work for the big camel that Ringo Starr bought.

MS. RIEDEL: You did the tile work?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: She made the—she formed the tiles.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, a big camel.

MR. FOOTE: A big camel, instead of this.

MS. FOOTE: Ringo Starr bought it. Then he got rid of it, I don't—I heard.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, he sold it to somebody.

MS. FOOTE: It was about—it came over—

MR. FOOTE: It was big, it sat on a rug, like, from here over—

MS. FOOTE: Yeah I pounded out all the sand.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: So were you an assistant for a while? Or were you just helping out that day?

MS. FOOTE: Not really, I would just pop in, and she would put me to work. You know, that sort of thing. And then —

MR. FOOTE: Charles and I would talk and have wine and cheese.

MS. RIEDEL: Sounds like a good setup. So you were describing the show at your house.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, it was really the plan, there was—some of the Planetary Pots, but there was a series where like three or four pots—actually they were like little pedestals, and big cloud formations on top of them.

MS. RIEDEL: Clouds?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, they were beautiful. I wanted to buy them.

MR. FOOTE: There were these animals coming out. There was—oh, that was a series of four.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, there were four, and some lady got in there before I could get them.

MS. RIEDEL: In your own home?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, that was at the sale, so—

MR. FOOTE: It was at the sale, but we were trying to figure out, what, could we afford them? Because they were a little more on the pricey side. We're now seeing back, why didn't we do that.

MS. FOOTE: Well let's see, what else?

MS. RIEDEL: So how many people came and what would you describe as the general reaction to the work.

MS. FOOTE: Everybody liked the exhibit. They really did. The ceramics, and the paintings. We had one fellow, he was a doctor that Bill knew, he bought, what—three or four of her florals.

MR. FOOTE: He bought more than that, and a landscape. He bought that big landscape piece.

MS. FOOTE: What big landscape piece?

MR. FOOTE: The one that has the cloud in it?

MS. FOOTE: No, he didn't do that, no, he didn't. No, he didn't, because Viola asked—I bought it. It was one of her little arid looking California hill landscapes.

MR. FOOTE: Not that one. The one that seemed very green, and bigger than that. Earl bought that one, because I hauled it back.

MS. FOOTE: There was nothing like that at that exhibit. Anyway, about that painting—Viola said, could you bring that back, there's something I want to touch up on that. Big mistake. She changed—she repainted the whole thing. I was so mad. I was ready to—kill. Because the other—I really loved the other painting. She painted over it. A totally different-looking thing. Colors—

MS. RIEDEL: I assume that only ever happened once.

MR. FOOTE: No, no. It happened before. This was one of the first ones.

MS. FOOTE: What happened before—

MR. FOOTE: Remember the cat one we wanted?

MS. FOOTE: Oh, we didn't even buy that, she—

MR. FOOTE: No, we said we wanted that one. And she just painted over it.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah. That's the very first one I bought. I love that one.

MS. RIEDEL: The floral tulips.

MS. FOOTE: That's a very small one.

MS. RIEDEL: And this again is acrylic?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. FOOTE: What painting are you talking about, she did over?

MR. FOOTE: The one with the pussycat. We did—we wanted the pussycat one.

MS. FOOTE: No, before that. You said Earl bought one with carvings.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, no, I'll show you which one it was. But, this fellow, he left, and he said, "But, I have all these." We bought them all back. He had 'em for three or four years, and then he left, so we bought 'em back.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, and that made you happy, no doubt.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, we were. He was given them a while here.

MS. FOOTE: But we should get on with the interview.

MR. FOOTE: This is the one, here—this is huge. [A landscape. -BF/PF]

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, that is quite beautiful.

MS. FOOTE: No, that's the one Viola did over.

MR. FOOTE: Really?

MS. FOOTE: Yes, that is. That's the very one I got furious with her about. He didn't buy a landscape, Bill.

MR. FOOTE: Huh? Yeah? Well, move on, doesn't matter.

MS. FOOTE: No, that's the one Viola did over, and I wanted to—

MS. RIEDEL: It's funny, because not having seen the original, that one looks quite beautiful, but so different from anything I associate with her work.

MR. FOOTE: Well, this is one of my favorite florals.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, that's the one—

MS. RIEDEL: Another floral.

MS. FOOTE: That's an early one.

MS. RIEDEL: Beautiful. Absolutely beautiful, much more traditional, and this is acrylic.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, like floral is more traditional, then we start looking at when she does these funny little things that make them untraditional.

MS. RIEDEL: Really.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, just the way she handles—

MR. FOOTE: This is part of the museum series.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, the *White Deer* still life.

MR. FOOTE: From—was it Chicago?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, it says Chicago in parentheses. You have an extraordinary collection of her work, I had no idea it was quite so much.

MR. FOOTE: We have—much more. [They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: There are over a hundred pieces. Yes, maybe we will take a look at that later.

MS. FOOTE: And then we get into the big ceramics, we—

MR. FOOTE: But this floral was everybody's—we weren't sure, but this is one of our favorites.

MS. RIEDEL: The floral with white daisies. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. FOOTE: Just when you look at the composition of the whole thing, it's not the traditional floral.

MS. RIEDEL: Not at all. Now you begin to see a sense of the abstract coming in, absolutely. Absolutely. And a little bit more busy, a little bit more of that clutter that I think of her work, the density.

MR. FOOTE: So we had a lot of fun with that.

MS. FOOTE: But anyway, the exhibit at our house. It was some of her older ceramics, some of her Planetary Pot series, and—paintings, mostly the florals. Did we have any landscapes in that?

MR. FOOTE: Yes, we did. Don't you remember the guy that bought the landscape was the one you had to go to small claims court with?

MS. FOOTE: Oh, yeah. [They laugh.] The lawyer.

MR. FOOTE: We had landscapes.

MS. RIEDEL: And did you do—was this the one and only sale that you did for her at your house?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And what inspired that, was she not having other—I assume you closed Lincoln Park.

MS. FOOTE: No, I think—we had gotten rid of the gallery at that time, and she hadn't connected up with anybody.

MR. FOOTE: There was no other outlet at that point. There was not an outlet at that point.

MS. FOOTE: That's what I just said, she hadn't connected up with anybody, and so we just decided to do it. She was accumulating more stuff than she had room for.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. FOOTE: So we had a sale.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, it was—actually it was, I think between Viola and Peggy, it was more of a mutual decision. And you know, Peggy had said, let's do it, but I think was just talking about, and it happened. We said, well, we have this, why don't we—

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, we had the space—

MR. FOOTE: Just before we go to remodel the whole house, we said, "Let's do a show." So.

MS. FOOTE: And it was fun.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, absolutely.

MR. FOOTE: It was fun.

MS. RIEDEL: And so was the response to her work—it seems like from your experience, it was always fairly positive.

MS. FOOTE: It was positive.

MR. FOOTE: A lot of our friends bought, and then their friends bought.

MS. RIEDEL: And was there—it seems that both the three-dimensional and the two-dimensional work both, were appreciated and purchased.

MR. FOOTE: Yes. Easily.

MS. RIEDEL: And that seems to be true from the start.

MR. FOOTE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. FOOTE: I think that's true of her work, period. I mean, I know later, in her later things, it was—you know, the big ceramic pieces, but she was still doing very wonderful paintings. And I guess, did she ever really get away from painting? I think so, [briefly -BF/PF].

MR. FOOTE: Not really. She did but she also did those things on paper, after a while. It was multiple colors, and there was one piece I wanted, and we reneged on it.

MS. FOOTE: Oh, that was in Rena Bransten's gallery.

MR. FOOTE: In Rena Bransten's gallery.

MS. FOOTE: That's after I had gotten the Lyme disease.

MR. FOOTE: I thought about it, and thought about it, and said, I don't know, what are we going to do with it? And, after a while, there was a point where you just realize you can't take in much more. And what we really wanted more at that point, was more of the ceramics. But, oh my word. You can't lift them. And so, as I'm getting older, I'm thinking, hmm, I have to look at this.

MS. FOOTE: She did a lot of interesting paintings too at that time. And I think more and more her paintings and ceramics connected.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm. How so?

MS. FOOTE: Well, it's like, one was a study for the other if you will.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you say more about that?

MS. FOOTE: That was kind of a period where we kind of lost touch, too. I remember—oh, what was his name, there was a fellow that worked for her—

MR. FOOTE: Not Sam [Perry]?

MS. FOOTE: No, not Sam.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there somebody named Neil?

MS. FOOTE: Not for a long period of time, but she—she would incorporate him in her paintings.

MS. RIEDEL: There's a younger fellow who died, I remember, from AIDS, I think he was an assistant for a while.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, I can't think of his name.

MS. RIEDEL: I think she'd done a three-dimensional piece, a clay piece, about him—maybe a male nude, but that might have been later.

MS. FOOTE: But then, there's some paintings with him in it, and he's sort of a mysterious figure throughout the painting. You know, he's there, but you don't quite know who he is, or what he's doing there. If I remember right.

MR. FOOTE: We also like on the transition piece I showed, the white piece, the person standing with a parrot, naked, is Charles.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Standing with a parrot.

MR. FOOTE: That is definitely Charles, there's no question. So Charles was oftentimes incorporated a little bit, just as an image. And then—

MS. RIEDEL: We'll definitely want to get into that. So—I do wonder what qualities about her work first drew you to it. I mean, what did you find so compelling to purchase it in such depth, and such a range of work. Because certainly the early pieces are very different than the later pieces.

MS. FOOTE: Oh yeah, I think because they were different. They had—they bordered, if you will, using—they bordered on, well maybe it could be traditional, but it really wasn't. And that made it interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah. Plus, her use of black and some of her monochromatic things, which—did we have any left?

MR. FOOTE: Seven.

MS. FOOTE: Or did she paint that one over?

MR. FOOTE: No, no, we do, we do.

MS. FOOTE: But anyway, it's the way she used monotones or neutrals, that were very much alive. They didn't—there was nothing flat about her paintings.

MR. FOOTE: Well, like this one.

MS. FOOTE: Flat emotionally, not—

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. FOOTE: We fell in love with this one. This was also a museum charity.

MS. RIEDEL: Yellow still life.

MR. FOOTE: Her Egyptian series, you know.

MS. FOOTE: Oh what about—I thought you were going to show her—

MR. FOOTE: I'm going to find that other one. The landscape.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah she did the whole series, a desert series. And I don't know what happened to that. She started painting—she bought a huge roll of butcher paper. And she hung it on the wall. And she would do paintings and sketches, and roll them. I don't know whatever happened to those. And at that time—that was when she was doing her Desert Toy series.

MS. RIEDEL: Desert—oh toy, right. So you say—when you—sorry, go ahead.

MS. FOOTE: No—I said, "Well are you going to sell any of those?" And she said, "No, I don't think so, I like them." And, but then later on, she said, well, people—she'd have students in for talks and things, and they'd steal them.

MS. RIEDEL: They'd steal them? Really?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, they'd steal from her.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my gosh.

MR. FOOTE: Here, this was a different one.

MS. RIEDEL: *Blue and Silver Study*.

MR. FOOTE: That's very unusual for her.

MS. RIEDEL: It is very unusual, almost like a frame and a weaving, it's—yes. That is quite different, I would never have thought that was hers.

MS. FOOTE: It's very different. It's the only one she did like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you have any idea, roughly, what year that was? Are these in chronological order, more or less?

MS. FOOTE: That would have been—

MR. FOOTE: I think it was the '80s, wasn't it?

MS. FOOTE: In the '80s.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, you know, that's really surprising.

MS. FOOTE: And she put something on the surface, made it sticky.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, sweet rolls is what it was.

MS. FOOTE: It wouldn't totally dry, it was some sort of finish thing. And it always had a slight stickiness to it.

MR. FOOTE: She uses the more [inaudible].

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Now is this something she came back to, or was this—

MS. FOOTE: No, that was early.

MR. FOOTE: That's earlier, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Much more of a straightforward landscape. It's acrylic, but it almost looks like watercolor.

MS. FOOTE: I know.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. But it's always good sized. And I know that was important to her from the start. So this is 56 inches high, 40 and a half wide—

MR. FOOTE: The little tulip one, that's probably one of the smallest ones we have. All the rest are large. Well, not this large. But—hell, we like large.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, well it's good.

MS. FOOTE: No wall space, huh?

MS. RIEDEL: I think it's so interesting that you say that there was just something, you talk about—I would think of it as an edge between what you think of as more traditional or expected, but then there's something that's just not quite—

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, there was an edge to it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, and then also that life, that sense of life. You think that was something that was true across the boards?

MS. FOOTE: Even in those, you know, very desert-like paintings that she did, or the arid paintings—but they were alive, you know?

MR. FOOTE: Everything was alive, actually, it was really good. And what was wonderful for me—I'm more a sentimentalist, so when I get to know somebody, and I see where things are going—I knew what was going on between she and Charles, and what was happening, and how she had evolved—and how she continually worked and moved and pushed herself.

We were always wondering, what's going to be next?

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. FOOTE: And it was always wonderful to see that next boom. Which she even did with a portrait of us.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, it was so funny. You know that famous, *American*—

MR. FOOTE: *Gothic*?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, of course.

MS. FOOTE: The *American Gothic* car. That was us.

[They laugh.]

We do have a study of it. But we don't have the—

MS. RIEDEL: You don't have the painting?

MR. FOOTE: No, no, she didn't paint it. She just did it as a study.

MS. FOOTE: No, she did paint it, Bill.

MR. FOOTE: She did? What did she do with it?

MS. FOOTE: She did paint it, but we have, like a small—yeah we have it. Small sketch?

MR. FOOTE: I know we have the sketch, but we don't have the painting as such. The finished product. That was funny. I'll find it here. Just a second.

MS. FOOTE: Well, but no. I think—Viola's work was really liked by most people. Like, I had some old high school friends down, who came down for that show, and I know they weren't the least bit art-educated, but they bought.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. What did they buy, do you recall?

MS. FOOTE: Ceramics, mostly.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it more functional work, or—

MS. FOOTE: More functional, yeah, but they liked the exhibit. They liked the whole thing.

MS. RIEDEL: And this was at your house?

MS. FOOTE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] This was at our house.

MR. FOOTE: Here we go, when we were much younger.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh my gosh. That is terrific. That is terrific.

MS. FOOTE: But Viola in the—in the '80s when she first—when she was settling in, in Oakland, did a lot of paintings with people. I keep wanting to go back to that one fellow, you said he was an assistant at one time. And I can't drag his name out of my head.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. FOOTE: But he appeared in a lot of her paintings. And she would incorporate people in her paintings that I didn't know, but she did, and they had some meaning for her.

MS. RIEDEL: So there was certainly an autobiographical narrative to her work.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, there was some relationship going on in her life, with those people.

MS. RIEDEL: She never talked about it, though, and you never asked?

MR. FOOTE: Viola was, when it came to relationships—this is also another transitional piece, this is between figures and—this is the circle one, remember?

MS. RIEDEL: So this was painted on craft paper on mat board, but it's interesting, it's a round painting, it's one of the references of the Flea Market series.

MS. FOOTE: So is that one of the Flea Market series?

MR. FOOTE: Flea Market series, but also was toward where she was doing the figures, well what she did also—

MS. RIEDEL: It has that density, in the—

MR. FOOTE: Yes, it's this one here.

MS. RIEDEL: And animals and human mix—something going on there?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, she always did that.

MR. FOOTE: This is the flip side of that one. She did it on two sides.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I did read about that. Yes, yes, yes.

MR. FOOTE: We said, "Viola!" And we liked both of them. So—

MS. FOOTE: You know what she did? A really wonderful painting of her home, it wasn't a house, but a garden, or some sort of farm scene of her home in Lodi. And it was—remember that big thing, it was huge.

MR. FOOTE: It was huge.

MS. FOOTE: And I don't know whatever happened to it.

MS. RIEDEL: The painting.

MS. FOOTE: Because—what she would do, at that point in the '80s, sometimes she would take photographs, and then project them onto a canvas. And paint over them, you know. She would paint the outline, or whatever.

MR. FOOTE: Honey, was that about the time when her father died?

MS. RIEDEL: He died, I think in '73.

MS. FOOTE: No, no this was after, this was after that. But I don't know. She did that for a while, I don't know if she kept that up.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd love to talk about that, I mean the influence of the farm, and that— there's such wonderful descriptions of her growing up in that mix of nature and sort of decaying machinery all around.

MR. FOOTE: Well, she started to do a series on that. That's the series Peggy's talking about.

MS. FOOTE: And that's when she would take photographs. And she'd project them on to a canvas, and then she'd start—

MR. FOOTE: I really think, to be honest with you, I think—

MS. FOOTE: I don't think she kept it up.

MR. FOOTE: She didn't complete them. I think it was more of an emotional, "going through" something. It was kind of like something she had to go through, and this was her way, I think, of dealing with it.

MS. FOOTE: Whatever happened to them? I haven't seen them—

MR. FOOTE: I never saw anything finished.

MS. FOOTE: I wonder if Squeak has seen them.

MS. RIEDEL: So you both saw them, but then you never saw them again.

MS. FOOTE: I just saw the one.

MR. FOOTE: I saw them in process.

MS. RIEDEL: So would you describe what it was?

MS. FOOTE: It was a scene—it had a ladder, and it was like an orchard. Scene in an orchard. The ladder, very complex vegetation. And you know, leaf, tree, and I can't remember—the ladder was prominent. But what else was in that, I can't remember.

MR. FOOTE: It was mainly that, honey, it was like an orchard with a ladder.

MS. FOOTE: I'm trying to remember if there was any other—an inanimate object besides the ladder, I can't remember.

MR. FOOTE: I know she had plans of doing a tractor, but that—we never saw anything happen with that.

MS. RIEDEL: She had such a wonderful description, I think in an early interview. She talked about the truck, and the trees that had grown up around it, and the tires were still fully inflated.

MR. FOOTE: She had a—all she had was a picture, but she was going, that was something she was going to do.

MS. RIEDEL: She talked about it almost as growing up with a Magritte, I think, in front of the back yard. Just that sense of how surreal the very landscape she grew up in was.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, this would have been something she lived with, I think. And I liked it very much. In fact, it was—you could say it was traditional, but it was so complex, it would be like, I want to say, a real large pointillist. Big.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. FOOTE: Sort of thing. It was so, so crowded. So full.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. So dense.

MS. FOOTE: And, I don't know what happened to that.

MS. RIEDEL: But, painted—are you saying just jabs of color, sort of pointillist?

MS. FOOTE: No, I mean just that was the appearance, that's my—my appearance. That's one thing that I can't—you know, if you did look at it right away, you'd say, gee, that's an oversized pointillism, you know? Instead of the small dabs but no, it was carefully drawn out, I mean painted out. But it was, it was dense and complex.

MS. RIEDEL: She said in an interview, I think with Paul Karlstrom, that she would describe her dad as a funk artist. But that she wasn't. And I thought that was an interesting comment.

MS. FOOTE: Could be, well she said—all I remember, talking about her father, is he'd just leave stuff in the garden, in the field, just to rust and rot. And she thought that was okay.

MS. RIEDEL: She thought that was what?

MS. FOOTE: Okay.

MR. FOOTE: And also it was kind of like why she left the stuff at Divisadero. In the backyard.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, I tried to talk—that when they moved from Divisadero she left a lot of small little pots, and little figures in the garden. I said, "Come on, Viola, I'll go help you gather those up." And she says, "Oh no, just leave them." And then years later she says, "You know, we should've gotten those things."

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, yeah.

MR. FOOTE: But that was Viola—there was a part of Viola that was, when she was done with something, she was done with it. And then later, well, "Maybe I..." But normally she was kind of done. And she could draw a line, and be very clear about that. But this was very interesting to watch sometimes, because Viola was very—emotionally very close with her emotions.

MS. RIEDEL: Somebody was asking about almost that blank affect or visage that she presented so often in photos. Do you have any insight into what that might have been about?

MS. FOOTE: You know what I think it is? Up in Lodi, there are a lot of Germans from North and South Dakota. That's their affect. I think that's what that's about.

MS. RIEDEL: It's just how she grew up.

MS. FOOTE: It's just how she grew up.

MR. FOOTE: I think it has a characterological part of the persona and it was always that way. But she would laugh. She would get something, she would get tickled with something and she'd laugh. When I talked at her memorial, Sam said, "Bill, I was fine until you talked." And then he started crying. I talked about how she would always say, "I'm fine." Her arm could be off, and it would be, "I'm fine."

It was one of those very "I'm fine" individuals who would never really tell you. When we were trying to deal with her cancer, I wanted to strangle her sometimes—lovingly. But it was like, "No, Viola, you go to do this." "No, I'll just work around it." You can't work around it.

MS. FOOTE: Viola could get quite passionate about things, especially when she was discussing art—all hers, but not necessarily hers always. But maybe discussing someone else's art. Sometimes she would be very informative and then other times, she could tear people apart. One nice thing I found about her—if you went with her to an exhibit, she would discuss very carefully what that problem was that particular painter had to deal

with. She made it interesting, really very interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you give me a couple examples of these things that you've just described? Because they would be helpful—insightful, I think.

MS. FOOTE: I think—well, you know, like Art Nelson. He was a very good potter, very good ceramicist. And she would just get on his case sometimes. "Well, you're not doing this right," you know.

MS. RIEDEL: In terms of a technical thing?

MS. FOOTE: She would just pick on him.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. FOOTE: She would. She would just pick on him.

MS. RIEDEL: And is that because she thought he could do better, or because—

MS. FOOTE: I think, yeah. Actually, she did say that. She did say that. But he was so different from her. And I think that bothered her. There's something about his very precise technique about dealing with ceramics that offended her sensibility, her way of doing things. You just do it and keep moving and going, and Art was very precise and methodical. That bothered her, I think.

MR. FOOTE: One time also we were at a dinner party at Rena Bransten's. And Viola was there and [Robert] Arneson came in. And everyone was talking about Arneson—

MS. FOOTE: Who came in?

MR. FOOTE: Arneson.

MS. FOOTE: Oh.

MR. FOOTE: He didn't stay. He kind of came in and left. Something he was saying about something that he did—and I think it was Viola that says, "But I did it first."

MS. FOOTE: No, no. She may have said that then, but when it came to china painting, she said—they were talking about all these newer artists, young artists coming up, doing more china painting on their ceramics. She says, "Well, they know who did it first." [Laughs.] She could get really miffed sometimes.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, I imagine. I imagine it was really hard to be a woman, especially an artist at that point in time, it was—

MR. FOOTE: She had to fight all the way.

MS. FOOTE: Exactly.

MR. FOOTE: Because here's Viola and Arneson. "Well, we'll be going to Arneson," you know? Okay, he's not that great. I thought Viola was far more exciting and far more interesting than Arneson.

MS. RIEDEL: Did she talk about him at all, and her work in relation to him?

MS. FOOTE: Who, Arneson?

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Because certainly that comparison is made.

MS. FOOTE: No, she did discuss him once in a while, but it wasn't anything in-depth.

MS. RIEDEL: Did she talk about any of what was happening around her in the area? [Peter] Voulkos and Arneson and [James] Melchert and Bob Brady?

MR. FOOTE: The one who would really get involved in all that was Charles.

MS. RIEDEL: And let's talk about him.

MR. FOOTE: Charles would talk about [Garth] Clark. All these people would come around. Viola was—

MS. RIEDEL: Garth Clark?

MR. FOOTE: Garth Clark. He would sit and listen and so forth. She'd listen and say something, but it was Charles who was really engaged in all these things. But Peggy had a very interesting point, which I think is really true about Viola. Her passion was art. There's no question.

MS. FOOTE: She was a workaholic, for sure.

MS. RIEDEL: She seemed to be, even from the interviews I've read, a person of few words. Her work was really where she spoke.

MS. FOOTE: If it was something she was truly interested in, she could go on at length.

MS. RIEDEL: Have you heard her do that about anything in particular that comes to mind?

MS. FOOTE: I'm trying to draw it in my mind. Who, what, when? She would talk more about—maybe an artist and what that particular artist was presenting, and what it could represent. She'd go into depth on things like that. But I can't think of any particular artist of the time, it's been so long.

MS. RIEDEL: I know she read voraciously, as well—she had a huge library.

MS. FOOTE: She had tons of books.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, wait a minute, she had tons of books. But she had wrappers around them. They weren't even cracked.

MS. FOOTE: No, those were the big art books.

MR. FOOTE: After the show at our house, she had this money. Well, you and she and Charles went—and what she'd do is, she bought a ton of books.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, she liked books.

MR. FOOTE: And they were immediately out buying books.

MS. FOOTE: Well, for both of them. That was another art form.

MR. FOOTE: That was another art form, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: When you think of the major influences on she and her work, what comes to mind? Artists, books, exhibitions? Anything that she mentioned that was exciting or that inspired her that she might have discussed?

MR. FOOTE: Well, partly for me, why I like some of her earlier work is because it had very much an Asian feel. She'd talk about the tenmoku glazes and the Asian—some of the Chinese, Japanese potteries—she knew some of the Japanese—

MS. FOOTE: That was more from the glazing technique—

MR. FOOTE:—glazing techniques.

MS. FOOTE: Not so much the forms but the glazing.

MR. FOOTE: What we said earlier is that Viola was a person who would never stop being interested in maybe any new form that was coming. Like at Wenger Gallery when she did the archway, that was the beginning of we knew where it was going—

MS. FOOTE: Big.

MR. FOOTE: Big. And she struggled with how to get that up safely, and keep it up safely. She would go on ad nauseum about how to do that. She would get very into technical stuff.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd imagine.

MR. FOOTE: You have to, with those pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: That was very much that era, too, is they were getting larger and larger with clay, figuring out how to do that. What kind of clay bodies—

MS. FOOTE: How to put it together and keep it together.

MS. RIEDEL: I know Jerry Rothman came up with a whole new kind of clay body that would enable you to cantilever pieces out. Voulkos, of course, would go much larger. But to build as large as she did, would be technically—you'd have to really be figuring it out as you went.

MS. FOOTE: She would do things in sections and then she'd have to build in to each section how it could be put together with rods or whatever to keep it stable, to keep it together and stable.

MR. FOOTE: I have to say something for an aside for me. I know we've used the word that her work is traditional. When I think of traditional, I think of my grandmother's work.

MS. RIEDEL: No, no, I think some of those earlier pieces are traditional. I don't think any of the later work at all is traditional.

MR. FOOTE: No, no, I know what you mean, but I often think some of the earlier work is not traditional. It was even cutting edge at that time—different.

MS. RIEDEL: How so with some of these birds paintings, for example?

MR. FOOTE: Well the bird paintings and so forth, because of just the composition. And the scale and the quality of movement in them. And the way the paint strokes are, it's not really traditional.

MS. FOOTE: At that time, when she was doing those paintings—I'm trying to think of the name of the artist—they used to sell them at Gump's and he did animal figures, very much in the same—do you know who I mean?

MR. FOOTE: Yes.

MS. FOOTE: There's almost—

MR. FOOTE: Brian somebody—Brian or Byan somebody—Brian—

MS. RIEDEL: The birds that you showed me—the little snapshots almost have an Asian feeling to them.

MR. FOOTE: Those almost have an Asian feeling, yes.

MS. FOOTE: This artist, and the way he painted his animals, and there looking at the birds—there's a similarity in technique. I'll think of his name.

MR. FOOTE: Wilson?

MS. FOOTE: Brian Wilson.

MR. FOOTE: I think it was Wilson.

MS. FOOTE: Is that his name? They used sell them at Gump's years ago when Gump's did good things.

MR. FOOTE: They had a gallery there. They even had a—Morris—they had a show for him, the potter.

MS. FOOTE: David Morris. [Morris, a very fine potter, worked at CCAC; La Paz, Mexico; and Larkspur, California. - BF/PF]

MR. FOOTE: David Morris. We met David through Viola.

MS. FOOTE: David wouldn't have talked about getting critical of another potter or artist or something. She'd get really mad at David. David was a very fine potter. She says, "I don't know why he keeps doing the same stuff over and over and over."

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. FOOTE: Over and over and over. And she said, "He's better than that." She thought he could do more, and he wasn't doing it. And that offended her. Does that makes sense?

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. Absolutely.

MR. FOOTE: It is, because he wouldn't push himself to another level. I think Viola found that not a true artist.

MS. RIEDEL: And certainly that was something that she never did. It seems like she almost never did the same thing twice. Constantly different.

MS. FOOTE: She was constantly on the move.

MR. FOOTE: This is kind of traditional, but is it traditional?

MS. RIEDEL: It's hard to tell from a snapshot, but it certainly feels more traditional. I mean, more traditional than her later work. There's certainly a loose-knit—this one has an abstract and a figurative sense to it at once. But it certainly feels more traditional than I would expect from her.

MR. FOOTE: I'm sure that it was her later work, absolutely it is. For me, though, when these were coming out, traditional was, "Oh, it's a pretty tree landscape, and a pretty snapshot and lovely painted," but now I don't want it. I want something much more—looseness. I want so much looser. And that's what drew me to it.

MS. RIEDEL: Some of these pieces that we've been looking at—some of the every early works—almost feel like the small sketches that would later figure into the much denser paintings. It feels like you can see the beginnings right here. These are the seeds that would figure in, over time.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, there was a period, it occurred to me with Viola, where she'd certainly get very involved in their painting. And then she'd get super involved with glazing—glazes and glazing techniques. It fluctuated back and forth, and yet, somehow she kept it incorporated.

MS. RIEDEL: And that is interesting because so much about glazing you don't know at the time. China paint gives you a little bit more of a sense, but I can see how the painting would have been affected.

MS. FOOTE: I've had to work out some glazes.

MS. RIEDEL: Big surprise when that kiln opens, isn't it?

MR. FOOTE: I remember Viola saying one time, if you're going to get married and have kids, forget being an artist. Your art is your number one thing. Forget a family. That was very firm in that approach.

MS. RIEDEL: When was that?

MR. FOOTE: Throughout.

MS. FOOTE: No, no.

MR. FOOTE: More later, I think.

MS. FOOTE: The fellow that went back to Tennessee—

MR. FOOTE: [Richard] Brennen.

MS. FOOTE: Brennen. He was a very fine ceramicist. She said that about him. He never should have gotten married. And I could have kind of agreed with her.

MR. FOOTE: After meeting his wife?

[They laugh.]

MS. FOOTE: He really was a super fine ceramicist. Not only a potter but he did wonderful—I have some of his work, too. I could kind of agree with Viola on that. He kind of got trapped into this family situation.

MR. FOOTE: Well honey, look what happened to Gloria Champion. Wonderful African-American artist.

MS. FOOTE: Beautiful.

MR. FOOTE: Her beautiful work—we say, what happened on that one? At her memorial—Viola's memorial—I was talking to a reporter, and this woman came up—we lost track of Gloria. And she kept saying, "Bill"—nice African-American woman—"Bill? Bill?" Gloria. My god, it was Gloria.

What we want to do is, in our wills, we're going to give all her paintings back to her. We met her new husband and he was a lawyer—lovely guy—and we had dinner. How did we deal with that, honey?

MS. FOOTE: I just asked her if she wanted her paintings back now. And she said, yes.

MR. FOOTE: So we gave her pretty much—we kept two and we said, "Oh, we'll will the rest to you."

MS. FOOTE: The whole point of that is, she's another artist that should not have gotten married. She really had

tremendous potential.

MR. FOOTE: Her husband wanted her pregnant with four kids. I mean, that did it.

MS. FOOTE: From that point of view, I agree thoroughly with Viola.

MS. RIEDEL: She was quite extraordinary at that point in time to be making those kinds of choices. Certainly, that was beginning to happen more. But for her, especially given her background from a much more traditional community, she really was prepared.

MS. FOOTE: And coming from someplace like Lodi, which is really a typical farming community.

MR. FOOTE: I also think Viola needed to make an independent statement from family, and I think art was the way to do it.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you say more about that?

MR. FOOTE: Well, you don't hear much of [her growing up ... -BF/PF] with three brothers and herself. You don't want to think much more beyond that. You just don't know what went on there.

MS. RIEDEL: Did she ever say anything?

MR. FOOTE: No, nothing.

MS. RIEDEL: Did she use any reference at all? Did she refer to that as if it were an awful experience, or as if it were no big deal?

MR. FOOTE: It was almost like, it was not talked about. Therefore, it was something she really—it was not that she was against it, but she didn't want to have anything to do with the brothers.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. FOOTE: She never talked about it. Charles would never say anything. And so, we just didn't go there. If you don't come up, you don't pop out.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. But she at some point mentioned that she grew up in Lodi in a one bedroom that she shared with three brothers. She did share that much.

MR. FOOTE: There's also this—

MS. FOOTE: I don't remember that.

MR. FOOTE: Squeak and Gary do.

MS. FOOTE: I don't remember that at all.

MR. FOOTE: This is Gloria. And this was also one of hers. Oh, sorry. One more.

MS. RIEDEL: That's beautiful. So these are Gloria Champion?

MR. FOOTE: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: But I don't want to lose our focus on that for a minute, because I think that is important. Because that is something that was mentioned in the—those were close quarters, certainly not unheard-of.

MR. FOOTE: No. I really don't think anything bad happened. But I think she lost an identity.

MS. FOOTE: Did she actually tell you that?

MR. FOOTE: I heard her saying something about it a long time ago, yes.

MS. FOOTE: I don't ever remember her discussing that.

MR. FOOTE: Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I heard it from Gary. I heard it from Squeak.

MS. FOOTE: We'll check with Squeak. I don't know.

MR. FOOTE: We heard that from Squeak.

MS. FOOTE: Because she would never discuss family much. She didn't want to be bothered with them.

MR. FOOTE: Squeak knew more about the family than we did. Partly, because I'm a psychiatrist. We heard much more through Charles about Charles. I know Charles.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Let's talk a little bit about Charles because we haven't even touched on him yet. I'd like to at least get that started today. Do you know how they met? They met when she was a student at CCAC. And then when you met them, they were already living together.

MR. FOOTE: They were together.

MS. RIEDEL: What was their relationship? How would you describe that relationship?

MR. FOOTE: Who knows? They were very protective of each other, and loving.

MS. FOOTE: Charles was a mentor critic and he could really criticize her. He'd say, "Oh, the old, fat girl," and stuff like that.

MR. FOOTE: "Old, fat Frey."

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, fat Frey.

MR. FOOTE: And she'd get mad.

MS. FOOTE: And she'd let him have it quietly. No, they got along. I think they were both so different that they were compatible. They found some sort of compatibility. Charles was truly helpful to her. I think he really pushed her a great deal. I think also he could be critical of her things that made her more productive, in a way, that really brought out more creativity in her. And then they could get mad as hell at each other.

MS. RIEDEL: And is it because he had that art history background and he had a great sense of art in general that he was able to critique the work in a way that would help push her further?

MS. FOOTE: I don't know if it's pushing in the usual pushy sense. It's just observations he would make.

MS. RIEDEL: Anything come to mind at all?

MS. FOOTE: Oh, I'm trying to think. There were so many, I can't think right now.

MS. RIEDEL: This is the beauty of doing this over two days, is that if anything occurs to you, we can talk about it tomorrow.

MR. FOOTE: From my perspective, what I saw, is he was one of the major mentors for Viola, and major pushers, but in a gentle way. And I think why Viola and he got along so well is that she really respected Charles' perspective on almost everything.

If you'd ever want a beautiful tour of San Francisco, you'd go on a walking tour with Charles. We did this once. And you see the city through his eyes. And my god, you have no idea how gorgeous not only this city is, but what the architecture—what they were trying to do with the angles and light. You never saw anything like that.

MS. FOOTE: He also knew history.

MR. FOOTE: History also, and he knew art.

MS. FOOTE: Great history buff.

MS. RIEDEL: And architecture.

MR. FOOTE: Architecture. He knew all that sort of stuff. He was also severely traumatized by World War II. I did a lot of work on that, and a lot with him.

MS. RIEDEL: He served? Was he in active duty?

MR. FOOTE: Oh, year, World War II in the Asia area.

MS. RIEDEL: He had carpal tunnel as a result of that, didn't he? Something had happened from shrapnel on the wrist?

MR. FOOTE: He also had some skin problems from fungus that never went away. Then he also—I can say this

now—but he had pretty much a substance problem. But later on, that went away, thank goodness.

MS. RIEDEL: Was that alcohol?

MR. FOOTE: Typical of veterans. Typical. It's the number one substance problem, and PTSD. Because Charles had it, no question. And so, we worked a lot on that. I loved Charles, and he loved me. It was a wonderful time. But I'd get mad at him and he'd get mad at me. And we'd be okay with it.

MS. RIEDEL: When you're friends for that long, that's bound to happen.

MR. FOOTE: But we were all so respectful. I think for Viola, I think he always offered a glimmer of an edge of something that she could see something differently. It folded right in with her creative bent, which also was that movement of push.

MS. RIEDEL: That makes sense.

MR. FOOTE: And when you consider his architectural background, a lot of these pieces are architectural.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that's an excellent point, right.

MR. FOOTE: So when you look at it from that standpoint, I can see how they would be like this.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd love to hear a little bit more about that San Francisco tour, because the way you talked about how he described lines or light also makes me think about her work. It'd be interesting to have a little bit of insight into the way he saw them.

MR. FOOTE: Here's this angle here, look at what the architect did there, and then look what they did over here. And then look at how the sky-blue sky come in and does this. You go, oh my god. All of a sudden, you're seeing a painting you never saw before. It was the way he would have you look at the lens.

MS. RIEDEL: An extremely keen visual sensibility.

MR. FOOTE: Very much so. I think Viola really found that piece very intriguing for her own growth.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, of course.

MR. FOOTE: What do you think, honey?

MS. FOOTE: Sure. He was certainly extremely intelligent and verbose. He could articulate things very well, which maybe Viola couldn't or wouldn't.

MR. FOOTE: He was a writer. He would send everybody letters.

MS. FOOTE: He was a great letter writer. We have a box of letters.

MR. FOOTE: We have a ton of correspondence. Squeak has a ton. We have all that stuff. At his memorial, I read a letter that he sent to us. It was just lovely. When we first got to know them, we had a lunch in our garden area where we have the show. And Charles just—meandered a story. It was also a verbal, floral story. You couldn't help but get attached.

MS. RIEDEL: Just describing where you were—

MR. FOOTE: Where we were, and where it took him, and remembering the war, and the rivers, just whatever. It was how he wove the tapestry. I think that weaving of tapestry—how he did it—also was always something for Viola. Because if you look at all the works—it's a tapestry.

MS. RIEDEL: The paintings in particular, absolutely. Yes, that makes sense. And that he could describe that verbally, which is not something that I think of her as doing very often. But maybe that was the perfect balance.

MR. FOOTE: Viola has this one picture, she had this show at the Bransten.

MS. FOOTE: At where?

MR. FOOTE: Bransten's Gallery [Rena Bransten Gallery]. These two figures, these two men in suits, with white suits with a globe in between. Two men in suits, and then these African-American men heads on the shoulders coming up. I looked at it—Viola came up to me, I looked at it, and I smiled, and I looked at Viola and I says, "Really, Viola." And she just grinned. Didn't say another word. I knew what she was doing. So did—maybe somebody else. But with her, there was more to it.

MS. RIEDEL: And what was she doing, or what did you think she was doing?

MR. FOOTE: On the one hand, the black man on the shoulders of white men, so to speak. But also, our responsibility to that that we created. Plus, it's a world global issue about humanity. You put the whole thing together. But would she ever say that? No, never in a million words, but it comes out in the art.

MS. RIEDEL: That's very helpful.

MR. FOOTE: That's how she would do it.

MS. RIEDEL: And she must have appreciated so much that you saw that immediately and regularly.

MR. FOOTE: I said, "Viola, really." And we just laughed. We didn't say another word. A lot of our work with Viola—when we'd leave we'd always just give her a hug. But her hugs were kind of like this—

MS. RIEDEL: Not very tight.

MS. FOOTE: She was not a demonstrative person.

MR. FOOTE: But did she like us hugging? Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, interesting.

MR. FOOTE: You knew that that part was okay.

MS. RIEDEL: She appreciated that effort and that feeling. She probably appreciated that she didn't have to respond any more than she could.

MR. FOOTE: We didn't expect it. That's one thing I think you just—a level of acceptance. That's how they work. One time, when was it? When was the fire in Oakland? '89? No, that was in the '90s. The fire in Oakland?

MS. RIEDEL: At her house? Oh, in the hills, yes, yes, yes.

MR. FOOTE: That was Father's Day or Mother's Day, or some damn thing. So we had to go to Stockton. We were getting concerned about the fire. And the more we heard about the fire—because Viola and Charles' house on Oakland Avenue, that could have come right on down there.

So we called them and we said, "Viola, you guys need some help? We'd be coming home and we can swing by." She said, "Well, Bill, I would like some help." So we swung by. First thing she wanted to take out was books. The next thing were her papers. So we put some things in her truck, and we put some things in our car. We took them down to the studio in Oakland. And then we started seeing money everywhere.

MS. RIEDEL: Money?

MR. FOOTE: Money! She had money everywhere. I said, "Viola! Put this—" "Well, it's just nah nah nah nah." And so, "Is there any more?" She says, "Oh, probably, but I don't know where it's at." I said, "Okay."

MS. FOOTE: She loved also donating money [in the sense of supporting art students -BF/PF]. She loved jewelry.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. FOOTE: Funky jewelry. She loved it. And gold.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. I've never seen any photos of her, I don't think, wearing anything like that.

MS. FOOTE: But she had a lot of it.

MS. RIEDEL: Really. Did she wear it? Or did she just like to have it?

MS. FOOTE: I think sometimes she would wear rings. I can't remember now. I know she had a lot of—especially odd, unusual jewelry and antique pieces.

MR. FOOTE: If we can remember, we'll try and bring you two pieces. We bought them when she passed away.

MS. FOOTE: We bought them originally.

MR. FOOTE: The one we did.

MS. FOOTE: She bought them from me.

MR. FOOTE: What was his name? Clark?

MS. FOOTE: Clark. Bill Clark.

MR. FOOTE: Bill Clark. He did these weird, weird jewelries.

MS. FOOTE: There's two Bill Clarks, by the way, and they're both artists.

MS. RIEDEL: Which one is this?

MS. FOOTE: Bill Clark was a jeweler, a goldsmith, and he designed wonderful jewelry. Did he also do—

MR. FOOTE: Metalwork. He did some fancy antlers for dance.

MS. FOOTE: He did presentation pieces for shows.

MS. RIEDEL: San Francisco or Oakland-based?

MS. FOOTE: He was more Berkeley.

MR. FOOTE: His studio was in Emeryville. I took a class from him once. He was a different kind of guy.

MS. FOOTE: Then there's another Bill Clark. Was he a painter or something?

MR. FOOTE: I don't know.

MS. FOOTE: I can't remember.

MR. FOOTE: We'll try to bring those pieces so you can see them.

MS. RIEDEL: That would be fun to see.

MR. FOOTE: They're very unusual.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, it was the sort of thing she liked. In fact, about jewelry—they were moving from San Francisco to Oakland, and she put all her jewelry in a paper bag and it got thrown out.

MR. FOOTE: Charles put it safely in the washroom in the Oakland house. And when they cleaned out the washroom, it all went in the trash. Thousands of dollars of jewelry.

MS. FOOTE: Many thousands of dollars. Oh, well.

MR. FOOTE: And Viola just smiled and went, hmm.

MS. RIEDEL: It's fine.

MR. FOOTE: "It's fine! I'm fine!"

MS. FOOTE: She would go to antique shops. She loved to go to antique shops.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you ever go with her?

MS. FOOTE: Yes. She'd look at jewelry. She's look at different jewelry, and also ceramics.

MR. FOOTE: Yes, she would buy ceramics.

MS. FOOTE: She would collect ceramics.

MS. RIEDEL: What did she collect? And did she talk to you about it as she was getting it, what she was seeing?

MS. FOOTE: Sometimes, I wouldn't know where she got it. One time, I know, when she was in New York, she came back—this was when she was in Oakland—with these huge, beautiful Italian ceramics, but they were a totally contemporary design. I said, "Viola, where did you get those?" She said, "I bought them at Bloomingdale's." There was an artist there—she told me his name and I cannot remember—she said he worked in Italy but he did all contemporary designs. And they were stunning. I wish I knew where they were at, they were stunning pieces. She would do that. She would buy if there were unusual or antique pieces. She bought a couple of big Chinese pieces, blue and white pieces from me.

MR. FOOTE: She did, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: And broke them.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, she broke them.

MS. RIEDEL: But it sounds as if a lot of the collection, or a lot of what she was drawn to, was antiques, or kitsch, or kind of junk. But then she'd come up with these pieces from Bloomingdale's, which were none of that. They were very contemporary.

MS. FOOTE: They were wonderful. If it was unusual and it appealed, she would get them. If it was well done.

MR. FOOTE: One of the pieces she got in New York, remember, was that piece from the Philippines, that priest with the little boy. It was a sculpture in wood.

MS. FOOTE: She didn't get that in New York.

MR. FOOTE: Where'd she get that then?

MS. FOOTE: Oh, maybe she did.

MR. FOOTE: She got that in New York.

MS. FOOTE: I went back with her to New York one time and there was an antique cooperative—was it on Lexington? I can't remember. But we went in and strolled through it all, and we stopped at this Indian man's store and he had these wonderful old Indian paintings.

MS. RIEDEL: Native American or East Indian?

MS. FOOTE: East Indian, I'm sorry. And she just fell in love with them. So she bought a bunch of them. And then we found another store that had pre-Colombian stuff. And she bought—remember that one cylinder pot? Oh, I loved it. She bought that. She would go back whenever she was in New York. She'd go back and she'd buy more, especially from the Indian man, the paintings. She had a whole collection of these small miniatures. They weren't terribly [old -BF/PF]—maybe 19th century. She loved them and she'd buy things like that.

MR. FOOTE: We gave her a whole bunch of those framed Japanese prints. Not prints—

MS. FOOTE: Woodblock prints.

MR. FOOTE: Woodblock prints. Peggy had a huge collection of them and I think we just gave them to her.

MS. FOOTE: They weren't framed.

MR. FOOTE: They weren't framed.

MS. FOOTE: No, they weren't framed.

MR. FOOTE: Peggy just gave them to her because she had loved them.

MS. FOOTE: She would collect things.

MS. RIEDEL: And did she display them? When you went to the house or the studio, would you see them actually installed? She just had them.

MS. FOOTE: She just had them.

MS. RIEDEL: She'd look at them from time to time.

MR. FOOTE: She'd pull them out and look at them. When she went and did the Chihuly thing, down in—

MS. FOOTE: Chihuly—

MR. FOOTE: —in Washington, the glass—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, right, up at Pilchuck, yes, yes, yes.

MR. FOOTE: Pilchuck, yes. She came back and here was this big bowl. I said, "Oh, those are interesting." I said, "But Viola, what's in this?" And there was all these male genitals.

MS. RIEDEL: Really! She always talked about the guys making all the penises.

MR. FOOTE: There was this bowl full of male genitals. I was, what the hell is this?

MS. FOOTE: What ever happened to that one?

MR. FOOTE: I don't know whatever happened to them. But it was funny. She had a good time there. Did they ever make anything that she designed?

MS. FOOTE: I remember she made a couple figures.

MS. RIEDEL: That was quite a bit later, right—in the '90s, wasn't it?

MR. FOOTE: Oh yeah, that was definitely '90s. Much later.

MS. FOOTE: We're skipping all over the landscape here.

MR. FOOTE: Are we bothering your—

MS. RIEDEL: No, no, no, absolutely, this is fine. It's fine. We'll balance as we need to and then we'll come back around.

MS. FOOTE: I remember one glass figure, it was very—I guess it was a woman because it was very buxom and bulbous and breasty. I don't know whatever happened to that. She had several things out on the desk there.

MR. FOOTE: It was so funny when I was photographing with the photographer—very nice young man. He said, "Some of these figurines, I love her female models." They were rather busty. I said, "Well, yeah, there's a gay person here." He said, "Oh, look at the guys." We just laughed because it was very funny. Because that was Viola. That's how she did it.

MS. FOOTE: Another thing she loved to collect was little ceramic figures, especially from the '40s. Crazy little things like the figurines, they'd be like little flower pots of these cute ladies' heads on them. She did things like that. Remember, she had a whole collection. And some of her ceramics relate to those.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MR. FOOTE: In fact, some of those things in the '90s were all based on that. The closet in the Oakland house—there was one little closet in the dining room. Open it up—filled with these little figurines. Floor to ceiling, just huge. "Viola, are you going to buy more?" "Oh, yeah."

MS. FOOTE: She would—if I found something really unusual, I would give it to her.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you know what she looked for in particular when she was looking for those figurines?

MS. FOOTE: No, it wasn't any one thing. It just had to relate to her in some way. Like I said, she did buy a series of those little flower pots with the ladies with the little hats and pretty faces. She bought a bunch of those. Some of those appeared in her paintings.

MS. RIEDEL: It makes me think of some of those *Mrs. National Geographic* with the hats and little faces.

MS. FOOTE: Or *Mrs. Redbook*.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. FOOTE: I could never understand it.

MS. FOOTE: She just loved to collect things.

MR. FOOTE: And Charles was into jewelry and gems, and she would go on the TV. She'd stay up and she would be buying stones and everything from these—she gave me [some -BF/PF] stones.

MS. FOOTE: She gave you not a whole bunch—

MR. FOOTE: Not a bunch, no, a few.

MS. RIEDEL: Where would she buy them? At the flea markets?

MR. FOOTE: No, on television.

MS. RIEDEL: Really.

MR. FOOTE: QVC or other jewelry shows. Especially these Indian guys, she loved them.

MS. FOOTE: She have me a gold necklace that she bought. There used to be, in the '90s—it came on late at night. It was a jewelry program that sold Indian gold.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. FOOTE: And she'd buy from them. And she gave me a necklace she'd bought. That was not too long before she passed away. But she said, I want you to have this. She gave Squeak—

MR. FOOTE: A bracelet.

MS. FOOTE: A big, heavy, I mean, huge heavy thing—gold. But you know what, when she got better, she gave that—was that when she was very ill?

MR. FOOTE: She was very sick, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: She gave that to Squeak and then she got better. She says, "You know, I kind of miss that."

MR. FOOTE: But she was never held to anything. She'd let it go. She would never hold anything like that.

The only thing I noticed when we took her to Carmel one time to see our friends and we hit some antique shops down in Moss Landing there. That's when I noticed that her health was not good, there was something wrong. She had almost a fainting episode inside the antique shop. I had to get her to sit down. She broke out with sweat.

I said, "Viola, are you all right?" And then I knew that there was something really wrong. There was no follow-up on her cancer. And I knew something was off. That was beginning of the downhill.

MS. RIEDEL: So that was the early '90s? Mid '90s? Late '90s?

MR. FOOTE: Mid '90s, probably. Mid '90s when that happened. It was scary for me. Being a physician, I just know too much.

MS. FOOTE: We shouldn't even bothered taking her. I think it was really tiring for her.

MR. FOOTE: She wanted to go.

MS. FOOTE: There were a lot of little funky antique shops down there that had odd things, and she loved it. But it was a disappointment because you either see a lot of good stuff or you don't. There just wasn't anything there at that time. But she was tired.

MR. FOOTE: She was tired. But that's the whole point, is she was tired but then she would still push herself.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. That sounds right.

MR. FOOTE: And she'd still push herself.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm curious what you all talked about on these trips. From the very beginning, I know she wasn't big on socializing, per se. But you said you would all have dinners together. Then you've taken some trips. What would you talk about? Would she talk about exhibitions that she'd seen? Did she talk about her work? Clearly, she didn't talk about Charles then.

MS. FOOTE: We'd talk about people we knew. We'd talk about art, what she was doing in ceramics. A little bit of this, a little bit—nothing specific. Generally, we never got too intense with Viola.

MS. RIEDEL: Did she talk about, for example, when she first went to Europe, or when she was—did she talk about her experiences in New York?

MS. FOOTE: She would talk about her experiences in France, and how she went to work at Sèvres with that grant she had. She says, oh, those French. They're so lazy. They don't want to work. At Sèvres, she was talking specifically about Sèvres. They talked about—which I don't think ever happened—they promised her they were going to do a dinner service based on her work. But I don't think that ever happened. How many times did she go there? Two? Three?

MS. RIEDEL: Twice, I think.

MR. FOOTE: Twice, I think. That's when she had the first big problem with her cerebral phlebitis.

MS. FOOTE: With her what?

MR. FOOTE: She had blood clots, remember, from sitting on the plane.

MS. RIEDEL: You hear about that, but never anyone who's actually had it.

MR. FOOTE: Blood clots. Remember?

MS. FOOTE: Oh, right. Blood clots.

MR. FOOTE: That was the beginning of some of the problem

We visited her at Kaiser that time. She did fine, but was like, okay, be careful. Can we lose some weight, Viola?

MS. FOOTE: She had really gotten very heavy.

MR. FOOTE: She had gotten very heavy, too heavy.

MS. FOOTE: Especially after Charles. She put on a lot more weight.

MS. RIEDEL: When did he pass away?

MR. FOOTE: He was alive when she was there, honey, when that happened.

MS. FOOTE: I'm just saying the weight situation.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, the weight, yes.

MS. FOOTE: She got heavier after he—when did Charles pass away? '90—

MR. FOOTE: I don't remember. All I know is that we went—

MS. RIEDEL: He was quite a bit older than she was, yes? He was born in 1914, she was 1933. So almost 20 years.

MS. FOOTE: I think he was many things to her. Not only a mentor, but he was so intelligent. He could give really wonderful critiques on things. Then when he got irritated, he could just be—

MR. FOOTE: He could be a blister.

MS. FOOTE: He could be a blister.

MR. FOOTE: Also, if he got irritated and had a little bit too much Scotch, then he was even worse.

MS. FOOTE: He was generally a very sweet person.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yes. Very loving person. Good heart.

MS. FOOTE: That was good for Viola.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't want to pry in any way, but I'm curious as to whether that was an intimate relationship between the two?

MS. FOOTE: Well, it was intimate because of their closeness, and all. But as far as any sexuality—one time, remember we went over there and they were all, both of them just beaming. Bill and I looked at each other—[They laugh.] okay. There's no mistaking that.

MR. FOOTE: It was so funny. We were at the door, going to have a big gathering. We were bringing food, Art Nelson—he had food. Art could get a little pissy. We're knocking on the door. And I said, "Well, maybe they're not home." He says, "Oh, no, they're home. They're probably fucking." So, okay. We just said, okay.

MS. FOOTE: I brought this up to Squeak and she says, oh, yeah, that would happen once in a while. I don't think it was what I would call a chronic sexual relationship.

MR. FOOTE: No, I don't think it was that.

MS. FOOTE: It would just happen whenever. That was so funny that one time, they were both beaming. It was so cute.

MR. FOOTE: Also, there's a relationship with Charles and Corky [Vernon Coykendall] that was weird. Kind of we wonder about that one. I wonder about it. Gary and Squeak don't wonder about it, but I still do.

MS. RIEDEL: You think they don't worry about it because they're convinced?

MR. FOOTE: They're convinced. I'm not.

MS. RIEDEL: They're convinced it was a gay relationship?

MR. FOOTE: I'm not. But I think there was something there. I don't know what it was.

MS. FOOTE: They were long-time friends.

MR. FOOTE: Long-time friends. So it could appear one way but—

MS. FOOTE: You don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: So there was never anything explicit.

MR. FOOTE: No, not that I know of. Charles never said anything on that. Even though I was kind of, quasi friend-slash-therapist, I never delved into that personal aspect of his life. Because I thought, with our boundaries of our friendship, I thought, that should be an area we should not go into, unless it was necessary to go into it. And it was never necessary to go into it. What was more important for him to go into was dealing with sensitivity of how people that hurt people.

MS. RIEDEL: How people hurt people? Interesting?

MR. FOOTE: His sensitivity of how insensitive—humanity being insensitive to art, artists, aesthetics. Couldn't understand how people could be so harsh and cruel. The war bothered him terribly.

MS. FOOTE: I'm going to get this out before I forget it. You know Corky and, where was it, Richard?

MR. FOOTE: Richard.

MS. FOOTE: What was his full name?

MR. FOOTE: McDonald. Richard McDonald.

MS. FOOTE: McDonald. He was a painter, just sort of a mediocre fellow, thinking wise.

MR. FOOTE: He was very mediocre.

MS. FOOTE: And Viola would criticize him, but not too harshly. She says, he's just not that good. But Charles would get highly irritated with Richard. And I don't know if it's because of his relationship with Corky, or because—I don't know. But I've heard that they made some sort of harsh criticism or remarks.

MS. RIEDEL: Now was Corky gay?

MS. FOOTE: I don't know.

MR. FOOTE: Corky and Richard were partners. I think that was a gay relationship.

MS. FOOTE: There was an irritation on both Viola and Charles' part.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, towards them, yes.

MS. FOOTE: They took it out on Richard.

MR. FOOTE: But I think the anger was really towards Corky.

MS. FOOTE: Yes, but they took it out on Richard.

MR. FOOTE: And that was unfair. Because Corky, wasn't he the head of the Pot Shop?

MS. FOOTE: Yes, he was head of Ceramics at that time.

MR. FOOTE: There was obviously some ego. There was stuff there. But because the politics and long-time friendships, they overlooked a lot. But you could feel the tension. And I think poor Richard kind of got it. I don't know if they thought Richard took away Corky's power or something like that in the Pot Shop? We just don't

know.

MS. FOOTE: I have no idea. That was so long ago. And at that time, we really didn't know everybody all that well.

MR. FOOTE: No, we didn't. That's when we met Jackie Maybeck.

MS. FOOTE: Jackie Maybeck, she was fun.

MR. FOOTE: She was a sweet, fun—also the Tokis, they gave clay to everybody.

MS. FOOTE: They had a clay shop.

MR. FOOTE: There's so many other people we met through them.

MS. FOOTE: Jackie Maybeck was real fun. She was Bernard Maybeck's daughter-in-law.

MR. FOOTE: We have a couple pieces by her.

MS. FOOTE: And she was a lot of fun. Well, we could go on and on.

MS. RIEDEL: We'll pause this here because this card's about to end. I think it is important to try to just address that directly and get your sensibility.

MS. FOOTE: Viola was also good friends with Jackie Maybeck.

MR. FOOTE: We all liked Jackie. She was quite lovely. Has this been helpful?

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, absolutely. —

[END OF CARD ONE.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Peggy and Bill Foote on February 16, 2014 for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art in Bill's office in San Francisco, California. Card number two.

So we'd been discussing just the relationship and the degree of influence of Charles on Viola.

MS. FOOTE: Charles was a figure for Viola. A male figure. That she could depend on. He may disagree with her, and maybe get a little pushy with her, but he was always there. Always backing her up and defending her. And yet giving her—I think he also gave her a great deal of affection.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yes.

MS. FOOTE: Whether they had sex now and then, who knows, who cares. But I don't think it was a mad passionate affair. I think it was a long term—in a sense it was a passionate affair.

MR. FOOTE: It was.

MS. FOOTE: Not a sexual passionate—but a passionate affair that they've had. And they could treat each other with great passion—

MR. FOOTE: Oh yes.

MS. FOOTE: —of opinion, of feeling. Yeah, I saw them do that.

MR. FOOTE: But caring about each other very intensely.

MS. FOOTE: Yep.

MR. FOOTE: There's no question about that.

MS. FOOTE: One time, we were at a gathering at Viola's house—this is in Oakland—and something came up, and I corrected Charles on something. He says, well, not so. And I said, well, yeah, Charles, I think so. Don't ask me what it was, it wasn't important, but Viola got very angry with me. I was working out in her pot shop at that time, and she asked me to leave and take everything. And I did. And they invited me back later.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. FOOTE: No, she was really—there was no critique of Charles in her mind at all.

MR. FOOTE: No, you couldn't do anything to Charles.

MS. FOOTE: No criticism.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. FOOTE: I could. Coming from a perspective of, "Let me tell you how to do—"

MS. FOOTE: Well, you were doing a different sort of thing.

MR. FOOTE: I was a different kind of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: What was your thing?

MR. FOOTE: Well my thing would be, Viola, could you have Charles watch this? And you've gotta watch that. And now he's doing this, and just pay attention to that.

MS. RIEDEL: So you were trying to watch out for his health? And you were trying to take care of him?

MR. FOOTE: Health, and also where he was looking at, and she would listen and she would get that.

MS. RIEDEL: Because you were trying to help him?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, help him.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. FOOTE: But I could be critical.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, as long as you had his best interests at heart.

MR. FOOTE: Best interest for both of them, actually.

MS. FOOTE: But I was criticizing an opinion.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. FOOTE: Different thing.

MR. FOOTE: Also, yeah that's true because she was very—I won't say this [inaudible]. But I think really, I don't remember Charles really saying this directly to me, but he did say it in a variety of ways when we talked. What drove him to Viola was he saw the talent. He saw what she had, and where she could go with it.

MS. FOOTE: That's true.

MR. FOOTE: And that was the bottom line.

MS. FOOTE: That's true.

MR. FOOTE: And so I think she knew it, and he knew it, and that was conviction. I really do.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, it's interesting, because one of the topics I really would like to address is Viola and her work in terms of gender issues and feminism. Gender issues in particular, but it seems like in some ways, we're getting to that through this conversation. Because, from what I understand, she never spoke directly about, or spoke much about, gender issues or feminism, though certainly was very much of that era.

MS. FOOTE: Well, she did—

MS. RIEDEL: And having a strong male figure. I know she made multiple references to sort of the "boys club", "ceramics club" thinking of Arneson and Voukos and those guys, that—she didn't feel part of that.

MS. FOOTE: But Charles was not quite in that club.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. So here was a strong male figure that really appreciated her, and what she had to offer, and believed in her. And it didn't sound like there was a lot of that in her life.

MS. FOOTE: No.

MR. FOOTE: I don't think so.

MS. FOOTE: I don't think so.

MR. FOOTE: And when we came along, actually Peggy was really good for her, too. Because Peggy had this, more of a strong taking care of—like going to court for her. "Oh no, don't go to court." "No, that's your money. We're going to go to court." And then also, Peggy was helping her buy some jewelry, some pearls.

MS. FOOTE: Oh, pearls, yeah.

MR. FOOTE: You've got to tell that story because Viola would just roll over and write a check.

MS. FOOTE: It was a gem and mineral show down in San Mateo, god, years ago. And she saw these pearls—actually they were lovely, slightly yellow colored pearls, but they were beautiful. And the gal wanted, I don't know how much, three thousand dollars. And Viola said, oh, okay. And I said, no, Viola. No, no, no. We walked—so I went back, and I said, that's too much money.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. FOOTE: And I got it down, I forgot, I got it down and it was 50 per cent. 40 per cent, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, exactly.

MR. FOOTE: But Viola would just write a check.

MS. FOOTE: She would just write a check.

MR. FOOTE: But also, I think that's also—she saw us also as protectors on one level.

MS. FOOTE: Well, I think—and I think this is true, we never took advantage of her. I really cared a great deal about her and Charles. And I think a lot of people felt that way about her, but there's also a lot of people out there on the periphery, that—"what can you give me" sort of thing. Or what can I get from you.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. FOOTE: And I was never interested in it from that point of view. But talking about their family and things—we got into a discussion once, Viola and I, about— what brought it to mind, is Jay DeFeo, with her great big *The Rose* thing. And we don't live too far from the building that it was in, where they had to cut the wall out. But also—why can't I think of her name, that did the dinner—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, Judy Chicago.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And she talked about that issue, really thought that was wonderful. And there was a great feminine thing for her in that.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah. She would talk about things like that with women artists. She was very much—that was important to her.

MR. FOOTE: I think so, because art—there was very much a drive. I wouldn't say I would see this as a real feminist position that she had. I think she was, but I think she was more, "I'm a female artist," and "I want a female artist to be notified, and noticed."

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: And Charles could help Arneson, help Voukos, help all these people. But his focus was to elevate Viola. And there's no question in my mind about that.

MS. FOOTE: That's why I think she backed Squeak a lot.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yes.

MS. FOOTE: She strongly supported Squeak in her aspirations. Which was good. I'm thinking of—gee, it's been so many years since I've been down to that Pot Shop. But I went to a couple of shows—this is after I had gone to school there.

MS. RIEDEL: At CCA?

MS. FOOTE: CCAC, when it was in Oakland. And there was a couple shows there, and there was a couple potters that she really pushed that were young women. And they were just good. It was still not big, it was small. Very delicate work, very pretty. But good. And Viola was pushing them. And I'm trying to remember the name of the one girl she really liked. And the gal didn't follow through on her career as far as I know, but she was good.

MR. FOOTE: Well, it would also make her a little irritated.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: They can't be a true artist, so they're not going to do something like this—it's interesting, because on the one hand, I understand where she was coming from, for her passion about art. But also, I think it was also—we need more women going in and doing this, being seen more. And we're going to get married, and have babies, and cook dinners—you can't do your art. But that's the one thing Charles did do—shopped, food, meals, all done.

MS. RIEDEL: He did all that.

MR. FOOTE: He did all that.

MS. FOOTE: He did all that.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. FOOTE: He did all that.

MS. FOOTE: In fact, I think it was good for him to do that.

MR. FOOTE: Oh yeah, he needed to.

MS. FOOTE: He needed to.

MS. RIEDEL: Did he have a position, a career, of his own?

MS. FOOTE: Well he was at CCAC.

MS. RIEDEL: For what?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, he taught there. He taught there for awhile. And then I'm trying to remember, what did he do after he got out of the army?

MR. FOOTE: Well, honey, all I remember—he went to Paris for a while.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Then lived in [inaudible] or something.

MS. FOOTE: I have some of his sketches from Paris. Which I'm gonna give to Squeak and—

MR. FOOTE: For the archives.

MS. FOOTE: —for the archives.

MS. RIEDEL: I want to note that he was a part time professor of ceramics history at, I think, CCAC. Well, he was there in the '50s and left in '54. And then from '79 to '85—but that's all that I really know.

MS. FOOTE: Well he did teach there, too, maybe he did it on his own.

MS. RIEDEL: He was involved there for 40 years, is what I've read.

MS. FOOTE: I know he was very good in teaching glaze class. He taught glaze class there, in fact.

MR. FOOTE: Well to be honest with you, I think—Charles had some form of a pension from the military. And as far as a job, Viola was more of the money maker.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. FOOTE: She bought the house, it was her money. And Charles was just—

MS. RIEDEL: They had a very modern relationship.

MR. FOOTE: Very much so in that regard. Because Charles did not have what you'd call a robust income.

MS. FOOTE: He did have some income, though.

MR. FOOTE: He did have some income, but I never asked. And he wanted to pay me, I said no, we'll have to come to an agreement. Well, we did. And it was what he could afford, and that's fine. And I was fine with that. But it was necessary for him to do that. It was good. Well, we dearly loved him, and it was very sad to see him go down with COPD and emphysema. Just horrible. Well he was a major smoker. So anyway—

MS. RIEDEL: COPD, what is that?

MR. FOOTE: Chronic pulmonary disorder.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay. CPD.

MR. FOOTE: What'd I say?

MS. FOOTE: COPD.

MR. FOOTE: COPD, yeah. And also what you have to be careful with that is when a person has some substance—like alcohol, it depresses the respiratory, so it's a very vicious cycle. But he got away from the alcohol a good portion of that.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah he did.

MS. RIEDEL: I wanted to just touch briefly—you'd mentioned something about Charles being able to help Arneson or help Voulkos. How so?

MR. FOOTE: By comments.

MS. RIEDEL: Really? And did they listen to him?

MR. FOOTE: Voulkos did.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. FOOTE: He worked bigger.

MR. FOOTE: He worked bigger. After Charles pulled him aside and said, "You're not gonna go anywhere until you go bigger."

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. FOOTE: Yep.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you hear that or did Charles tell you that?

MR. FOOTE: Charles told us that.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, and you believe that?

MR. FOOTE: Oh, I would believe it.

MS. FOOTE: He was doing small pots. If you go into his early work that's true. But then he started working bigger, and he got into those big plates.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, I would believe that. I would believe that. I don't think that's a story.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it a source of frustration for Viola and Charles to see the male artists so widely recognized? Or did she feel like she was—

MS. FOOTE: I don't know if she—

MS. RIEDEL: —getting the attention her work deserved.

MS. FOOTE: —she may have felt it, but I don't think she let it incapacitate her in any way.

MR. FOOTE: Do you know what I think happened with that? I think that she saw that as a trigger and a spur to have her go further, and faster, and bigger, and better.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. FOOTE: I think that was the carrot.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah. Did she talk about the work at all in terms of political or social commentary?

MR. FOOTE: Rarely.

MS. RIEDEL: It certainly had it, but the impression I'm getting is that a lot of it just came out through the work. It wasn't necessarily—

MR. FOOTE: It mainly came out through the work.

MS. FOOTE: It was there.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. FOOTE: It was there, but I don't know if she went into great discussions. But I know she would have groups of people over from school and all that, and I think they did get into discussions like that. But we weren't around at that time. I'm trying to think who might be helpful, but I don't know any of those people now.

MS. RIEDEL: It also seems like her work walked a very interesting line between her own personal experience, and then social commentary, or political commentary, or gender issues. And what the tone—

MS. FOOTE: She was not unaware of these things.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. I wouldn't think—

MS. FOOTE: She was certainly not unaware.

MS. RIEDEL: But the two would synthesize in her work? Do you think that feels accurate? Her own personal experience, and then her sense of what was going on in the world?

MR. FOOTE: I think—you kind of spurred me on—our pots that we had for our housewarming, that she made for us, or gave us, I should say. We also saw her every fall at the San Francisco—City Hall Square [Civic Center Plaza], they would have an art festival [San Francisco Arts Festival]. And Viola was—

MS. FOOTE: Oh, that was in the '60s and '70s.

MR. FOOTE: And she was always showing there, and that was where a lot of these pots were, these functional pots were. She also had a very—she was doing her craft, absolutely. Getting better and better with glazes and so forth. But she also had a practical side. She needed extra income. So these were—salable, and so she would go out—they would just go out. And so you could see where there's a practical side to make money, and then also, where do I carry it over to something a little weird? So here's an "endangered species," here's a this sort of thing. She started pushing that whole concept.

MS. FOOTE: She did do an Endangered Species series, which was wonderful. We had some of those at the show.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Late '60s, I think. Early '70s.

MS. FOOTE: Maryanne bought the lynx.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, she bought that on Wenger, honey.

MS. FOOTE: Huh, she bought that from Wenger?

MR. FOOTE: Leslie Wenger, yeah. And Leslie Wenger took the toucan. We got the budding piece. We were kicking ourselves we didn't get something else. And Viola took back the beaver, but I think the beaver sold recently.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, our friend who's living in Washington now bought the lynx, it's really wonderful. And I called her because there were some people from Cincinnati somewhere—

MR. FOOTE: They were trying to do something with the museum there.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, and I said, "Can I give them your phone number to call?" Well, they never called her. She also had a couple paintings. And then I talked to her a couple years ago, and she says, "Oh well, I had to get rid of it. Maryanne saw this. We're going to clean house, let's get rid of it." She put it into auction, she was very disappointed. Well she put it into auction up in Washington, she's not going to get anything there. I said, "I wish I had known." Because I would have bought it from her, for whatever she paid for it. But anyway, that's how

things go. Now you see it, now you don't.

MR. FOOTE: Well Maryanne has another piece that I think is wonderful.

MS. FOOTE: Which one is that?

MR. FOOTE: Remember the tall one that's a white figure—woman figure in the nude? It's —

MS. FOOTE: She bought that?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, they bought that. It was in their bathroom here in Oakland Hills. Remember and they had all the pussy willows in it?

MS. FOOTE: Oh, yeah!

MR. FOOTE: And Royce and Maryanne called it "Somebody Somebody Thunder Pussy."

[They laugh.]

MR. FOOTE: But it was a wonderful piece, and they bought that one. And that was great, that was a great piece.

MS. FOOTE: She had lovely paintings, but oh well.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you close with her during the time of her retrospective at the Crocker Art Gallery? And then the early '80s as those pieces got so large?

MS. FOOTE: I never got out to that show.

MS. RIEDEL: And then to the Whitney exhibition? Did you have a chance to get to that?

MR. FOOTE: I didn't get to that.

MS. FOOTE: That was back in New York?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, I didn't get that either.

MS. FOOTE: No, I went back with Viola when they were setting it up. They were talking about setting it up.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. FOOTE: That was just before the show.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, I think you went back for that.

MS. RIEDEL: The early '80s seem like just an extraordinary time for her work. It was just taking off. In scale, recognition.

MR. FOOTE: The Wenger show did that.

MS. RIEDEL: The late '70s? Early '70s?

MR. FOOTE: No.

MS. FOOTE: The Wenger show?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, the Endangered Species.

MS. RIEDEL: Ah, you think that was really a taking off point.

MS. FOOTE: I don't think so.

MR. FOOTE: Following that was the Hank Baum. Following that was the Bransten and—then Rena Bransten.

MS. FOOTE: Then Rena.

MR. FOOTE: Then Rena.

MS. FOOTE: Then Hoffman. [Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York City -BF/PF]

MR. FOOTE: Then Hoffman, and then somebody in L. A.

MS. FOOTE: Well, that was Wenger's father in Los Angeles.

MR. FOOTE: No, there was another—

MS. FOOTE: Yes it was.

MR. FOOTE: Wasn't there another—

MS. FOOTE: No, no. He had the gallery in L. A., and he handled some of the work down there. [Frey's gallery in L.A. was Asher-Faure. -ALF]

MR. FOOTE: Oh he did? But also there was another artist in another gallery over in L. A.

MS. FOOTE: Not that I—well maybe. But I'm not I'm aware of it.

MR. FOOTE: For the recent stuff. I don't know, I can't remember.

MS. FOOTE: Well maybe, if it came back around in the '90s, so I don't know.

MR. FOOTE: And anyway—

MS. FOOTE: So I don't know.

MR. FOOTE: —that was very interesting to see all that. It was like a skyrocket going. And I think what happened here is when, finally—you got some gallery owners who could see where she was going, and had the pull and [means to promote her -BF/PF], that was another further carrot. So therefore, it really pushed her even further. It also gave her confidence. And I think that's when she arrived.

MS. FOOTE: But then, I don't know if you know the story about her, she got carpal tunnel.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. FOOTE: Very severely.

MS. RIEDEL: In the '90s, wasn't it?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Or late '80s?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, '90s.

MS. FOOTE: Bill knew about this doctor who treated musicians and all, he's very well known. We took her over, and he said, he's here in San Francisco.

MR. FOOTE: He's on Post and Van Ness.

MS. FOOTE: And he examined her and did x-rays. And he told her what was the matter, and what he had to do, which would have made life easier for her. And she says, "Well, how long before I can work?" And he said, "Three months." And she said, "Oh, I can't do that." Because it was in her right hand. And he said, "Well, that's not such a long time." She said, "No, I can't do that." "Who's your doctor?" And she said, "I'm at Kaiser." And he said, "Who's your doctor there?" And she told him the name of a woman doctor, and he said, "Oh, I know her. She's almost as good as me."

[They laugh.]

MS. FOOTE: I just looked at him.

MR. FOOTE: Well, he is good.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, he's good. But she wouldn't do it because she couldn't work for three months. I said, "Viola, you could always paint and sketch a little."

MR. FOOTE: We were both on her. Because this was not going to get better.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. FOOTE: She wouldn't do it.

MS. RIEDEL: She would not do it. Interesting. And it was never done?

MS. FOOTE: Mm-mm.

MR. FOOTE: No never. It was like this.

MS. FOOTE: She would work with this one hand, and then Sam would help her.

MR. FOOTE: Well, that's where Sam came in. Sam came in big time, because that was when—

MS. FOOTE: He was really good to her.

MR. FOOTE: And Sam is—have you met Sam [Perry]?

MS. RIEDEL: No, he'll be interviewed probably in the next month or two.

MS. FOOTE: He's a nice guy.

MR. FOOTE: He's wonderful.

MS. FOOTE: He can probably fill you in on a lot of things from the '80s and '90s, because at that time—'86 I contracted Lyme disease. And things went to hell, and then I got arthritis right after that, which is typical.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. FOOTE: So I kinda lost touch.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. FOOTE: And which made me feel bad. I could have at least called and checked in on things.

MR. FOOTE: Well they were busy, and that's how life goes. But we were still connected. When we got together, it was like we saw them yesterday. It was not an issue. But Sam will be able to do a lot of filling in toward the end there, because he was really the person daily with her. Very significant person in her life.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. For 17 years, right? I think he was her assistant.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah. Well we were happy she had him, but you see from our perspective, we got very protective. I did, anyway. It's like, who's these new people named Gary and Squeak? You're all enamored with Gary and Squeak. Now you guys, who are they? [... -BF/PF]

MS. FOOTE: Bill.

MR. FOOTE: No, in my mind. I didn't say that. But I would be, mmm. Because there was also some horror stories along the way. Some people that had some really—taking advantage of them. And you know in the art world that happens. But they were, all these people—later on were really good people. It was all wonderful.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you visit—I imagine you did—the house in Oakland where she had all the figures outside?

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: I worked in a workshop out there.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you describe what that felt like, and how many pieces were there?

MS. FOOTE: Wonderful. It was really like a jungle, if you will, between Viola's big sculptural pieces, then overgrown areas, and then brick work that Charles would—Charles would make little arrangements of brick, little terraces, little things, and then little plant things, then the sculptures, and then there'd be a whole back area that was really a jungle. Weeds, and what not. And then this big studio that she built, with a huge kiln. That never worked properly. She spent a fortune on it.

MS. RIEDEL: I'll bet.

MS. FOOTE: Never worked properly. And I don't know why she didn't go after whoever installed the thing, but—

MR. FOOTE: Well, that's her nature. Like the pearls, honey, she didn't know.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting the way you just described that. It made me think of her childhood home with that wild, overgrown space, and then the machinery—this was perversion.

MS. FOOTE: It was like an adventure going out there, because you'd find things.

MR. FOOTE: Well, I think the thing that is interesting is what Peggy said about her father, about just leaving things. That's kind of how this backyard was. But it was like a—

MS. FOOTE: It was arranged.

MR. FOOTE: Arranged, yeah. It was arranged.

MS. RIEDEL: I believe that. Yes, of course.

MR. FOOTE: It was. That's when we wanted some of those pieces, but there's no way you can put a ten-foot Chinese sculpture—

MS. FOOTE: Oh, I wanted that one. The Chinese lady, have you seen it?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, you didn't see that? Oh well, it was wonderful. But you know, you just can't.

MS. FOOTE: I still think about that one, but—

MR. FOOTE: And the big chicken she did, the big rooster.

MS. RIEDEL: That I did see.

MS. FOOTE: She had a lot of wonderful things out there.

MS. RIEDEL: And did she talk with you about the changing light back there? And how that helped her see them and evolve them?

MS. FOOTE: No, she didn't.

MR. FOOTE: Charles did though. Charles talked about the changing light back there. One time we were sitting there, in the dining room, and the light was coming in, and he was talking about the light and how it hit things.

MS. FOOTE: I remember the big palm tree in the middle of it all.

MR. FOOTE: The big palm was in the middle of it all.

MS. FOOTE: And Charles was saying, hmm. "It's full of rats."

[They laugh.]

MS. FOOTE: Rats do like palm trees. No, you were always—and if I hadn't seen her for awhile, there'd be something new out there, which was always fun. And they'd say, "Oh c'mon, you've got to go out and see this."

MR. FOOTE: Or there'd be a new book, or there'd be new—little ceramic things.

MS. FOOTE: I really enjoyed that.

MR. FOOTE: That one piece she got from the Philippines, with the priest and the little boys. I said, "Viola."

[They laugh.]

MS. FOOTE: I said, "That's a pedophile."

MR. FOOTE: That's a pedophile.

MS. FOOTE: She just laughed.

MR. FOOTE: And she was, "I had to have it." We know!

MS. FOOTE: It was such a grim looking thing.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, she would do these things.

MS. FOOTE: She'd buy odd things like that, just to—even though it was supposed to be a Saint somebody-or-another, it was a disturbing sort of sculpture. Wood sculpture. I said, "Viola!"

MS. RIEDEL: She really liked that, didn't she?

MS. FOOTE: Well, yeah.

MR. FOOTE: She kinda liked the edgy.

MS. RIEDEL: She absolutely liked the edgy, I would think.

MR. FOOTE: She really did.

MS. RIEDEL: And it seems like she talked about the importance of bringing in that sense of aggression, especially in those larger figures. Which is not too in-your-face, but that that sense was somehow important.

MS. FOOTE: Well, I was just thinking it went to her—the women figures, when she first started getting big. They were only like, maybe six feet high. And what'd she call them? Grandmother figures?

MR. FOOTE: Grandmother figures, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: And then looking at them, and they look very sweet, but they're not. They're really scary ladies.

MR. FOOTE: They're formidable.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, I think those figures are definitely from Lodi. Reflections from Lodi. Because I mean, I'm very familiar with Lodi, and in fact I used to go to school with a gal from Lodi, and her father was German. Dietrich. And he had a dairy farm, and everybody knew each other in that area, and they're hard. Not mean. But just hard, tough people who worked. And they—I guess they'd have fun once in a while.

I went to a dance once, up in Lodi with a fellow I was dating. He was a farmer from Lodi. And here are these—all around the edge of the dance floor—they used to have wonderful outdoor dances, because the weather could accommodate. All these hefty, German ladies, farm ladies, sitting around the edge looking at—and they all knew Les. Like, who is this? I wouldn't say they were mean, they just—the way they were, they were just deadpan.

Totally deadpan. Going back to why Viola was seemingly expressionless. But that's the way the women were. Not today, but that's the way they used to be.

MR. FOOTE: Well, if you look at the faces on her tall figures, her reclining nudes, male or female nudes—if you look at all their faces, they're the same face. They're very expressionless, they're very flat. You're not going to get what that person is thinking.

MS. FOOTE: That depends on what she has them dressed in, and what they're carrying.

MR. FOOTE: It's the dress, it's a costume. And it's the issue.

MS. RIEDEL: Exactly. Exactly.

MR. FOOTE: And I rather enjoyed her reclining nudes. Especially some of those female nudes. Wonderful. But they look wonderful, and these pastoral places that had the space for them to be in.

MS. FOOTE: Like di Rosa.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. Did you see any in Las Vegas when you were just there? Because I understood there was at least one there.

MS. FOOTE: Well there is one, we did see it some years ago, in—

MR. FOOTE: Bellagio [Resort, Las Vegas NV].

MS. FOOTE: In the Bellagio.

MR. FOOTE: We've seen that one, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, that's kind of nice.

MS. RIEDEL: Is it still there?

MS. FOOTE: I don't know. We didn't go [back -BF/PF].

MR. FOOTE: We didn't go.

MS. FOOTE: But I thought it was interesting to see that figure amidst all the glitz. [Laughs.]

MS. RIEDEL: I would think so. I would think she would love to see it there.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: Well it was wonderful, actually.

MS. FOOTE: No, it's just—it was wonderful. But it certainly wakes you up from all the stuff around you.

MS. RIEDEL: Perfect, right?

MR. FOOTE: But also, that whole glass scene in the Bellagio is Chihuly. And then you go down, there's Viola, and there's this other artist. So the guy did—Wynn did a good job, but I have no idea—he had to sell that so—

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, he did?

MR. FOOTE: Bellagio. Well, he had a monopoly going on, and gaming people said, you've got to do something. But we haven't been back, I don't know if it's there.

MS. FOOTE: I don't know if it's still there.

MR. FOOTE: Well, it will be somewhere, because it was a good piece.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah. Well, where did you see one of her pieces in Kansas?

MR. FOOTE: Kansas? Nelson has them [tall figures -BF/PF], definitely has one. And—

MS. FOOTE: Oh, and Washington.

MR. FOOTE: Washington DC has the [tall figures -BF/PF], definitely. And in San Francisco, the Crocker has one, de Young has one. So—she's all over, really.

MS. FOOTE: Which I'm really happy.

MR. FOOTE: We're thrilled, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Was there a community, other than the people we've discussed so far, that you think that was significant to her development as an artist? We certainly mentioned Charles, we've talked a little bit about CCAC.

MR. FOOTE: I think Corky was in there somehow. But ambivalent.

MS. RIEDEL: Katherine Choy, did she ever talk about her at all? From Port Chester [NY]?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, she talked about her. Didn't she go up there and visit for a while?

MS. RIEDEL: I think she worked there for a year or two at that art center in Port Chester. And there was a strong female artist, unfortunately that didn't end very well.

MS. FOOTE: Squeak told me something about Tulane [University] that I didn't know. What was it? She went to Tulane—

MS. RIEDEL: About [Mark] Rothko?

MS. FOOTE: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: About Rothko? I know she had a workshop there with Rothko when she was at Tulane. And that was a big influence in terms of color.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, I don't know about that.

MS. FOOTE: Well, she didn't graduate from Tulane. That's what it was.

MR. FOOTE: She didn't get her MFA.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you know why that was?

MR. FOOTE: We don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: I see that reported in multiple different ways, but you're sure that she did not get a degree?

MR. FOOTE: We don't know. We never heard that. We heard—

MS. FOOTE: Well, this is what Squeak told me. She said, "Did you know she did not get a degree?" I said, "No, I didn't."

MR. FOOTE: We didn't know that.

MS. FOOTE: So—

MR. FOOTE: We never questioned, because it didn't matter to us. It's not important. What's important was the work, and her relationships, and what was going on.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like the main person who was really important to the work was Fiske, from what you've said. Charles.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, he's central. He's central.

MS. FOOTE: Well, he's central in that he bolstered her, pushed her, one thing or another. But not to the creative process itself. That was her. That was her. But he supported her in every way, and that—

MS. RIEDEL: But was there a community at CCAC that was significant?

MR. FOOTE: There was a lot of infighting and jealousies there. It's typical stuff.

MS. FOOTE: And then when—what's her name, from Utah?

MR. FOOTE: Oh, Noni Eccles Treadwell.

MS. FOOTE: Noni Eccles built the Pot Shop, the new Pot Shop.

MR. FOOTE: We were very involved with Noni.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: We knew her with Richard.

MS. FOOTE: That raised a lot of jealousies [on CCAC campus -BF/PF], I think, because it was a wonderful new building.

MR. FOOTE: And it was also I think more so because of Viola and Charles then with Noni. And that became a frictional part. But, I liked Noni. She was a weird one. We were at dinner one night, at Viola's place, and she just looked at me, and she goes, "Well, you know, we all have to go the fountain sometimes, and see a doctor." She loved her sauce. I liked her a lot.

But I can share something with you that was very intimate to us, and I'll never forget it. It made me realize that we were very, very close to Viola. I'm going to say this to you—Squeak and Gary know about it, but I really don't want any—I wouldn't want this out in the publication.

MS. RIEDEL: Maybe we should turn that off, then. You can strike it, but there's no way to strike it from the recording. Why don't I pause this and we'll discuss this for a moment.

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so we're rolling.

MR. FOOTE: Because it was beautiful.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. FOOTE: You okay?

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, we're good.

MR. FOOTE: Well, this was when we were living in the house where we had Viola's art show. This is after our remodel, and everything was further on in the later '70s. And we got a call, it was Viola. I said, "What's up, Viola?" And she said, "Well, I don't know." She says, "We've had a thing, Charles is in the hospital," and I could tell she was upset.

And I said, "Okay, we're coming right on over." And Viola never, ever did that. Not only to us, but anybody. So for her to call, and say, "I need some help"—emotionally, it was like, we didn't know what was up.

Well, we got our stuff together, and I think we grabbed some crackers and cheese or something like that to go. And got over there, and Viola then proceeded to tell us what happened. In the Divisadero house, the kitchen has a huge window, that looks out the backyard from the kitchen. Well, Charles was in DTs, and he went right through the window. Because he thought somebody was after him. And he went right through the window, and landed in the garden. And there's a drop.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, it was quite a significant drop.

MR. FOOTE: A significant drop. Well, he was in the hospital in Mount Zion, and she said, "I just had somebody come in, they fixed the window." Yes, okay. But she was shaken. And so I said, "Okay." I said, "You guys stay here, I'm going to walk to Mount Zion." I could walk, it wasn't that far from the house.

So I went in, saw Charles, and he was kind of unconscious—going through DTs, actually. And that's when I realized the severity of his fungus in his feet, and the severity of his feet. Because he had a real problem with that.

MS. RIEDEL: Did it make it difficult to walk?

MR. FOOTE: He could walk okay but—it was a continual battle. And he got that from the Philippines or somewhere over there. Well, I got back. When we opened the door, first I'd—"Viola, are you all right?" "I'm fine."

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

MR. FOOTE: Then why the hell'd you call?

[They laugh.]

MR. FOOTE: It's going, okay. So Peggy sat with Viola, and I went and saw Charles, and then came back. I said, "Viola, he's going to be fine." But I said, "I think I need to start talking with Charles." And she said, "Would you please?" And that's when this whole thing started.

And so we'd go over almost every week. Charles and I would sit in the living room and talk. He'd have coffee. And sometimes I'd have a glass of wine, sometimes just water, and we'd talk. But that day, we didn't talk. I got back, Viola said, "He'll be fine, but we have to do some things now, and if Charles wants to, we need to talk about a few things." And he really pulled down his drinking. That scared him. It scared her. And so—Peggy was very supportive of Viola at that time, and so I was sitting there, and that's when Viola said, "Well, let's play with the clay."

MS. FOOTE: What—oh, clay.

MR. FOOTE: I said, "Really? What do I do?" And so we sat around this kitchen table with the new window, not talking, but working with clay. Working with clay is all we did. And Peggy did a couple things. I was still working on—"What do I do?" And Peggy whipped out a couple things. And Viola was making these goblets. And I was watching her make this thing, and I—"What is this going to be? What is this going to be?" And when it was all done, I said, "Oh my gosh, that's great." She eventually gave me that goblet. And eventually the picture of it.

MS. FOOTE: We have several of those today.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, several, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: She made a bunch of those goblets after that.

MR. FOOTE: And that one's very, very dear to me. And so there is that piece that was that very—intimate, close, but was through clay. And if that doesn't sum up Viola, I don't know what does. But also, the clay was china painted. So when you have that piece—and then we gave her a big hug, and we called her the next day, and things went on. And did we discuss it? Did anybody know about it? No.

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you so much for sharing that, because I think that is really a very insightful story. And it does give extraordinary insight to her strength, and vulnerabilities—

MR. FOOTE: And her commitment to him.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. Absolutely.

MR. FOOTE: And then his commitment to her to stop drinking and to go down from there to the time of his death.

MS. RIEDEL: And so they were still in San Francisco, so that would have been late '60s, early '70s?

MR. FOOTE: '70s. They were in '70s.

MS. FOOTE: Just—I'm trying to think.

MR. FOOTE: Well, we moved to San Francisco at the end of the '70s—

MS. FOOTE: Huh?

MR. FOOTE: We moved in to the city at the end of the '70s, and they moved to Oakland at the same time.

MS. FOOTE: So it must have been the late '70s.

MR. FOOTE: Late '70s, yeah. Because—that was a wonderful house—

MS. RIEDEL: They moved to Oakland in '75, I believe.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: '75?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, that sounds right.

MR. FOOTE: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: So this would have been probably right before that.

MR. FOOTE: Right before that, yep.

MS. RIEDEL: But that is a really revealing story about—her allegiance to him, and also the closeness of your friendship, too, that you were the one she called.

MR. FOOTE: Well, close friendship, and she could trust us.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. And that she really couldn't talk about it.

MR. FOOTE: No.

MS. RIEDEL: She really couldn't talk about it.

MR. FOOTE: This is the goblet.

MS. RIEDEL: And that's the bird. Isn't that exquisite?

MR. FOOTE: And then it's a worm coming over here.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a worm. So that is the goblet she made that evening.

MR. FOOTE: Right, sitting around the table.

MS. FOOTE: I thought it was a more simple goblet. Not too elaborate.

MR. FOOTE: Well, honey, we have a couple more simples. Then we gave two of those to Bob and Cathy [Cliff], remember?

MS. FOOTE: That's right. I've got to get pictures from them of that.

MR. FOOTE: This is another goblet.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yeah. Much more what I'd expect from her, actually. A little bit more of that refined quality—

MS. FOOTE: The original one was very simple. Just—

MR. FOOTE: But you see, when you see these, you can see—I can show you a simple goblet that was made at the same time. If I can find it.

MS. FOOTE: Well, she did do those elaborate ones in the kitchen.

MR. FOOTE: No, no. Not in the kitchen.

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. FOOTE: No.

MR. FOOTE: Here's a more simple one.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right. That's interesting, I didn't know about the goblets. So that's a nice piece to add.

MS. FOOTE: And then we have a piece—it's a two-piece—is it a goblet? It's very strange. It isn't china painted. Is it white? Boy, isn't it awful, I've had things packed away so long.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. FOOTE: Which one, honey? This is a candle holder. A stand—but it stands up high. This is the Chabot—

MS. FOOTE: That was definitely Chabot College.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Extraordinarily intricate even back then.

MS. FOOTE: The colors in those, which are very muted, they go along with the same time she did those landscapes. And she was telling me her inspiration for that was when she was driving—she was with, I guess, a couple of other people, Charles and I don't know who else. Driving up to Stockton, I think, and this is before everything was built up. It was really nothing there. And that's what the hills looked like in the summertime.

And that was her inspiration for those paintings, the dry hills. And if you ever drive up there—you can't see them the same way now. Because there's too many buildings and things. But just kind of desolate dry hills, and that's what she did. And those glazes, it's the same time period. When I say she relates things, somehow or another, they're related.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: Viola never drove until, golly, the '80s.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right. She made a conscious decision not to do that.

MR. FOOTE: And she wanted to—

MS. RIEDEL: She took the public transportation, observe what was going on.

MR. FOOTE: But then it came, I think—the practical came in. I've got to drive, and so she would do it. That's the kind of thinking—"Well, I'm here at this point, well this—next."

MS. RIEDEL: Was there ever anything discussed—was there a topic of interest that was not art-related?

MR. FOOTE: Oh. Politics, no. Religion, no.

MS. RIEDEL: Seems like that was—

MR. FOOTE: Jewelry yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Jewelry perhaps.

MR. FOOTE: Jewelry, yes.

MS. FOOTE: With Charles we could. We would touch on a number of different subjects with Charles. And I guess

Viola would be there, but I don't know how much she would chime in. She would.

MR. FOOTE: Chime in with like a—pop! But nothing conversant. No. Not conversant.

MS. FOOTE: Charles and I would get into some literature things, and stuff like that. If I re-read that—we've got a box of letters from him, which I want to reread. And then I'm going to turn them over to—

MS. RIEDEL: Artists' Legacy Foundation and Squeak, yes.

MR. FOOTE: Yes, we're going to give it to them.

MS. FOOTE: I don't want to keep them.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, that sounds smart.

MR. FOOTE: I mean, what are we going to do with them?

MS. FOOTE: And if I give them to my family, they'll get tossed. And I don't want that to happen.

MR. FOOTE: Either of our families, they'd get tossed.

MS. FOOTE: And I want to get those sketches that Charles did in France.

MR. FOOTE: Yes.

MS. FOOTE: They're like charcoal sketches. No they're not charcoal, are they charcoal?

MR. FOOTE: No, they're not charcoal.

MS. FOOTE: Well they look like charcoal sketches, but they're not.

MR. FOOTE: But the other thing Charles did—he also did some ceramics. He did some apples, and then he also really did some—these glazes, these apples, some pomegranates. Viola had those. They had them upstairs in the Oakland—

MS. FOOTE: But I had a couple little pieces that Charles did.

MR. FOOTE: Oh yeah, we have a couple pieces. But they were wonderful. The glazes were just wonderful.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, and he'd taught ceramic glazes, correct?

MR. FOOTE: Yes.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, he did. He taught glazes. And he was very smart about it.

MR. FOOTE: He was very smart, and so forth, but—

MS. RIEDEL: I think he'd studied clay in Chicago, before the war, I think, and he'd come out here. That might have been after the war.

MS. FOOTE: He talked to me a little bit about Chicago. He worked at the Chicago Opera House when he was a young man. And he was very skinny and small. He was never fat, anyway. What he had to do was hold on to the things for the curtains, pull the curtains—or hold on to something for the curtains so they'd open and close correctly. But he was so light he just—

MR. FOOTE: Swinging.

[They laugh.]

MS. FOOTE: That's about the only time he ever talked to me about Chicago. He never talked much about his past life.

MR. FOOTE: Very, very, very little about Charles' past.

MS. RIEDEL: Viola spent some time in Chicago, though, I think in '67 the Field Museum in particular was really influential.

MR. FOOTE: That was where two of those paintings are from.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Okay.

MS. FOOTE: Well, there was an art exhibit—no, that was after the art show she was in. Maybe not. Maybe she did sketches of that, and then did the paintings later. But we have a ceramic piece which I'm going to give to the Legacy. It's a memorial to Vietnam?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, there's two memorials.

MS. FOOTE: No, just the one, Bill, just the one. That other piece comes from the Chabot College.

MR. FOOTE: Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: She did a sketch of the—

MS. FOOTE: No, it was a big ceramic. It's a big ceramic.

MR. FOOTE: I can't lift it.

MS. RIEDEL: And it's a piece that she did.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yes.

MS. FOOTE: Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: A Vietnam War memorial.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah. That's the first—yeah, so, I'd love to see that.

MS. FOOTE: And the glaze on that, that is an early type of glaze that she did for—which one are you showing her?

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. So it's the round Vietnam War Memorial. Looks like a pot with big relief figures on it. But very abstract.

MR. FOOTE: It's actually a bomb.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a bomb. Interesting.

MS. FOOTE: What?

MR. FOOTE: It's a bomb that went off. And then the figures are all in the bomb.

MS. FOOTE: Who told you that?

MR. FOOTE: It's my interpretation.

MS. FOOTE: Oh, okay, that's your interpretation.

MR. FOOTE: If you look at it, you can probably guess.

MS. FOOTE: Anyway, that was done many years ago. And then when she comes back in the '80s, and does her little Desert Toy series, same kind of glaze.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. That very dry, brown—like the hills you describing.

MS. FOOTE: That, Bill—that was at the Chabot College show.

MR. FOOTE: Was it? Okay.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so this is not the Vietnam Memorial?

MR. FOOTE: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: But this is a beautiful piece. This is—oh god, broken bodies at the top.

MS. RIEDEL: So she might never have spoken about it, but certainly there was a political consciousness that surfaced in the work.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, there definitely was. I think I can say this quite clearly. Had Charles not been in World War II, I think we would have seen a different history. A different involvement.

MS. RIEDEL: How so?

MR. FOOTE: I think his spirit got broken. It was almost too much for him.

MS. FOOTE: Well, Charles was really a poet.

MR. FOOTE: Oh yes, absolutely.

MS. FOOTE: He really was. And I think that would have continued on. I don't know how, but I think that—because that got broken.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, it did get broken. And he just saw life through such a different lens than most people.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. FOOTE: Very different lens.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you describe it?

MS. FOOTE: I think Charles was more acutely aware of what was around him than most people. Really.

MR. FOOTE: I did a workshop, and I did it three or four times. And Charles wanted to come to it. And I said fine, so he came. And there was a whole—since I knew Charles, there was a whole, I think 30 people were attending.

MS. FOOTE: What?

MR. FOOTE: 30 people were attending.

MS. FOOTE: Oh, okay.

MR. FOOTE: And Charles—when I finished the first meditation, everybody liked it and it was fine. And Charles says, Bill, he says, this was beautiful. He says, this was magic. And I never thought of it like that, but he was right. And everybody listened to that.

But he would take that little piece of word, and put a different spin on it, and you would just see it differently. And I think that was the draw for he and Viola. Because I think Viola could carry that different spin, and he could put something out, she'd carry off, then she'd also intrigue him. It could be a leapfrogging type of thing. That's my suspicion. No way to know that for sure, but because I think about it historically, I think that's true.

MS. RIEDEL: Does that sound right to you?

MS. FOOTE: I don't know. I wasn't there. I don't know.

MR. FOOTE: I'm talking about in general, honey.

MS. FOOTE: Huh?

MR. FOOTE: I'm talking about in general.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, I'm just saying I wasn't there, so I don't know what Charles' reaction was.

MR. FOOTE: No, I'm talking about the concept of the fact that you could put that different lens on and it spurred Viola.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, because she had a—yes.

MR. FOOTE: And Viola would do something, it would spur him.

MS. RIEDEL: Because she had a different lens of her own.

MR. FOOTE: Exactly. Then he'd see that lens, then he'd put another lens.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. And they could just—

MR. FOOTE: And they could keep on going on.

MS. RIEDEL: I can see that. And that would make for an extraordinary, ongoing, decades-long conversation. And art and aesthetics, I think, Peggy, you said so interestingly earlier, that was their passion. That was their passionate connection was the aesthetics, and the art. And if he has this soul of a poet that you're describing now, that makes a lot of sense. And he could talk about it verbally, she could produce it in form and color.

MS. FOOTE: Charles was able to express himself very well.

MS. RIEDEL: With words?

MS. FOOTE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. FOOTE: He's very good with words.

MR. FOOTE: Well also, I've been thinking about it, honey, and your relationship with Viola—I really think that the relationship with Viola and Peggy was very close. It really was.

MS. RIEDEL: Viola and Peggy?

MR. FOOTE: Yep. Viola and Peggy. Definitely. And I also thing that what Peggy brought to the table in that relationship was a sense of grounding. And—

MS. FOOTE: Really?

MR. FOOTE: Huh?

MS. FOOTE: I said, "Really."

MR. FOOTE: No, I'm convinced of that. Just about your New York trips.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: There was a sense of grounding that they had together that was good for Viola, and good for Peggy.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, but the thing is—like on our trip to New York, and other situations, I didn't make any demands. Nor did she make demands of me. We just sort of plodded along together.

MR. FOOTE: Well, no, you plodded along together but there was also a sense of security that she could plod along, and you wouldn't interfere.

MS. FOOTE: We could explore together, too. Which we had a good time doing in New York.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Can you describe or talk about that a little bit? How you'd explore together?

MS. FOOTE: Well, we went to—god, I can't remember where these places—I'm sure they're not there anymore. We were walking around, we ended up in some place, god knows where, but it had all these great antique architectural elements. From buildings, from homes, and what not. It was wonderful. We had a ball. And we'd go into places like that.

And just so much speculating—well, what could I get back there? But we're talking about huge, huge, wonderful pieces. And they were so different because they were once a part of something else, and now they're just independent on their own. And they have their own—they stand on their own, you know. Oh, it was great.

MS. RIEDEL: Which was so much what she would do at flea markets.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Find those pieces that had belonged to something else.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And so she must have appreciated that you could see what she was seeing.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: In the raw form.

MS. FOOTE: And I could see it, too. No sweat there. I used to explore antique shops when I was very young. Yeah, it was a fun time.

MR. FOOTE: Well, I thought—when I said grounding, I also think that there was another piece to it.

MS. FOOTE: Well.

MR. FOOTE: You also—this is my observation. There's a feistiness about Peggy. "No, Peggy, no, we shouldn't do that." "No! No, Viola we're going to move!"

MS. FOOTE: No, I would never, ever do that.

MR. FOOTE: No, no, gently.

MS. RIEDEL: With the pearls, that sort of thing.

MR. FOOTE: The pearls. That sort of thing.

MS. RIEDEL: You wouldn't let her pay too much, you would insist that she wait.

MR. FOOTE: You would be much more kind of like, no, Viola. Taking [the buyer of one of Viola's paintings to court for non-payment. -BF/PF]. She would have avoided that. But it is that kind of quality that Peggy did offer to her, I think. And I think that was good, actually. And I think it was a very important piece. Don't you remember the time at the auction house, when you wanted this Japanese book of these prints?

MS. FOOTE: I could have killed both of you.

[They laugh.]

MR. FOOTE: Well, we were both—the price is going like this, and Viola's saying, no, no.

MS. FOOTE: No! They were wonderful Japanese wood blocks. Rare—they were all contained in this wonderful boxed folder. They were wonderful.

MR. FOOTE: They were.

MS. FOOTE: It went up to six hundred dollars, and I said, that's not too bad. And both of them pulled my arm down. And it got sold to some—I mean, I was so damn mad at both of you.

[They laugh.]

MR. FOOTE: But it wasn't going to stop at six hundred. I could tell.

MS. FOOTE: No, I knew that. I wasn't going to stop at six hundred.

[They laugh.]

MR. FOOTE: See? That was what we knew. But Viola—"Peggy, no! No!" And I was like, "Peggy." But, because of that quality of—no, that also helped Viola see certain things differently I think. I guess I disagree with you, I mean I agree with me, but I think it did.

MS. FOOTE: I'm still thinking about the wood blocks.

MR. FOOTE: She's still in a little pissed-off mood because she—

[They laugh.]

MS. FOOTE: They were worth six thousand even then.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Well, maybe we better stop here for the day.

MS. FOOTE: Oh, god.

[They laugh.]

[Audio break.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Peggy and Bill Foote on February 17, 2014 for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is still card number two, and we are now in Peggy and Bill's home at 2199 Pacific [Ave.] in San Francisco.

Okay, so Bill, you were just ruminating a little bit after our conversation?

MR. FOOTE: I was just ruminating how I went to—thought of many of the dinner parties we were with, and some of Viola's birthday parties, and one year after Charles had died, we—Peggy and I and Viola—spent New Year's Eve together, and we went to a place in Oakland, Scott's I think. And then I was thinking about—

MS. FOOTE: No, I don't think it was Scott's.

MR. FOOTE: It was Scott's, yeah. Fish. [Scott's Restaurant. -BF/PF]

[... -BF/PF]

[They laugh.]

MR. FOOTE: Well we were somewhere there. And Viola—that was when Charles was gone. And Viola—I just happened to think—you know, Viola did get more subdued following his passing. And so—gosh, I was looking at it, this year she'll be gone ten years.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, 2014 and 2004. And what year did Charles pass away?

MR. FOOTE: I don't know. I think Charles was—two or three years earlier.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, so not too much earlier.

MR. FOOTE: Not too much earlier.

MS. RIEDEL: Given that he was close to 20 years older.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. FOOTE: And he was—I talked to him on the phone, and I was trying to get over to see him, but it was—we were here, and he was in Berkeley. And—he sounded good on the phone, and eventually he took a turn for the worse. And there was nothing much—

Charles and I had a great relationship. He and I were kind of complete. It was not one of those things I had to do anything about. And, well I was thinking about all those. And just the—it's like Peggy saying yesterday, I remembered—Viola, she'd get something—she could get very animated and angry about something, but it comes out, boom, and it's over. Not at anyone in particular. About a situation or something. And she'll be very vocal about it. But, never held on to much of anything. But I was thinking about some of that.

MS. FOOTE: Well, I was going back to—we went to Divisadero Street. We visited quite a bit over there. And that's where I made the tiles for her. She had an electric kiln there, and that's where I made the tiles for the camel.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you still have the camel in your collection?

MR. FOOTE: Yes, just the picture?

MS. FOOTE: Oh, the small one, yeah.

MR. FOOTE: The small one.

[... -BF/PF]

MR. FOOTE: Oh, no Hank Baum had that one, didn't he?

MS. FOOTE: The big one?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, Hank Baum had that big one. It was in his show, as ours was. Remember, Leslie was fighting you for that camel?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, because Viola swore I could have it, and she—and Hank Baum was going to sell it to Leslie, and I said, “Oh no, you’re not.”

[They laugh.]

MS. FOOTE: “That’s mine.”

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: He’d learned that.

[They laugh.]

MS. FOOTE: Oh, yeah, it was a tiff for awhile, and I’m sure Leslie was most unhappy with me. But then Viola did say, “Yeah, I did promise it to her.”

MS. RIEDEL: So that took care of that.

MR. FOOTE: And we weren’t going to buy it out of the show, we would buy it in the show, because that’s the only fair thing to the gallery owner. And so that was fine.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. FOOTE: But it was always these funny things that would happen. “I wanted that one, you can’t have it.”

MS. RIEDEL: I was struck looking through the collection—the photos of your collection last night, at just the diversity of work that you have of hers. The variety is quite extraordinary. Never mind functional to utilitarian pots, to non-functional sculptural pieces and paintings, but just the variety of content, and the variety of style was extraordinary.

MS. FOOTE: She tried any number of things, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes. I mean, often, when I think of her work, I think of a more focused body of work. I think of the standing figures, or I think of the dense imagery of the paintings, but the variety of content, images, and styles was really fascinating. It had that feeling.

MR. FOOTE: I really think it was all a preamble to the end. And when she did the arch, that was—I mentioned something about that, I guess I forgot to tell you that.

MS. FOOTE: But the arch was interesting. She had a lot of grape leaves on it, and things like that. Have you seen that?

MS. RIEDEL: No.

MS. FOOTE: I don’t even know where it’s at.

MR. FOOTE: [The Artists’ Legacy Foundation has it. -ALF] It’s in the [Foundation’s -ALF] warehouse.

MS. FOOTE: When I saw that, that was at Leslie Wenger’s gallery, and I’m going, “What is this about?” I didn’t care for it.

MS. RIEDEL: And it was one of the later pieces?

MS. FOOTE: No. That would have been in the ‘70s.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, okay.

MR. FOOTE: Later ‘70s.

MS. FOOTE: And it was—she was starting to do larger pieces. And this was—I think maybe one of the first ones.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, this was the first.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, when she was getting over five foot tall or something like that. No, it’s—and the china painting on it is more—but it wasn’t as vibrant as her later stuff.

MR. FOOTE: What was it, like a grape arbor thing?

MS. FOOTE: That's what I said, it was an arch. With grapes on it.

MS. RIEDEL: With grapes.

MR. FOOTE: And that's also where the wedding cake was.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. At the same exhibition?

MR. FOOTE: At that same show.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting, and that was monochromatic, so that—yeah.

MS. FOOTE: I'm trying to remember what else was in that exhibit, and I really can't.

MR. FOOTE: Well there was the toucan, there was the lynx, there was the beaver.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: She had still Endangered Species.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: It was pretty much all Endangered Species.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. FOOTE: And there's that wonderful—remember we wanted to get it—remember the wonderful cougar? But Charles, when he was moving it out, he bent it, and the leg twisted off, and Viola says, "Oh, too bad."

MS. FOOTE: I wonder if they kept the pieces.

MR. FOOTE: I hope they kept the pieces.

MS. FOOTE: You can always repair it.

MR. FOOTE: It sat this high. It was the cougar sitting up—

MS. RIEDEL: A couple feet.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, it was wonderful. And Charles was really upset, Viola says, "Eh. It happens." She never got too upset about things like that.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, as far as I remember with her work, it was working that was important, and exploring, and doing. Like if things got broken or didn't turn out, it didn't seem to stress her at all, or at least not much.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. Can you say some more about that? That's fascinating.

MS. FOOTE: Well, just like the example I gave you. Leaving all her little pieces in the garden.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. FOOTE: "I don't want them." Or, as Bill said, something broke, "That's okay." But even in the Pot Shop, if something came out the kiln, and it got warped or broken, "Well, too bad."

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: And she was already on to the next thing.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, she didn't—she didn't fuss about it.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, one thing—I always remember, don't pick up the pots with the handles, the handles will always break off. And—

MS. FOOTE: When we moved, someone did pick up—

MR. FOOTE: Someone did do that.

MS. FOOTE: One of our Nelson's pot, and it just [broke into pieces -BF/PF]—I still have the pieces.

MR. FOOTE: Anyway, but there was never really an issue, really, for her.

MS. RIEDEL: So it was really that the process itself, the exploration, and the making of the work—that was what was—

MS. FOOTE: It was very important for her to keep working. And—almost driven.

MS. RIEDEL: That's what it sounds like from everything I've read.

MS. FOOTE: Just like, the example—the hand problem, and she wouldn't take three months off to—“No, no, I can't do that.” She had to keep working. And I'm not—I'm not sure why she was so driven.

MR. FOOTE: And the Endangered Species also, wasn't there a monkey in a [toddler's coat -BF/PF] or something like that? Or a baby carriage?

MS. FOOTE: Yes. There was something in a cart.

MR. FOOTE: It was wonderful.

MS. FOOTE: Was it a monkey?

MR. FOOTE: It was a monkey.

MS. RIEDEL: In a baby carriage?

MR. FOOTE: It was—

MS. FOOTE: Not a carriage. It was like in a little wagon.

MR. FOOTE: A cart, a wagon, something like that. And that one I keep thinking, oh, we should have gotten that one. But, then most all of that, everything in that show went, pretty much.

MS. FOOTE: Is Leslie Wenger still in this area?

MR. FOOTE: No, she's—she went and moved down to Southern California because her husband was that labor union guy, organizer. And his job took him down there. And so she works—started working with their father, in the gallery business. I have no idea what she's doing at all.

MS. FOOTE: I have no idea where she is.

MS. RIEDEL: It's interesting from what you're saying too, that—from what I'm understanding from our conversation so far, her work sold consistently from the beginning?

MS. FOOTE: Yes.

MR. FOOTE: Oh yes, it did.

MS. FOOTE: Yes.

MS. RIEDEL: It wasn't like there was a period of time where nothing sold.

MS. FOOTE: No.

MS. RIEDEL: It seems like it sold consistently.

MS. FOOTE: If anything stacked up in her house, or anything, it's because she didn't put it out.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, I know there was a period of time in the late '70s, to '80 or so, when she—late '70s, '75, '80, when she just—she wanted to look at a lot of the work. She just wanted to think about it before selling it. Or focusing on selling it.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, and also she talked about that a little bit. Talked about—she says, where artists all sometimes get—screwed up, when they get ready for a show, they don't have a body of work. And she says, if you sell all the time, you don't have the body of work to really do a show. And I remember that, her talking about that. So she would pull things back. We'd see things, we thought, ooh, ooh! We'd never say anything, we'd just say, well, when it comes available.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MS. FOOTE: She got the large studio in Oakland. There's—she was always working. It was a pretty good size space.

MS. RIEDEL: Is this on Third Street?

MR. FOOTE: Third. Somewhere in that area, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: And then—then there was the warehouse. Was that Squeak and Gary's?

MR. FOOTE: That's Squeak and Gary's.

MS. FOOTE: And she would store stuff in there. And Squeak and Gary can tell you more about that. But she'd keep stuff stored in there. And pretty good—good amount of work. So—

MR. FOOTE: Well, honey, I think a lot of that work I saw—the thing—their backyard was full of those ceramics things. I think [the Artists' Legacy Foundation has -ALF] a lot of that. I do. I'm not sure.

MS. FOOTE: Now, that would have been in the '80s.

MR. FOOTE: '80s, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: 1980s.

MR. FOOTE: That was a Chinese woman—the thing. That's when she did this wall for—Esprit bought the wall. This huge wall. And that was a wonderful piece. But you need space for that thing. [*Decline & Fall of Western Civilization* was exhibited by Esprit, but never purchased. It is currently owned by the Foundation. -ALF]

MS. RIEDEL: Right. That was considerably later, though, yes, in the '80s or '90s, perhaps.

MR. FOOTE: It was much later, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: But you see when she—when you look—it's interesting what you said regarding the variety of our work, our collection.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MR. FOOTE: Because it looked like—which is always what I think I said in my address, was—it felt like all of it was work in progress, until those later years, and then it stayed focused right in to that. And it didn't change. It's figures, columns, those amphoras. And she didn't deviate. And the plates. That was pretty much what it was all about the last 10 or 15 years.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, but she was still—well I don't know how long she continued making small, like her Desert Toy things. Which were small. She kept that up though the '80s.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, she had some wonderful pieces that were small, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, I loved them but she wouldn't let me buy [any of them. She called them her desert toys. -BF/PF] Those she wanted to keep.

MR. FOOTE: Yes, she did.

MS. FOOTE: And her collection of little ceramics—like ceramics, figures, and what not, from Japan. From '20s, '30s, '40s, she loved those. So she had a lot of those. And they show in her later work. And you'll see them in her paintings.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. FOOTE: A lot of those little ceramic figurines show up in her paintings.

MS. RIEDEL: One clarification I want to make, just before we get too far along, was I read up again last night on her assistant, that we were talking about yesterday. And we were talking—mentioned Sam and Neil Williams, but the assistant who passed away was Kevin Anderson.

MR. FOOTE: Kevin.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: That's it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. FOOTE: Yes, yes, yes. Thank you.

MS. RIEDEL: Sure. Do either of you know of Viola doing any commissions? Did she do any commissions when she was working with you?

MS. FOOTE: I don't know if she ever did.

MS. RIEDEL: I don't know that she did many, she might have done a few. But I just wanted to see if you had any experience or recollection of that.

MR. FOOTE: Well, no, she did do a commission at the San Francisco International Airport.

MS. FOOTE: Oh, yes.

MR. FOOTE: She has a huge installation there. Ceramic.

MS. RIEDEL: In the—

MR. FOOTE: In the international—international—we've never seen it.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, I haven't seen it either.

MR. FOOTE: It's in the International Airport. International—

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Terminal.

MS. FOOTE: Well can you see it or do you have to—

MR. FOOTE: You have to almost be past security, I think, to see it. That's the problem.

MS. FOOTE: That's what I thought.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting.

MR. FOOTE: And we've never seen it.

MS. RIEDEL: I've never seen it either. I've been there a couple times but—in the past couple of years. But I haven't seen it at all.

MR. FOOTE: We saw her working on it. And she got that commission, I think it was—but who? Was it Rena who got that for her?

MS. FOOTE: Possibly.

MR. FOOTE: Possibly Rena. She won—she won it from the San Francisco Art something or other. I'm sure Rena was the one who spearheaded that. But I know that one was definitely a commission.

MS. RIEDEL: And have you seen it? You've never seen it at all.

MR. FOOTE: I've never seen it.

MS. RIEDEL: And did she talk with you about it?

MR. FOOTE: But Sam knows about it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. FOOTE: Because I think he installed it.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. Oh, good, that will be something interesting to talk with him about.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: I'm going to talk with him in the next month or two.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, yeah I think he installed it. And—

MS. FOOTE: I can't think of anything else. Did she do anything for Rene di Rosa?

MR. FOOTE: Who?

MS. FOOTE: The big collector. The collector. Well, he's gone now, isn't he? He died.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, Rene di Rosa, of the di Rosa foundation up there in Napa. I know she has work there, I don't know if they were commissions though. They might have been.

MS. FOOTE: I don't know, it's possible.

MR. FOOTE: I don't know.

MS. FOOTE: Because he was a good collector for stuff.

MR. FOOTE: Honey, I don't know. I just—I remember that commission, but I don't really think in terms—

MS. FOOTE: I can't think of anything else. Anyone else that would—because he collected a lot of her work.

MR. FOOTE: Like the amphora at Bellagio. I don't know if that was commissioned. I think that was just something that he bought.

MS. RIEDEL: He purchased. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, let's talk today, let's focus a little bit more on maybe your gallery. The second gallery that you opened. And from there, just talk a little bit also about your collection. And then maybe some—

MS. FOOTE: The Oriental gallery, yeah. I've always been interested in ceramics, and I was going back—and how I got interested in art—and I'm thinking, when I was growing up in Stockton. There used to be—in Stockton there was a large Oriental population of Japanese farmers, and Chinese people. And they had a wonderful Salvation Army store that I would pass on my way to school, walking from—and I'd pop in there. And they had wonderful things, when I think about it now. So, I picked up little things then. And then—

MS. RIEDEL: What sort of things would you pick up?

MS. FOOTE: Just little ceramic pieces.

MS. RIEDEL: Little figurines?

MS. FOOTE: Figurines, dishes mostly.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, okay.

MS. FOOTE: And I don't know what happened to them. They disappeared.

MS. RIEDEL: That makes sense that you and Viola were kindred spirits of a sort.

MS. FOOTE: And then in high school—well actually, I did have an art—I had a brief period when I went to public school, three years. And it was during that time that I did take an art class. I was kinda required to. And I did enjoy it, except I had this very weird teacher. She would criticize my work. "Oh, that's no good", blah, blah, blah. And then she'd come back a month later, "Oh, that's so wonderful!" She drove me crazy.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, yes, that sounds awful.

MS. FOOTE: But then in high school, I went to a Catholic high school. There was no art classes at all, except I think my last year of high school, they got someone in to teach art. And that was—it was okay. Actually, I did more weaving in that class. I did do some drawings and some paintings. And I think my father tossed those.

And—what else? Then into college I did take some—I'm trying to remember. I had so much busy stuff going on then. Yeah, I did take art classes in college. One or two. And I remember I had to do some sort of architectural thing. And my brother happened to take the same class a couple years later. And I still had it stored away. He said, "I don't know what I'm going to do." I said, "Oh, here take this." And the teacher remembered it.

[They laugh.]

MS. RIEDEL: Yikes.

MS. FOOTE: My poor brother.

MR. FOOTE: That Chuck?

MS. FOOTE: Chuck, yeah. I said, well, "Sorry, why don't you change some of it?"

MS. RIEDEL: What had you made?

MS. FOOTE: I can't remember. It was—trying to make—it was a building of sorts. I think. I can't remember.

MS. RIEDEL: Models, from an architectural model?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, yeah. And then in Napa, where I met Bill, I did take some watercolor classes up there, at the junior college. And, and, and.

MS. RIEDEL: And so then you were at Lincoln Square Gallery for a year or two. What was the address of that place, do you remember?

MS. FOOTE: Do you remember? It was a—

MR. FOOTE: Oh.

MS. FOOTE: It was a small shopping center. It had a Safeway store. And then what was—the gal had one wonderful Scandinavian furniture store there. Can't remember.

MR. FOOTE: It's right where you—

MS. FOOTE: It's on Lincoln Ave. It is Lincoln, and I can't remember the cross street.

MS. RIEDEL: Lincoln Square Park.

MR. FOOTE: Lincoln Square is right where—what is that little college that's right there? There's Mills. But the little—not Saint—there's a little college nestled in the hills, all girls school.

MS. FOOTE: Are you talking about Mills?

MR. FOOTE: No. It's Catholic. But this is on down from there.

MS. FOOTE: It wasn't a college, it had to have been a high school.

MR. FOOTE: Maybe it was a high school or something.

MS. RIEDEL: We can look later, and then maybe add it when we give the transcript. It might be helpful to have.

MS. FOOTE: I'll have to find, I probably have something.

MR. FOOTE: I can't remember where exactly it was, to be honest with you. I just, right now I'm just drawing a blank.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay. No worries, we'll find it. But it's interesting that when that closed, and you were sort of happy, it sounded like yesterday, to be out of it, but then you went back and opened a second gallery.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah. I'm trying to remember at that time. When did I get a hold of Roger Gardner's work? Was that when I had—

MR. FOOTE: We were—no, we were—yeah, we had the gallery then. We were living on Robinson Drive at that time. Roger.

MS. FOOTE: No, no. We were on—we were on Castle Park Way. Yeah. Roger Gardner was a young artist, out of Berkeley. He didn't continue his work. He was really very, very good. I think he's back down that way, or in the Southern California area somewhere. But I handled his work. I acted like an agent for awhile.

Actually got his work in a gallery up in Yountville. And those people were very strange. They decided they were going to take his work. And I couldn't have it back. And I said, "Oh really?" "Well, we don't know that you're his agent." I said, "Give me a break, who brought this stuff up here?" Anyway, Roger was in Mexico, but we got it—I got it straightened out.

But it was—that's why I think the gallery business makes me crazy. I wouldn't want to do it for a living. But, yeah, and there was someone else's work I was handling. Who was it?

MS. RIEDEL: And you opened an antiques gallery? Did I understand that correctly?

MS. FOOTE: We moved over to San Francisco. And I had been collecting Oriental stuff all along.

MS. RIEDEL: Paintings, sculpture, a variety of things?

MS. FOOTE: Mostly ceramics.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, some paintings.

MS. RIEDEL: Contemporary or older?

MS. FOOTE: No, older.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. FOOTE: Older antique.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MS. FOOTE: And so Bill says, "What are you going to do with all this stuff?"

[They laugh.]

Oh, we moved over here and—I think, when was it? '78 I opened the—

MR. FOOTE: '78, '79, somewhere like that.

MS. FOOTE: '78, I opened the business. I was south of Market [St., San Francisco] in a warehouse.

MS. RIEDEL: What did you call it, Peggy?

MS. FOOTE: Just Conway Antiques. That was my maiden name.

MS. RIEDEL: Conway Antiques.

MS. FOOTE: And I did pretty well there.

MS. RIEDEL: Just run it by yourself? Did you have somebody helping?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, no, it was by myself. Of course, it wasn't a big traffic area, so we didn't have to worry too much. But I did really well there. And of course I had Gump's would buy from me. And then—that's another story.

MS. RIEDEL: Were you wholesale and retail?

MS. FOOTE: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: Are you wholesale and retail?

MS. FOOTE: No, I just did retail. Well, Gump's, yeah I would give them—I would give them a good discount, but I got tired of handling them too. Because you'd have to go down and sit on the doorstep to get your money out of them. Yeah. They were really—

MR. FOOTE: Typical of businesses. That's what they do.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. FOOTE: I'd have to go down and say, "Okay, I have to pay for this right away. I gave you 30 days. And here it is, four months, five months." I'd say, "Come on, pony up." Yeah, it was—oh, well. Anyway.

MS. RIEDEL: But that is interesting to hear that experience because one of the things that is discussed

throughout time, these various interviews, is the marketing of the art market, and whether that runs smoothly, or if there are difficulties. And if there are dealers that are agreeable or less so.

MS. FOOTE: And even if you had an agreement with them, okay, 30 days, or 60 days, they would just stonewall you until you got down and said, "I want my money."

MS. RIEDEL: Wow.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. And that sounds like that was not a one or two time occurrence, that that was ongoing?

MS. FOOTE: That was pretty much ongoing. But they did buy a lot of stuff from me, so.

[They laugh.]

MS. FOOTE: And then—

MS. RIEDEL: So how long was the gallery Conway Antiques open?

MS. FOOTE: Well, it started '78. Then went through to—oh, we had a period, I moved, I got out of the warehouse. And we were living up on Nob Hill at the time. And there was a little shop available around the corner from—what is that club?

MR. FOOTE: University Club.

MS. FOOTE: University Club was owned by a couple of gals. The—

MR. FOOTE: Twins Armoire [Boutique].

MS. FOOTE: What is their last name?

MR. FOOTE: The Wiebe twins.

MS. FOOTE: The Wiebe twins. W-E-I-B-E?

[... -BF/PF]

MS. FOOTE: Now, they've been in San Francisco a long time. And they're pretty flamboyant. They know where all the skeletons lie in San Francisco.

MS. RIEDEL: I see.

MS. FOOTE: Really, really interesting. But I opened the shop. It was quite small. I opened the shop there. And it was kind of okay. There was a lot of foot traffic. But then it was a mistake, in that it was more, you know, "tourists that were there to to buy t-shirts" traffic.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. FOOTE: But I did get some good people in there, but—then we moved. We sold our place there.

MR. FOOTE: Then we bought a Victorian. We rented for awhile, after we sold [our condo, then a bought a Victorian on Washington Street -BF/PF]—

MS. FOOTE: We went out to Lake Street.

MR. FOOTE: Lake Street. No shop at that point. Well, no, we did keep the shop for a little bit.

MS. FOOTE: Well, no, we found—no. Yeah, we did. And then I closed it because it just got—it just wasn't worth the effort.

MS. RIEDEL: So it was open from '78 to—so the warehouse opened in '78, and then you had the shop in Nob Hill. Did you keep them both for awhile?

MS. FOOTE: Huh?

MS. RIEDEL: Did you have both for awhile?

MR. FOOTE: No. No, it was one then the other.

MS. FOOTE: So I'm thinking, we kept that until—

MR. FOOTE: '81, '82, that's about it.

MS. FOOTE: '82. And then we found the little Victorian place on Washington Street. And it was Washington and Broderick. And there had been an apartment above and it was like a floral shop below, initially. So we had to remodel it. He wanted to get it, I said "Oh no, no, no, no, no." I'd owned it. "Oh, you can have your business." I'll say, oh, we got into that—another remodeling adventure, which—I don't want to talk about remodeling.

MS. RIEDEL: Does seem you've moved quite a bit. Number of different places. Yeah.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, so we were out of business for about a year, huh?

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: A year, year-and-a-half.

MR. FOOTE: Easy. We didn't—you didn't get back into business 'til '84.

MS. RIEDEL: So you're from '78 to '83, and then closed for '83.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, '84 is—'84 is—

MS. FOOTE: '84 until '87, '88. Because '86, I can track is the Lyme disease. And my energy just kept going down, but I kept the shop open. And then we sold that place, and moved to Sausalito. And basically, closed shop.

MS. RIEDEL: In '88.

MS. FOOTE: In '88, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: So almost 10 years.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, yeah. It was—but Bill was a great support there financially for me, because there were periods it was just terrible.

MR. FOOTE: Well, you know—who was it who said, "San Franciscans are cheap." They don't like to spend money.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. FOOTE: Oh, well—no, that's true. We had a really beautiful McGuire dining set. An eight-foot long table with chairs. Oh, I loved it. Got that in Oakland, and moved that around. But then, Bill got tired of moving it, and I can agree, it was a chore.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MS. FOOTE: So we donated it to the AIDS group.

MR. FOOTE: The food place, Helping Hand. Or, the big auction for the woman who started—

MS. RIEDEL: Project Open Hand? Lots of Helping Hands?

MR. FOOTE: Where they give food to the people with AIDS.

MS. FOOTE: They would make sure AIDS patients got taken care of.

MR. FOOTE: Open Hand, was that it?

MS. RIEDEL: I don't know.

MR. FOOTE: Something like that.

MS. FOOTE: Open Hands?

MR. FOOTE: I think it was Project Open Hand, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: Something like that anyway.

MR. FOOTE: It was a huge charity thing.

MS. FOOTE: A big charity auction down in Jackson Square. And a lot of people donated. Really some lovely stuff. And the guy came from Sotheby's in New York, and so my table and set came up, which at that time I guess was worth about eight, ten thousand dollars? Ten thousand, something like that?

MR. FOOTE: Easy.

MS. FOOTE: No, the set. So, there was a bid on it, it got up to two thousand. He says, "Now come on. I heard you guys in San Francisco were cheap, but this is worth more than that."

[They laugh.]

MR. FOOTE: He was very funny.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah. But, one time too, I donated a screen to a charity that—

MR. FOOTE: Maryanne.

MS. FOOTE: Maryanne Schulz over in Oakland. That was for another fundraiser for something.

MR. FOOTE: I think it was Oakland Symphony.

MS. FOOTE: Huh?

MR. FOOTE: Oakland Symphony I think.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, probably. But I donated a screen and nobody was—the bidding came really too low, and the guy—the auctioneer just said, this is ridiculous. And he just took it off. He says, "I'm not selling this." So that was kind of interesting.

MS. RIEDEL: When you did have your space, did you have any sort of special exhibitions, or would you just go hunting for materials and bring them back and sell them as you found them?

MS. FOOTE: No, I think I had an opening exhibit, and then—what was it—one other time I came back from that trip in Hawaii—

MS. RIEDEL: So it operated more as a store, really, than a gallery with exhibitions?

MS. FOOTE: No, I didn't do exhibitions.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, no, nothing like that.

MS. FOOTE: It was—I was being a one-man show as it were, and it just got too difficult.

MS. RIEDEL: I'd imagine.

MS. FOOTE: It just got too difficult.

MR. FOOTE: And also, I had to give Peggy credit for hanging in there. Talk about boring, sitting in a shop.

MS. FOOTE: Oh, it is.

MR. FOOTE: Boring. And so, I agreed with her, it was time to go. Close it up.

MS. FOOTE: So, what I still have—some of my inventory, which I'm getting rid of slowly, but I'm just going to put it into auction. It's just easier.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes.

MS. FOOTE: Everybody says, "Why don't you do eBay?" I said—you know I looked up eBay. I'm not computer literate at all, but I did find out about expenses dealing with the eBay and this and that and the other. I said, I'm going to put it into auction, because there it's buyer beware. It's up to you. And I don't have to worry about sending something to somebody, and they come back and say, it's not right. I just didn't want to bother with that sort of thing. And basically, it's about the same cost. Really.

MR. FOOTE: And also the auction houses, the eBay are right there. They're—

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, they deal with eBay too.

MR. FOOTE: They deal it right there, so why should we go through all this hassle?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MS. FOOTE: But, no. Relating to Viola's things, I'm sorry my friend in Washington didn't let me know about—that she was going to put her stuff—Viola's stuff into auction. I mean, I would've advised her better. Or I even would have purchased it outright if she didn't—

MS. RIEDEL: Did having a gallery influence your collection in any way? Or were they pretty distinct?

MS. FOOTE: They were kind of—kind of had two collective things. The contemporary, and the Oriental.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. FOOTE: And there may be some overlapping there as far as styles and all go, but I kept them separate somehow, in my head.

MR. FOOTE: I think we did because we'd like to make—we'd like to—this doesn't show it, but we liked the mix of the contemporary and the Asian.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. FOOTE: So Viola's stuff blended beautifully for all that.

MS. RIEDEL: Right, right.

MR. FOOTE: The art we have—some of her other stuff, is really just more contemporary. It's—you're not going to be able to do too much with an antique.

MS. FOOTE: It stands by itself.

MR. FOOTE: That stands really—that's a statement. But Viola loved our things. She loved the Asian work, too. She appreciated—well, she appreciated art period, no matter what.

MS. FOOTE: If you go back to some of her early ceramics—

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: I always remember a pot she made—actually it was a covered pot. I didn't see it in practice, I've just seen pictures of it. About so high. It was beautiful. Beautiful tenmoku glaze, with just a spot of—red, I think. Just wonderful. And it was very, very Japanese. Very Japanese in feeling. And early on, she would do things like that.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, she did.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Some of those early functional pieces, mm-hmm. Certainly had that influence. That was—

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, I know what—

MS. RIEDEL: —the focus.

MS. FOOTE: —when we had that show for her at the house, she had a wonderful teapot, it was the most beautiful red. And I wanted to buy it. Bill says, "No, you've got to sell it." I shouldn't listen to you.

[They laugh.]

MS. FOOTE: I should never listen to you. But I still remember it. It went to your friend who was in the Navy. I think they moved back to Chicago somewhere. Some doctor. Anyway, but there are some pieces, I just—they were really wonderful.

MR. FOOTE: Oh yeah. I think of a couple pieces I really wish I would have had. Rena's gallery, there was a piece—it was about this square. And it was Viola sitting in a chair, in this—all in ceramic. It was kind of like at her studio. And I saw that, and I thought—

MS. FOOTE: Was it a woman in a chair?

MR. FOOTE: A woman in a chair.

MS. FOOTE: It had Viola's face, didn't it?

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, it was Viola's face.

MS. RIEDEL: I feel like I've seen an image of that.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, it was just a bit—small, nice, and you could—I thought, but somebody will have already bought it. And I was kicking myself, I wish I had gotten there earlier.

MS. RIEDEL: It was a small tableau.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, tableau.

MS. RIEDEL: So 12 inches square, right?

MR. FOOTE: I'd loved to have had that piece.

MS. FOOTE: That was the show that we wanted to buy that painting, and we gave—didn't we give—told Rena to put a hold on it? And then, that's when I contracted the Lyme disease, and it just got too crazy.

MR. FOOTE: We better let that go, just go ahead and do it.

MS. FOOTE: I'm sorry we let that go, because I liked it.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, that was a painting that was wonderful because it was a picture of Viola, in the Pot Shop, in there putting pots in the kiln. And so for us—it meant something to us.

MS. RIEDEL: I think that tableau you're describing is in the video that Rena did—

MR. FOOTE: Is it really?

MS. RIEDEL: —with Viola. You might look—or I can send you a copy of that, but I think that's where I've seen what you're describing.

MR. FOOTE: And it was like, ooh, I really wanted that one.

MS. FOOTE: I wonder, did anyone ever—I know we didn't—take any photos in all of her backyard in Oakland?

MS. RIEDEL: I've seen some.

MS. FOOTE: I know there's a couple.

MS. RIEDEL: I've seen a few.

MR. FOOTE: Well I found the thing in our—I found that thing—what I wrote there, there's a thing—a picture of her backyard was in the paper. It was on the cover of her program at CCA when we—in memorial. So we have that, but we never took a picture of that.

MS. FOOTE: Well, it's too bad someone just didn't take a little film of the whole yard.

MS. RIEDEL: In Oakland, you're talking about, right. I'm sure there's some. I'm sure there's some photos.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, I think so. I'm sure someone has that. And I wouldn't be surprised if someone didn't film that.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, I'm sure Gary would have something.

MS. FOOTE: She had a lot of students that were really interested, and a lot of people that would come. They would have open houses periodically, and it was fun.

MR. FOOTE: Well, Viola's also—she got that claim of these big figures, and she's—I wanna cast them in bronze. And she did.

MS. FOOTE: Oh yeah, right.

MR. FOOTE: And I don't know how many she did—we said, "Viola, you have to have a crane to lift the thing."

MS. FOOTE: She did some smaller pieces.

MR. FOOTE: But she did do it. She said, "Well, at least these things won't break, they'll last forever." It was like—and they were mainly the female figures.

MS. FOOTE: I think her larger figures she—yeah, I think that time they were more important, and there was more attachment there, than rather the smaller things that were I guess more easily remade, or something like that.

MS. RIEDEL: That makes sense.

MR. FOOTE: In my mind, as a psychiatrist, I think some of those figures, she was really working—not all of them, but some of them, she was working through some of her own personal conflictual stuff. You could just kind of see it.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you say what you—would you talk about that some more? That would be really insightful and helpful, I'm sure.

MR. FOOTE: Well, it's just on my own—watching how she worked when we were watching her work with clay the day that Charles was in the hospital. And how she'd work through her emotions. And you'd very seldom ever see her emotions. And Charles—I remember one time, Poppy One, Poppy their little dog—

MS. FOOTE: The little one.

MR. FOOTE: And oh, we should talk about the dogs, because—Poppy One, there was Poppy Two, they were not very original names.

[They laugh.]

MR. FOOTE: But they were poodles, weren't they?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, they were poodle mixes.

MR. FOOTE: Poodle mixes. Poppy One was a wonderful dog. Viola was extremely attached to that dog. And Charles—I was talking to Charles, he called me, and he said, "Bill, Viola just called me, she was crying." And I thought, she was crying? And because—that's not Viola. But, Poppy died. And broke her heart. And he says, "Viola never cries." And so I thought, whew. That's a major thing.

And so then they immediately got another dog. Called her Poppy Two. And, oh, they were kind of apricot. Kind of apricot brown poodles. And they were sweet dogs, they were good.

MS. FOOTE: Well, then—I don't know when that dog died, but they got another dog. It was an Irish terrier, and I said, they're out of their minds. They were in Oakland at that time, and neither one of them had the energy to keep up with a little wild terrier dog like that.

MR. FOOTE: A wirehair. Oh my god, now that dog was all over everything.

MS. FOOTE: It was a good, sweet little dog, but—

MR. FOOTE: Who—didn't Squeak and Gary take care—

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, Squeak did. But I said, I told Squeak, "What are they thinking of?" She says, "I don't know."

[They laugh.]

MS. FOOTE: It is not their kind of a dog.

MR. FOOTE: No.

MS. FOOTE: I guess they thought they'd try something different. But they didn't mind getting rid of it, giving it to Squeak and Gary.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah. Well, my associations went from working through that remembered the dog, and her how Charles told me how she was crying about that. Because you never say you saw Viola with that kind of emotion. But Charles would. And so—so I knew that she worked out a lot of how she was feeling internally, quietly. And she worked it all through also her art.

MS. RIEDEL: And now, do you say that from what you saw in the art? Do you say that from observing her working?

MR. FOOTE: I think observing her working. And just little things that Charles would say she would say. Her reactions to things, even though she would have a very stoic face. But energetically sometimes, you could see a reaction. It would be irritability, or something hit her, or joy.

MS. FOOTE: Well, I think you would see that when she'd have—over in Oakland, the open houses, and she had students and people over.

MR. FOOTE: Yep.

MS. FOOTE: And they'd kind of sit around the table, and you could just tell people were talking, talking, talking. And Viola would be quite animated, and that's—well, they were talking art, and artists. You know which was fine, but—I think that happened later. As she got more involved in the art world itself, publicly, and she became more prominent at CCAC. She was head of the Ceramic Department at that time.

So, I'm not saying that she didn't expose herself internally, you know—but with art and her work, yeah, she would. And at that time, she would—because we attended some of those, and she was much more animated, and interacting with people.

MS. RIEDEL: Was it her students, do you think, Peggy, that helped her?

MS. FOOTE: There were students, and then friends. Longtime friends from the art world. And just, maybe collectors. But, you know, you've been there.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: It was like—occasionally, it would be like she was holding court. Which in some respects, I think was good.

MS. RIEDEL: Why so?

MS. FOOTE: Well, it brought her out. And in some respects—because she could talk about her art and how she was dealing with it more freely—I think she always did talk about her art, but as it got into the '90s and all, she was much more open and gregarious. I would say she was just more gregarious at that time.

MR. FOOTE: Well I also think, what had happened, she had arrived. She was known in New York, she was known in L. A., she was known here, she was known in France. And all of a sudden she's published, she's in museums.

MS. FOOTE: In her mind, I think, was, "I kind of made it." And I think that opened the door for her. She didn't have to prove anything anymore, she made it. And I think that was a very important piece for her. And we were thrilled for her. Really thrilled for her.

MS. RIEDEL: So she really had a place at the table, so to speak, now, and she felt that.

MR. FOOTE: Exactly.

MS. RIEDEL: And that gave her more confidence. Did that bring her more pleasure do you think?

MS. FOOTE: I think it probably brought her more pleasure and more confidence. I think it made her shine more, if you will.

MR. FOOTE: It did, but also it didn't diminish her drive.

MS. FOOTE: No, no, I'm not saying that.

MR. FOOTE: No, no.

MS. RIEDEL: No, that is interesting.

MR. FOOTE: No, honey, usually sometimes when people reach that, they kind of drop off, but she kept pushing.

MS. RIEDEL: Yes, that is interesting.

MR. FOOTE: She kept really push—she didn't rest.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: But I remember, I remember something I wrote—after I read it I said, oh, I forgot I wrote that, but it is true because this is what she said. Which is—her dream was to push clay to its furthest possible limit.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MS. FOOTE: She wanted to be taken out of the craft situation.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely. That was clear, she wanted nothing to do with that.

MR. FOOTE: In fact, I quoted it because it was a quote from her.

MS. RIEDEL: Which was?

MR. FOOTE: I can't remember where I put it. It was here. I was surprised that—when I read it, I says, oh, I forgot about that. I should put on my glasses.

MS. FOOTE: That could help. Oh, when we get things out I'll call you.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I'd love to come see, I really would. That would be terrific.

MR. FOOTE: Oh—

MS. RIEDEL: Well we can say, stay tuned and we'll read that before we—

MR. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: —as we're winding up. Or we can read it now if you'd like.

MR. FOOTE: No, no, no. It's no problem, it is in here.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay.

MR. FOOTE: But I do remember she said her dream was to push clay to its ultimate limit.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. FOOTE: And so that's why that desire was never—never stopped her. The plates started about this size. Man, they got—

MS. RIEDEL: 18 inches to a yard.

MS. FOOTE: You can't hang them on the wall.

MR. FOOTE: You can't even do anything with them, they're so heavy.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. FOOTE: And they were wonderful, but—

MS. FOOTE: She did gift us a plate. It was dated 1984.

MR. FOOTE: Did you see that?

MS. RIEDEL: I think so, yes, because it's a very thick one.

MR. FOOTE: Thick one, and that is dated '84, that's when Peggy opened the shop on Washington Street. They brought that over and gave it to us. And it's—but we'd give them things, they'd give us things. We didn't have any issues around that.

But also Charles, was like—when he worked things through, he'd work things through with Viola. They'd talk. But Charles would talk more aesthetically, and how he was pained by so many things. I think he found life sometimes very harsh.

MS. RIEDEL: Right.

MR. FOOTE: And it was very hard. He was talking one time. He was talking to us about—we were talking about jewelry. And he says, "Well, when I had gone into this jewelry shop, and it had a double strand of pink pearls. They were these big pink pearls." And he says, "They were just gorgeous. They were just gorgeous." He kept going in to see them, he was living on canned tuna or something like that.

MS. FOOTE: They were what?

MR. FOOTE: He was living on canned tuna, but he'd go into the shop, and he says, "I came by and one time they were gone." So he talked to the guy, he said, "Who bought them?" He says, "Well, a sheikh bought them for himself."

[They laugh.]

MR. FOOTE: And we just laughed.

MS. RIEDEL: It was interesting to me when you were talking yesterday that Viola so loved pearls, because we've been looking at these rings today, and they seem an unusual choice for her.

MS. FOOTE: Well, it was that time. She really got enchanted with this particular strand of pearls. I don't know if she has many of them. In fact, when they were selling some of her things, I asked about those pearls and they didn't know where they were at.

MR. FOOTE: I'm sure she gave them to somebody.

MS. FOOTE: She probably did.

MR. FOOTE: Because she gave us some things after Charles died. We said, "Viola?" She says, "Well, I want you both to have these now." I said, "Well, you're not dead yet." And—

MS. FOOTE: No, she did that when she was getting ill.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, and I says, "Well you're not dead yet." And she says, "I know, but I want you guys to have them." And so, we knew because of all of the people she had coming. She was passing on things, which was great, really great.

But it was so sad to watch her toward the end there, really fading. Because she was struggling—but she was not going to let anybody know how bad it was. And of course that's where I—Squeak, and I, and Peggy, kept—we're not lovers of Kaiser. And, trust me, there are wonderful doctors there, don't get me wrong. But in this case—but I had to tell Peggy and Squeak. The problem was sometimes not Kaiser, it was Viola. If she had to take a day out and go see the Kaiser doctor, it would interfere with her working. She wouldn't go!

MS. FOOTE: Well, I'd have to go over several times. I had to go over and take her to Kaiser, or she wouldn't go.

MR. FOOTE: Well, Sam and I took her to the oncologist at UC. And he was very nice, but he said. "But your doctor at Kaiser's excellent. Keep the track." I just wanted another opinion. And so did Sam.

MS. FOOTE: I don't know what we told Squeak and Gary about—we got a call, it was really late at night. No, maybe about nine o'clock at night. Was it Squeak calling, or Sam? About Viola's incision splitting open.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, yes.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, dear.

MS. FOOTE: And so we went over. I took some—

MR. FOOTE: Couldn't believe it.

MS. FOOTE: I took some butterfly bandages, and stuff—medical stuff over. And what it was, well—Viola had gotten so heavy, that they had just put clips to hold her incision together, which made no sense. She was far too heavy for that. But, we patched her up, and then took her to the hospital.

MR. FOOTE: We patched her up, and then they got her to the hospital.

MS. FOOTE: I mean, the whole thing was opening up her abdomen.

MR. FOOTE: Well, you also had a layer of fat.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, a big layer of fat, which was breaking things open.

MR. FOOTE: But, you see, when you have something like that, you can't close it up. It has to heal from the inside, otherwise you'll get an infection.

MS. FOOTE: But they could have at least found it.

MR. FOOTE: But they could have done something a little better than they did.

MS. FOOTE: And then these little—

MR. FOOTE: It was a psycho place.

MS. RIEDEL: What year was that?

MR. FOOTE: Oh lord, that had to be in the—

MS. FOOTE: '90s.

MS. RIEDEL: Early '90s.

MR. FOOTE: The early '90s. The early '90s. And we were just sort of irritated with that.

MS. RIEDEL: Of course.

MR. FOOTE: From a doctor's point of view. And they shouldn't have sent her home. They should have had her in for a little bit longer. But, then also—the reality is, the longer you're in the hospital, you're gonna die of infection, so it's better to—

MS. RIEDEL: Get out.

MS. FOOTE: But they also never followed up. I forget—was that situation? They diagnose cancer, and they never gave her a follow-up appointment to come back. And of course, she wouldn't bother. If they hadn't told her.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, no. She would never be proactive in that line for herself.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: Never.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. FOOTE: Actually Charles was a little bit more active in that regard for himself, actually. Well, he had no choice, really, he was compromised pretty badly. But—

MS. FOOTE: What do you mean he was compromised?

MR. FOOTE: Breathing wise.

MS. FOOTE: Oh, his breathing, yes.

MR. FOOTE: It was pretty—it got pretty bad there.

MS. RIEDEL: Let's pause this for a moment, because I think this card's about to end.

[END OF CARD TWO.]

MS. RIEDEL: This is Mija Riedel with Peggy and Bill Foote in their home in San Francisco, at 2199 Pacific on February 17, 2014, for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. This is card number three.

I wanted to go back and talk a little bit more about your collection and what you see as the most important or powerful influences on your collection. It seems like you've been collecting for a very long time—40 years?

MR. FOOTE: Yes.

MS. FOOTE: 40-plus years.

MS. RIEDEL: How has the collection changed? Were there things that were very important at the beginning that became less so? Is there a thread that follows things all the way through?

MS. FOOTE: No, I think—I can't think of anything I dislike about it. But there are a couple of pieces that I really love, like those huge bird paintings, the big panels. I really love those. I really like all of her bird paintings.

MS. RIEDEL: Did you two always pretty much agree on what you liked and what you didn't?

MR. FOOTE: Pretty much.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, pretty much, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MS. FOOTE: The one thing I'm unhappy with is that painting that she repainted. I don't think—I keep looking at it and I'm never going to forgive you, Viola.

MS. RIEDEL: How would you describe the trajectory of the collection? Or how would you describe the collection to someone?

MS. FOOTE: You know—I would see what she'd be doing. And as things changed I'd go, "Oh, I like that." I want part of that, for the collection. The only thing, like I said, was when things got so huge, there's no way we could deal with that. And then, like I say, there was a time period when we really weren't in close contact at all. And that was mostly due to me.

MS. RIEDEL: Being sick in the '80s?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah. That was when—well, I went into business. And then I had gotten ill. And so there was a time period there where we didn't have a lot of contact. And I missed a lot of what she was doing at that time. But you know, I'd see things and get caught up. And so I knew. But at that time, I don't know.

There was a change going on. And I think I wasn't too sure, especially like when she did those big plates, I don't think I was totally happy with them. Of course, it's none of my business. It's her stuff. But I wasn't too sure about those plates. I don't think I still am. I'm not certain that I like them so well.

MS. RIEDEL: And why is that? Because you seem to like just about everything that she's done?

MS. FOOTE: I want to say, there's kind of a messiness about them.

MS. RIEDEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And you don't think of any of the other pieces as having that messiness?

MS. FOOTE: No, not her large pieces. It's just like, maybe there's so much stuff in a smaller area, that it's kind of crammed. It's heavy.

There was something going on then, just because of the heaviness of the pieces, such a small piece, you know? And what was on top—I haven't seen all of the plates. So I can't make a real judgment. That would be unfair of me to do so. But the ones that I was seeing, I wasn't too sure what was going on with them.

MS. RIEDEL: I know what you mean. Some of them that were very thick relief. It had a lot of the density of the paintings. But more so than I might have thought of for some of the ceramic work, which— some of the figures were very restrained in terms of form. But then the painting on them could be quite dense, but not quite as dense as some of the paintings.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: And some of those plates were very austere, the ones of the self portraits or the early ones, Howard Kottler—

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, but see, I didn't see a lot of those. You see, I did not see a lot of those. What I saw was mostly these, what I called more crowded, like you say, dense plates. And I wasn't too sure about them.

MS. RIEDEL: Her work seems to comprise the majority of your collection, do you think that's accurate? At least fifty per cent of your collection seems to be Viola's work.

MR. FOOTE: Well, we also have things we didn't photograph in this.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, in the book?

MS. FOOTE: More small pieces.

MR. FOOTE: And we also have a lot of small pieces. And for example, when I started it, you saw, maybe, the picture of hibiscus there. Well, that was one of my first things before I met Peggy. Now, would I buy that today? No. I've shifted. Would I buy more of the contemporary things? We love that one big painting we have of Ellwood Graham. I don't know if you saw or remembered. It was a big piece. And up on the wall it's quite remarkable.

And it was, actually—San Francisco Museum of Art had that. And they sold it at auction. So we bought it at the auction.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, they were doing a deacquisition.

MR. FOOTE: So we had that. And we loved that painting. When it's hanging up you get really pulled into it. It's wonderful.

But it's so—now, to buy pretty pictures of a pony and floral—no. I would look at something else. I'd look at something like Daniel Merriam, these fantasies things? Oh yes, I'll go to those in a heartbeat.

MS. RIEDEL: And when did you begin collecting those?

MR. FOOTE: Oh, lord, Peggy bought that one that's in my office for my anniversary.

MS. FOOTE: We were walking—he was in a gallery in Sausalito. We were just walking down Bridgeway.

MR. FOOTE: Aronow, yeah, Aronow Gallery, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: And they had an exhibit of his work. We walked in. And it was just wonderful fantasy stuff. And really beautiful work. And we met him. He's quite a nice fellow.

MR. FOOTE: Very nice fellow.

MS. FOOTE: I don't know, maybe it's just little childhood stuff, fairy tale stuff, you know? But it's very intricate, if you really look at it.

MR. FOOTE: But our collecting is kind of like—we buy what we'd like.

MS. FOOTE: We're not disciplined collectors.

MS. RIEDEL: I had that feeling, yeah. I had that feeling.

MR. FOOTE: We buy what we like. And I'm not going to buy something if I said, well, this could be worth it. No, I don't like it. I don't care if it's going to be worth zillions. Why? And so I would say that we do that. But, I'm interested in a lot of things. I love gemstones. And we found that quite by accident. And what is that, Yuan or main piece, the Buddha?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, it's Kuan Yin.

MR. FOOTE: Kuan Yin. And we walked in, and we said, oh, that's nice. And Peggy had just finished the tiles in our entryway in the home in Oakland she made in Viola's studio. Those are tiles that were there before.

MS. FOOTE: Well, I made them when I was attending a class over there.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, that was for your class? Yeah, right. And they're wonderful tiles. And we needed something in the entryway. And here we were, visiting my folks in San Clemente. And we walked into this place in Laguna [Beach]. And here this was. I said, oh god, I have to call the bank, honey. We don't have the money for it.

[They laugh.]

MR. FOOTE: And so we told them, "Could you hold that until Monday?" And he said, "Well, yeah, I'll hold it 'til Monday." And we said, "Okay, we'll be here Monday to let you know for sure." And so okay, they did. I call the bank, arranged it. And they were so nice to help us. And we got there. And we said, "We'll take it." He says, "Are you sure you want it?"

MS. FOOTE: He had just gotten the appraisal.

MR. FOOTE: We said yes. And he just got the appraisal back in. Because they couldn't sell it. So they were about ready to take it out and sand blast it. That's Southern California.

MS. FOOTE: You'd be surprised. I'll bet this happened to many pieces.

MR. FOOTE: And it turns out it—what century is it, honey?

MS. FOOTE: Well, they dated it late Sung to Yuan Dynasty. I think it's not Sung because the arms are too short. Sung dynasty always had longer arms. But it's possible. But it's a nice, old piece.

MS. RIEDEL: It's a beautiful piece.

MR. FOOTE: What is that, the 13th, or the 14th century?

MS. FOOTE: What?

MR. FOOTE: This, I can't remember.

MS. FOOTE: It could be 14th century.

MR. FOOTE: 13th, 14th century. So we said, no, we're going to take it. So it was bundled up in our front seat of our car all padded.

MS. FOOTE: No, no, no, no—his daughter delivered it to us.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, that's right. He delivered it to us. That's right.

MS. FOOTE: She was coming up.

MS. RIEDEL: Drove it up from Southern California?

MR. FOOTE: From Laguna.

MS. FOOTE: What was the name of the gallery? He's still in business I think.

MR. FOOTE: Warren Imports. It's things like that, we'd be oh, that was nice. Well, it doesn't look good. But I think we have very refined taste. We like it crude. But we also like it refined.

I remember Viola saying something, I mean it was really interesting. We were talking about art and how people in the American public and the quality of art, and of course, we were always pushing her work to all of our friends and everybody. And she was saying, she fully believed that if you took somebody and put them in the middle of a museum gallery, no matter what the period or something, she says, if you just let people—don't tell them anything about it, they will always gravitate to the best piece. And without even knowing, they will know that this one—it speaks. Don't put a price tag on it. Don't tell an artist. But they'll gravitate to the best art.

MS. RIEDEL: Really?

MR. FOOTE: She was convinced that people would do that.

MS. RIEDEL: That's interesting. I'm not sure I agree with that. But it's interesting to think about that.

MS. FOOTE: I don't think everybody would.

MR. FOOTE: I'm not so sure, not everybody. That was her belief. And I thought well, that's interesting. But, I'm not so sure.

MS. RIEDEL: Regardless of exposure of education, anything? Anybody would wind up there?

MR. FOOTE: She said, even not educated, they will know a good piece or not.

MS. RIEDEL: Hmm, very optimistic.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, and I'm not totally sure about that.

MS. FOOTE: Well, there's so much trash out there today.

MR. FOOTE: Oh yeah, so she was very clear on that sort of stuff. But they enjoyed what we bought though, and they enjoyed seeing what we bought also. And we enjoyed what they bought.

MS. RIEDEL: I would imagine.

MR. FOOTE: And we'd always share what was going on between us all.

MS. RIEDEL: That must have made for a very rich conversation.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, it did.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, she would always go to—what was his name? The gallery on Grand Avenue, the fellow?

MR. FOOTE: Grand?

MS. FOOTE: The antique gallery, you know, what was his name? Viola would go there all the time to buy stuff from him.

MS. RIEDEL: Over in North Beach?

MS. FOOTE: We used to buy furniture from him occasionally. Was it Piedmont Avenue or Grand?

MR. FOOTE: Oh, no, Piedmont Avenue, yes.

MS. FOOTE: I don't think he's in business anymore.

MR. FOOTE: No, he's not there anymore. I know who you mean.

MS. RIEDEL: Over in Oakland?

MR. FOOTE: Over in Oakland. We bought things there. And we know the owner.

MS. FOOTE: We knew the fellow. He was a friend of—

MR. FOOTE: A doctor friend of mine, Maurice Beaulieu.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, a friend of Maurice Beaulieu's. Anyway, he would get wonderful things.

MR. FOOTE: Hensley.

MS. FOOTE: Huh?

MR. FOOTE: Hensley. David Hensley?

MS. FOOTE: Ken Hensley?

MR. FOOTE: Ken Hensley was the antique dealer.

MS. FOOTE: It was his gallery. And she would go there quite often. And she bought a lot of jewelry from him.

MR. FOOTE: She bought a lot of stuff from him.

MS. FOOTE: A lot of old jewelry.

MS. RIEDEL: Did she wear the jewelry?

MR. FOOTE: Sometimes.

MS. RIEDEL: So did she like it, also, just as an object?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: Well, you know, like, all those ceramic figures that are in that closet? She'd open the dining room drawers, full—and she'd play.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting.

MR. FOOTE: She just liked playing with her stuff.

MS. FOOTE: And she had a box full of it, you know, on the table, of jewelry.

MR. FOOTE: Just playing with it. And not necessarily wear it. Then when she got tired of it she'd pass it on.

MS. FOOTE: No, or she'd just put it away.

MR. FOOTE: Mainly put it away. So when they lost all their real good jewelry, it was like, how did that happen?

MS. RIEDEL: Well, have there been any books or exhibitions that were particularly influential for you, for your collection?

MS. FOOTE: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Nothing in particular?

MS. FOOTE: Nothing in particular. Any trips? Any traveling that was significant?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, well, you know, the one thing, Hawaii—

MR. FOOTE: Hawaii.

MS. RIEDEL: Which island? Oahu?

MS. FOOTE: When we were in Spain—

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, Oahu.

MS. FOOTE: Well, in Hawaii, there's the museum there that had wonderful Oriental stuff.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, the Academy [Honolulu Academy of Arts, now the Honolulu Museum of Art].

MS. FOOTE: And then they had some really fun antique shops years ago. But I think when we were in Spain, we went to the Prado.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, lord.

MS. FOOTE: And it was so big, we only did the Spanish and the Dutch. And that was overwhelming. It really was.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, it's huge. And it is overwhelming.

MS. FOOTE: It's just incredible. I came out of it, I mean, I had to sit down and cry. I really did. It was just incredible.

MR. FOOTE: You noticed a couple pieces in the photographs that were definitely Hawaiian. You saw the Tagami. And there was an Ito [Tatsuo Ito], a very bright picture. And we had got several of those. And we sold some of them to friends. And then there's another one, I was thinking about, Tom Okomoto. And he's Japanese-American-Hawaiian. And Tom was an occupational therapist in the mental state [hospital -BF/PF]—so he really connected to us. And me, especially—both of us, actually.

And he was a major collector but an unbelievable artist. And his shows were always sold completely out when he'd have a show. He'd maybe have a show every five years. But it was all gone. It was just instantly gone.

And a couple years, few years before he died, he gave us a painting. And it's in there, Tom. And we didn't ask for it. He said, "I want you to have it." We said, "Well, thank you. But you don't have to do this, Tom."

You had to be careful with Tom, with the Japanese custom. When we first met him, oh my god. Every time we came back to the hotel there was a gift. You know? No, we don't need more.

But we really became friends through the years. He had a very serious hearing problem. So he had double hearing aids and—really, a tall drink of water. He was over six foot-something.

MS. RIEDEL: But he was or was not a full-time artist?

MR. FOOTE: Not a full-time artist.

MS. FOOTE: Until he retired.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, that's what I thought I understood.

MR. FOOTE: He retired. Then he started doing more work. But people loved his work. And I don't know—the market would be Hawaii.

MS. FOOTE: Didn't Viola go to Hawaii once? Am I imagining that?

MS. RIEDEL: I don't remember reading that or hearing that.

MR. FOOTE: I don't think so.

MS. FOOTE: Maybe I'm imagining that.

MR. FOOTE: But she always would look at the pots we brought back from Hawaii, the Korean collection. You know, we have a [modest collection of Korean ceramics. -BF/PF]

MS. FOOTE: Why do I think—well, maybe we ran into people in Hawaii, they were familiar with her. I'm not sure.

MR. FOOTE: People were very familiar. Tom was familiar with her. And he was, actually, very involved in the art scene. And we never were able to get them to meet here. But they would have enjoyed each other. But talking about—there's a whole bunch of—right now, though, we look at it and say, that's really nice. And we don't need it.

MS. FOOTE: There's a point in life.

MR. FOOTE: There's a point where you say it.

MS. RIEDEL: Do you know how many pieces are in your collection?

MS. FOOTE: No.

MR. FOOTE: I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: Could you hazard a guess?

MS. FOOTE: When I think of those ceramic pieces, I've never counted them.

MR. FOOTE: There's ceramic pieces and then there's a whole group of art pieces I did not photograph. And frankly, it is too much.

MS. RIEDEL: There have to be close to a hundred in the book that I looked at.

MR. FOOTE: There are over a hundred, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: Oh, there are, yeah.

MR. FOOTE: And most of that's all Viola. And then, well, you saw some of the Japanese screens we have. And through the years my favorite—of course, that's why I like those two bird panels of Viola's—I'm very drawn to the Japanese aesthetic, the quiet pieces. I like that. I can sit with Japanese stuff, very simple room, and love every minute of it.

MS. FOOTE: Well, there's a lot of Viola pieces that are that way. They're very quiet.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, I know, they're very quiet.

MS. FOOTE: But alive.

MS. RIEDEL: That's so interesting. I never would have thought to describe her work as quiet.

MS. FOOTE: No, they're quiet, the early pieces. But they're alive. You know, they're not dead.

MS. RIEDEL: Those early pieces do have a quiet that has surprised me again and again.

MR. FOOTE: Well, Squeak and Gary—they were stunned. They had never seen anything of that period.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, it is a real treasure chest of work that you have there. Because it is a whole different side of her work.

MS. FOOTE: Well, it gives a historical thing, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Absolutely.

MS. FOOTE: Which I'm glad.

MR. FOOTE: Well, I think, also, you spurred it on today when you said this. And I never thought about it. But it's true. I think this is all a preamble for the work into the later '80s on into the '90s.

MS. FOOTE: That's what happens with good artists, yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: It feels that way. And the fact that something you said, Peggy, too, she just continually pushed herself. And something you said, as well, Bill, is she never would rest on her laurels. So all of this was building, building, building, towards the next thing.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, and I don't think Viola ever, to me, she never felt—or my impression was—she never gave you the impression that she was, "I'm going to be a great artist," that sort of thing. She just worked and became great. Yeah, it was just a drive she had. You know, she had to work.

MS. RIEDEL: When you look at her work do you think about her career over four decades? Do you see very specific stages? And do you think about the work in stages? Or do you see a thread of continuity through all of it?

MS. FOOTE: Well, there are different stages—but it's more like a growth thing, a melding and yet sometimes,

you think things have taken a dramatic change. But they're not. If you go back historically, there's a buildup, even to her great big pieces. I'm just going back thinking of her very quiet pieces. Then she got into her florals.

We have one in the bedroom, which we'll show—which may be considered a traditional thing. But they're not. There's a busyness in her brush work that precedes what went on in her later china painting in her ceramics.

MS. RIEDEL: There's even a chalice that I noticed, that was a woman's figure. And it's a woman falling off a bicycle or something like that. Maybe I'm putting two of them together. But there was almost a frenzy and almost an erotic quality to some of those very early pieces.

MR. FOOTE: Oh very, definitely.

MS. RIEDEL: But I don't see as much in the later work.

MR. FOOTE: No.

MS. RIEDEL: Yeah, and certainly not in the ceramic work. I mean, there's the density and the frenzy in the painting. But that was interesting to see in the ceramics. And in the piece you talked about, *Wedding Cake*, too.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: The way you said it and the way Peggy said it—I see the whole thing as her growing, and growth, and trying to figure out. Because all of a sudden when she bought a house, and she then had to have money for that. And she had in her heart her art. And there was this continual progression. And I think, also, the Wenger show—the critics raved.

MS. RIEDEL: This was in the early '70s.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah. Oh well, not early I don't think, that was more toward the later '70s.

MS. FOOTE: Do we have anything about the critics?

MR. FOOTE: I don't know if we have anything.

MS. FOOTE: I don't remember.

MR. FOOTE: I don't remember. In that whole box, maybe there's something in there about it. That's all Viola's stuff, that box on the floor. I don't remember. We'd have to look. I don't remember.

MS. FOOTE: I don't remember.

MR. FOOTE: Well, I know that the one critic says, "Viola Frey, a spring has arrived with the brightness, the colors," and so forth. The critic went crazy for her work. And I think that gave her a boost of confidence, too, the critic.

MS. FOOTE: Well, you know, I don't know if Viola ever really needed someone to tell her that what she was doing was okay or right.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, I agree with that.

MS. FOOTE: She would just do it. And anything that came along was just a confirmation and a boost, I guess. But I don't think she ever doubted who she was artistically.

MR. FOOTE: I think you're right. And also, what I also think is—I don't think she had very much ego around it. It was more around the goal I have, to do what I want to do. And success, to her, was just offering her more time to do what she wanted to do.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. She's completely connected to the work.

MS. FOOTE: Now, as she became more prosperous and had more money to deal with, I think she had more fun, of course. Because she could really buy all the crazy, fun things she wanted.

MR. FOOTE: She bought some real crazy stuff. We thought, "Viola?" She loved it, though. It was her.

MS. RIEDEL: Now, this show you're talking about, the Wenger show, was it in San Francisco?

MR. FOOTE: San Francisco.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MS. RIEDEL: Okay, I know there was one in '74. And there may have been one after that as well.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, maybe that was the one in '74 then.

MS. RIEDEL: Because then I think Leslie Wenger closed, correct?

MR. FOOTE: She closed.

MS. RIEDEL: And maybe Viola showed with her father down in L. A.? Or then she went strictly to Hank Baum?

MR. FOOTE: Hank Baum was next. It was '74? That probably is right.

MS. FOOTE: Now, she was on upper Montgomery Street then—Wenger, her gallery, yeah. Hank Baum, he was in —

MR. FOOTE: He was in a strange building. I can't remember what it was.

MS. FOOTE: He was in one of the big buildings downtown.

MR. FOOTE: That's what I thought, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: There's three of them.

MR. FOOTE: The Rockefeller buildings.

MS. FOOTE: Not the Rockefeller buildings.

MR. FOOTE: The Gateway buildings down there.

MS. FOOTE: No, that's not what they call them either.

MR. FOOTE: I don't know what they're called.

MS. RIEDEL: Something you said was really interesting, too. That I think that is an interesting point, that it wasn't so much personal ego. It was all tied up in the work and the development of the work. I think that is an interesting point.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, it really was. She would just look at things—the work. And already in her mind you could see her mind going to the next—she was already contemplating the next thing. And that's why I don't think she could ever stop working.

MS. RIEDEL: You talked about she was known in San Francisco. She was known in New York, known in L. A., and then in France. Did she think about herself, do you think, as part of an international tradition? Did she think about her work or herself as particularly American?

MS. FOOTE: I never got that impression. She never discussed that. And I never got that impression.

She would just talk about what she would do at that particular place or—I think when we went back and she was preparing for the Whitney show—I think there were some demands she was making. I don't know, I'm sure just for arranging things. And she was very concerned about how things would be, especially with her large sculptures, how they could be put together.

And she'd have to make sure someone knew what they were doing. She'd get fussy that way, with good reason. But as far as saying, well, I have arrived here. I have arrived there. I never heard that.

MS. RIEDEL: There was no strong sense of identifying herself as specifically American or one way or another?

MR. FOOTE: No. Never. Go ahead, I'm sorry.

MS. FOOTE: Just you know, "I'm Viola Frey." It didn't matter where I was at.

MR. FOOTE: There was, frankly, not much narcissistic ego attached. There really wasn't.

MS. FOOTE: I'm trying to think of an example. She could get touchy about some things. And I think it related mostly to how the art was presented. I'm trying to think if she'd ever said, "I could've done things differently, or I should have done things differently"—I don't think I ever heard her say that, no.

MR. FOOTE: I don't think so.

MS. FOOTE: The only time I ever heard any regrets from her was when she said, "Well, we should have picked all those things up from the garden." That's the only time I ever heard any regrets from her. Because I remember that, god, she had all kinds of cute little pots and figures around. "Don't you want this?" She did not want them.

MR. FOOTE: Well, the garden also had a lot of memory to it, Charles and so forth.

MS. FOOTE: Well, actually, I loved that house they had on Divisadero Street. It was great. It was a pretty Victorian.

MR. FOOTE: Oh, so did I. Viola—the only reason she left is she wanted a bigger space. She loved that house.

MS. FOOTE: Plus it was more convenient for her to be in Oakland.

MR. FOOTE: Oh yeah, for her to be in Oakland.

MS. FOOTE: Because of the school. Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: I don't know, you knew internally she was pleased. You could see a smile on her face. Like when I said, about those figures, I said, "Viola, really?" And she would grin and so forth. You know, that was just it, you knew. And she was pleased with what she did. But she'd never come out and say that. But you got that impression.

MS. FOOTE: Well, she would comment on her work. I should do it this way or I could do it this way, that sort of thing, kind of working things out. But she didn't do that a lot, at least with me.

MS. RIEDEL: Were those more technical considerations? Or content?

MS. FOOTE: Well, it's like I told you, like working out a problem. It's like when I went with her once over to UC Berkeley. They were having an exhibit of, oh, who, I can't remember. And we went through with that. And she said, "Well, this is the kind of problem he needed to work out or he was working out in his painting." And she would do that sort of thing. There's a problem that needs to be resolved.

MS. RIEDEL: Interesting. And would it relate to content? Would it relate to technique? Would it relate to some combination?

MS. FOOTE: It could be anything. It could be anything.

MS. RIEDEL: But she would see things in terms of, this is the problem that he or she is working on?

MS. FOOTE: You could see that's what she was doing. Even as she was working with clay, building those big figures, even though she'd gotten used to doing big figures, you could see when she was working—how am I going to place this next part of the figure? You know, that sort of thing.

MR. FOOTE: And I think, also, early on, talking a lot about glazes, glaze technique. And I didn't know. I just listened. I had no idea about any of it. But she would talk on it. And Peggy would talk about it to you.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, glazing.

MR. FOOTE: Glazing and glazing techniques, what you added and what you did, and what could happen, and what didn't. There's these problem things that were very exciting for her. But I think—the archway, that goes back to that show, that was probably the most obsessive I've ever seen anybody of her ever be, about how am I going to keep it up? How heavy is it going to be?

MS. FOOTE: The thing is, that was a learning experience for her.

MR. FOOTE: It was major—so there was a lot of, not obsessiveness—

MS. FOOTE: Because that was the first experience she did with a large piece that had to be put together in clay. And how do you do it so it doesn't fall apart or break? So yeah, she learned, though. That was a learning experience.

MR. FOOTE: We'd sit at the table in the kitchen, and we'd be talking. Well, put it this way. Well, then we got to put the bars in this way. I got to figure out should it go this way? Should it go that way? Well, is it going to sag? We had many sessions regarding that piece. I'd sit and listen.

MS. FOOTE: Bill?

MR. FOOTE: Huh?

MS. FOOTE: No, we didn't have any sessions. She had many sessions.

MR. FOOTE: Well, no, we didn't. She had many sessions. We sat and listened. We didn't do anything about it. We just let her talk.

MS. RIEDEL: Did she ever mention, did she ever think about just painting on the pieces rather than glazing, using acrylic?

MS. FOOTE: Well, basically, it was painting.

MS. RIEDEL: But it was always with glaze?

MS. FOOTE: Yes. Yeah, no, it was painting. Yeah, it was painting for her. But it was glaze.

MS. RIEDEL: And she never thought about just completely switching over and painting with acrylics?

MS. FOOTE: Oh, you mean, on the pot?

MS. RIEDEL: Painting on the clay, right.

MS. FOOTE: I don't think so. No, it was always with glazes.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, it was all glaze. Because she'd have to glaze it once, fire it, and then fire it again. Didn't she have to do that?

MS. RIEDEL: Right, multiple times.

MS. FOOTE: Depends on what she was doing. If she was using silver leaf or gold leaf, then that takes two or three firings.

MR. FOOTE: But didn't she have to fire the piece first?

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, you'd fire the piece first.

MR. FOOTE: Then she'd paint it or glaze it.

MS. FOOTE: And glaze it and then re-fire. There's a number. You can fire a piece with glaze on it one time, which is kind of chancy.

MS. RIEDEL: And then she can fire it again, I think, at a lower temperature if she wanted to—

MS. FOOTE: Depends on what type of glaze she was using. And like I say, if she was going to use silver or gold leaf, that's a third firing. [Gold leaf does not require any firing. Gold luster does require another firing. -ALF]

MS. RIEDEL: Right, for that kind of luster.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, because all I remember is all the multiple firings that she'd have to do on these things. And that were Sam and Kevin and all those people, they would be doing all that heavy work and getting them in kilns.

MS. FOOTE: Well, they'd have do the lifting.

MR. FOOTE: The lifting and all of that.

MS. FOOTE: But Viola did the painting.

MR. FOOTE: Oh yeah, she did the painting, always.

MS. FOOTE: And she did most of all of the construction of the clay itself. I think, maybe later on, maybe Sam helped her. I don't know. That's something you need to take up with Sam.

MR. FOOTE: My suspicion is Sam did some of the stuff. He would have had to, because of her hand. There's no way.

MS. FOOTE: And then at that workshop in Oakland, how did she manage to get so many cats? She had several

stray cats that she just let in. And they would stay. She would feed them. I don't know, was it three or four cats?

MR. FOOTE: Well, it took care of the mouse problem.

MS. RIEDEL: Well, we have done a very good job on these questions. I just have one or two final ones. And then maybe if you have any final thoughts that we haven't covered, feel free.

And then, perhaps, we can end with the piece that you've got. Just in an overall arcing context, how do you think about her work in terms of the bigger context of American art? What do you think the contribution, her contribution has been?

MR. FOOTE: Huge. I think very huge.

MS. FOOTE: I think she woke a lot of people up, especially in the ceramics area. A lot of people going, oh, you can do that? She did that.

She did that. I don't know—you know, I can't say how well she is known for her paintings. Do you know?

MS. RIEDEL: I think certainly she is better known for her ceramic work.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, better known for her ceramics. But her paintings always related to her ceramics, yeah.

MR. FOOTE: I don't know—my only thing is I just think Viola always thought of it as kind of on the cutting edge. And I think she brought a lot of new stuff in concept. And for her to have gotten that commission at the airport, that was a nice feather.

And when you look at things like that—you know what? You're going to have to talk to Sam. Because I think there were some other commissions.

MS. RIEDEL: Oh, I will, absolutely.

MR. FOOTE: But I don't know.

MS. FOOTE: I don't know.

MR. FOOTE: I don't know.

MS. RIEDEL: He's, very quick, next on the list.

MR. FOOTE: He would be the one who would know. Yeah, he would be the one. As far as I'm concerned though, for me, personally, it became more of a personal attachment to them, she and Charles. And so a lot of these paintings have meaning for me personally.

And so I'm thrilled that she was the artist she was. But I loved her work. And I felt we were very fortunate to know her and to know Charles during that time. We were very, very lucky. Very lucky.

MS. RIEDEL: Peggy, you asked if you thought she was better known for her ceramics or her painting. Did you feel strongly one way or the other that one was stronger than the other? Or did you feel they were essential to each other?

MS. FOOTE: Well, I knew her ceramics, they were big. But there's some of her paintings that are just so wonderful. And I don't know how well they're known. Though I know Rena has had some wonderful shows for her. And the paintings were great.

MR. FOOTE: But she's mainly known as a ceramicist, I think. But I think if people could see the gamut of work, people might do a double take.

MS. FOOTE: She had a tremendous output. And I know who I sold to. But then you have these other dealers over the years that have sold many, many of her things.

And who knows what she gave away? And like I said, the little things that were snatched from her. I thought that was kind of terrible. But it happens.

MR. FOOTE: Well, we really don't know totally. But, there was a lot of paintings that—they were in their house, that all went. You know, we just had tons of paintings.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, you know, like, I've got to get some pictures from Bob and Cathy Cliff. They have a couple paintings of her birds.

MR. FOOTE: And a floral.

MS. FOOTE: And a floral. And I wonder if Maryanne—did she buy one of those landscapes?

MR. FOOTE: She bought that beautiful floral of daisies. You remember?

MS. FOOTE: Yes.

MR. FOOTE: We told her to get over here and buy this for her house. It's perfect. And she did.

MS. FOOTE: So see if she still has it. Please send some pictures.

MR. FOOTE: That's a beautiful piece.

MS. FOOTE: I'll have to go back in my records. You know, it's been so many years. I'm sure these people are not living in the same place or they're not alive. And you don't know what happens to it. You know?

MR. FOOTE: But she would do things like—one piece, it was very hard to handle. But three paintings about like this, okay? Birds, but what Charles did, he put them all stacked [vertically—BF/PF]. And there's this much space between each painting. But they're all connected [by lacquered wood slats—BF/PF] to one big panel. You'd need a [high—BF/PF] wall, remember?

MS. FOOTE: Oh yeah.

MR. FOOTE: Somebody bought that. And I don't know who it was.

MS. FOOTE: What happened to that? That was over in San Francisco.

MR. FOOTE: It was San Francisco, yeah.

MS. FOOTE: It was in their foyer.

MR. FOOTE: And that went. But it would have to be a special place.

MS. FOOTE: I have no idea who has that.

MR. FOOTE: But it was a wonderful piece. But the whole thing is, I think—that she would never have stopped. For her to say, okay, I've arrived with the florals and to continue doing florals for the next three years, never happened. That's not her. This was just the foundation.

And I think we're seeing with color, with light, and glazes. And then her own evolvment of what she wanted to do, that we were just part of the foundation, that's all. And that was kind of fun.

MS. FOOTE: It was great.

MR. FOOTE: It was really great.

MS. FOOTE: It really was, it was great.

MR. FOOTE: Really great.

MS. FOOTE: And I miss her. I really do.

MR. FOOTE: Yeah, well, I miss her too.

MS. FOOTE: And Charles.

MR. FOOTE: And Charles.

MS. FOOTE: I really loved Charles. He was so funny sometimes. We'd get into these crazy philosophical discussions about nothing sometimes. But it was fun.

MR. FOOTE: Well, Peggy and Charles had a special relationship. They really did. Because Charles would go on and on. She would go on with him. And they'd get in these loggerheads. And they'd love each other. And then they'd get in loggerheads. But it was fun.

MS. RIEDEL: Would you be willing to read that? Unless you have any final thoughts? Or if they come to mind as Bill's reading?

MR. FOOTE: Let me get my glasses.

MS. FOOTE: Yeah, there was another—maybe I told you about it. She had this wonderful painting. It was in San Francisco. It was on the second floor—big painting of the interior of her house with this great black cat they had. Oh, I loved that painting. She says, “Well, I’m not through with it.” I said, “Viola, when you’re through with it, let me know. I really would like to buy it.” She painted it over.

MS. RIEDEL: Of course she did.

MS. FOOTE: I said, “I’ll never tell her I like anything again.”

MS. RIEDEL: That’s exactly it.

MR. FOOTE: Well, at the memorial—there were three speakers. And I was asked to be one of them because of our long connection.

MS. RIEDEL: Right. Who were the other two? Do you remember?

MR. FOOTE: Rena Bransten was one. And I think Nancy Hoffman. Mainly because those two catapulted her into the art. They did the catapulting. There was no question.

MS. FOOTE: They really did it for her.

MR. FOOTE: But we were the long-term, more personal thing. So it was an honor to do it. Now, this is what I wrote:

“Viola had called us one day in the early ‘70s. She was distressed and asked if we would come over and be with her. Charles had been hospitalized. And she needed some support.

“Peggy and I arrived with some nosh. And as Peggy sat with Viola I went and checked on Charles at the hospital. When I returned and told Viola that it was serious but not critical and he would be all right, I asked what I could do for her. Her response was, “I’m fine,” looking directly at me with a smile.

“How many times have we all heard that phrase? As we sat in the kitchen talking, the time came for no talking. Enter in a bag of clay that just happened to be under the kitchen table. We sat the rest of the afternoon, working with clay.

“As Viola whipped out one, two, three, goblets and Peggy a small pot, I was still folding slabs. A calmness and a non-stress groundedness filled the room. As I watched Viola form a goblet it looked like a straightforward cup. It had a pair of eyes, then a bird’s beak pointing downward, a large stem held the cup. A small but substantial base held the stem in place. And then appeared a worm, popping up from the base.

“The whole process was an evolution of creativity, as her mind seemed to take her from one step to another, peacefully. We learned a lot that day about Viola. As she taught me about clay I learned more about the ability to accept life events as they were.

“Even though she was distressed, she was able to place it aside and be with her being, which I felt was a gift that transcended into her art. We had become friends in 1968 as a result of handling her work in Oakland at the Lincoln Square Gallery.

“When I speak today, so many memories of vignettes and happenings like the one I just described passed through Peggy’s and my mind. The goblet story was one of the most intimate of times with Viola. She presented the cup to me when finished as a remembrance of that day. It will continue to be a cherished reminder.

“But throughout all the experiences with Viola, there was one consistent common denominator, the underlying need for continual transition. Viola, always wanting to push the limits of her creative ability, would often say she wanted to stretch the limits of clay. In the mid ‘70s she did create an arch for one of her shows in San Francisco.

“She’d discuss it at length. And we all talked about the concept and how great a piece it would be. As we watched through the months, it had become large, wonderful, and very heavy. The only problem was how to stabilize it so it would not fall, especially on someone.

“She worked it out. And when the arch was very well received, after the show she stated that she wanted do the work much larger. She did. She was on her way. Look at what she gave us all.

“Through the years, we watched her dedication to her art. Teaching, conversing, shopping in antique stores for prints, jewelry, and unusual objects, and accepting invitations from other institutions that were all part of that

dedication. Life experience was invited by her and used to express a different view, as witnessed by the large mounds of clay that were transformed into colorful, large, impressive ceramics.

“It has also been wonderful to be with the experience, so many past and present, who have affected by Viola’s dedication to art. All were a part of the process of the creativity. In recent history, sweet Gary, Rena, Trish, Dennis, and so many others Viola told us about, were a continued part of the process. We personally are very thankful for the dedication and devotion of Sam Perry, who helped keep Viola functioning for her art, even ’til the day she died.

“We saw her a couple of weeks before her death. I asked how she was. And I got, ‘I’m fine,’ looking directly at me with only a faint smile. In reality, she was just that, fine. Her passion and drive had led her to have her dream of doing what she wanted to do—work with clay and push it to the limits, as well as pushing herself for her art, which was her joy.

“We were very fortunate and blessed, these 36 years, to know Viola. We will miss her. And for me, I will especially miss her smile. We, as all of you, will have rich, fond memories. We also have a legacy of art that will always be a reminder of that passion and drive that made her one of the most important woman artists of her time.”

MS. RIEDEL: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]