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**Oral history interview with Fleur Bresler, 2018
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Fleur Bresler on April 19, 2018. The interview took place at the home of Fleur Bresler in Rockville, MD, and was conducted by Glenn Adamson for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and the Frick Collection.

Fleur Bresler and Glenn Adamson have reviewed this transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. Researchers should note the timecode in this transcript is approximate. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

GLENN ADAMSON: Testing, testing. One, two, three. Testing, testing. One, two, three. This is Glenn Adamson interviewing Fleur Bresler at the collector's home in—well, near Washington D.C., just outside in Maryland. Is it Rockville, Maryland, Fleur?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: On the 19th of April [2018] for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and the Frick Art Reference Library of the Frick Collection. And this is card number one of the interview. Fleur, thanks so much for having me here to your home.

FLEUR BRESLER: My pleasure.

GLENN ADAMSON: And maybe we could start by you briefly describing where we're sitting for the listener.

FLEUR BRESLER: We're sitting in the living room of one of two apartments that I own that are joined. This is the older apartment, and this is what is usually referred to as the more cluttered one.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, lots of objects around us.

FLEUR BRESLER: A lot of objects.

GLENN ADAMSON: And in all sorts of materials, particularly wood, which is a special focus for you.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. This apartment where we're sitting has the smaller objects in the wood collection. It also does have a collection of contemporary bird decoys.

GLENN ADAMSON: And in fact, it was with bird decoys that you started your collecting.

FLEUR BRESLER: That was the first wood I collected. That was not my first collection.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: My first collection was quilts.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. So, we'll get into that in one moment. Before we finish with the description of the apartment itself, can you just say a little bit about when you broke through this wall and doubled your collection space?

FLEUR BRESLER: We actually started demolition on the second apartment in 2011. It took a full year to do the demo and rebuild. It has now taken close to six years to actually do the reinstallation in the second apartment. [00:02:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: And do you have any sense of how many art objects you have in the collection?

FLEUR BRESLER: I know what I have in what is called the turned wood collection. That's currently about a thousand objects. My catalogue number is almost 1,100, but I'm deducting what I have given to other museums, though I retain the catalogue number.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, we'll get back to that subject of your philanthropic gifts to museums, including the Renwick Gallery, for example—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —later in the interview, but suffice to say, you have been collecting very enthusiastically for many years and have a very full representation, particularly of that field of wood art but also many other disciplines, too.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. So, let's take a step back now and talk about your upbringing just very briefly, because I think we do want to accelerate to the moment when you began collecting. But tell us a little bit about where you were born, your family life, growing up.

FLEUR BRESLER: I'm a native-born Washingtonian. My mother was a native-born Washingtonian. There are not a whole lot of us. We are called cave dwellers. [Laughs.] So, my family goes back to about 1869 in the Washington area. I went through D.C. public schools. The house that I was born in—and, yes, I was born at home—still stands; it's in the Kalorama area. And I was one of four girls. I came, which was what was considered in those days, mid-life of my parents, so I had much older sisters. So, I grew up pretty much as an only child. I was 10 years after the last girl. [00:04:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: And what did your parents do?

FLEUR BRESLER: My mother did not work, and my father ran the family jewelry store, which was a much older institution in Washington. It had been started back in the late 1860s. So, we were a well-established old Washington family. And Washington in those days—because I'm talking back in the late 1920s—was a small Southern town. We had no industry. You either did something that helped the government or was used by the government, or you worked in the government. That was it.

GLENN ADAMSON: One-industry town?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. No-industry town—[laughs]—really.

GLENN ADAMSON: What was the jewelry store called?

FLEUR BRESLER: The jewelry store was called R. Harris and Company, and it was rather an

interesting story there in that R. Harris stood for Reuben Harris. He and my grandfather were partners, and they had one of the very early agreements of the right of first refusal on who died first. And my grandfather was the younger—no, was the older of the two, but Reuben Harris died first, and his family didn't want to retain anything in the business, because his daughter was married to Sigmund Romberg, the composer. And my family bought them out, but because R. Harris was a rather nondescript name, they retained it. [00:06:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: I see. And your name was Straus growing up, is that right?

FLEUR BRESLER: My name was Straus.

GLENN ADAMSON: S-T-R-A-U-S?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. But my grandfather's name was Abraham David Prince, and he was known as A.D.

GLENN ADAMSON: And when did your families come to America? When did they emigrate, or—

FLEUR BRESLER: My father's family I know very little about. My mother's family arrived in Macon, Georgia before the Civil War, and why they went to Macon, Georgia, who knows? They were Confederate sympathizers. My great-grandfather and great-grandmother are buried in Charlotte, North Carolina, and when I—which they moved to after the Civil War because the climate was better. That was the family story. As I say, how they or why they went to Macon, Georgia, I don't know. My great-grandfather was a tanner; he did make boots for the Confederate soldiers, and he then joined a Georgia unit, did fight for the South in the American Civil War, which my grandchildren find somewhere between amusing and appalling. [00:08:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Sure.

FLEUR BRESLER: [Laughs.] But what's interesting about it is when they moved to Charlotte the tannery is—was on Tryon Street, which is where the Mint Museum is now, and it's within blocks of where they were. And when I named the textile gallery at the Mint Museum and went down for the naming, my distant cousin who still lives there informed me that he's been doing genealogy and that what he discovered was that—I never quite knew, as a tanner, why they were financially quite comfortable, and the reason that they were is he made belts, but not the kind you wear. He made the great big belts for the machinery—

GLENN ADAMSON: For factories.

FLEUR BRESLER: —for factories, particularly for textiles—

GLENN ADAMSON: What—

FLEUR BRESLER: —which was an interesting tie-in to the textile gallery at the Mint.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, there was this amazing return to the family—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —history—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —when you began to work with the Mint Museum—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —in Charlotte.

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Can I get back to the jewelry store for one moment?

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Was that, do you think, an influence on your aesthetic sensibilities growing up?
[00:10:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Absolutely. Yeah. As the much-later-in-life child, I was pretty much ignored by my older sisters. My parents didn't have friends with young children, so it was like being an only child. And I would be taken down to the jewelry store, deposited upstairs while my father was at work, and being deposited upstairs meant that I got to sit on the floor or be where our master engraver was engraving. So, one of my earliest memories is of watching somebody do beautiful hand engraving.

GLENN ADAMSON: And do you know anything about him, what his background was?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. His name was Tom Geraci. He was—

GLENN ADAMSON: How do you spell that?

FLEUR BRESLER: It would be a good Italian spelling.

[They laugh.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. So, he was an Italian immigrant?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, he was Italian; he had apprenticed. And in those days, any time someone left a high-level government position they would be given a gift, and frequently it would be something like a silver platter or a silver bowl, and what he was a specialist in was being able to hand-engrave the insignias of all of the government seals.

GLENN ADAMSON: Which, of course, were all different, so—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —he had to do each one—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —custom.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: That must have been a very rare skill at that time. [00:12:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: No, he was a master engraver. Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, you would literally sit there and watch him do—

FLEUR BRESLER: And watch him.

GLENN ADAMSON: —do his work.

FLEUR BRESLER: And also watch him feed the pigeons.

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And that building is still standing, by the way.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: And at one point I think it was a McDonald's. It's on F Street. It's—it was—it was right across from where Woodward & Lothrop's used to be.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. So, I'm getting the picture, then, that you already had this interest in craft from a very early age.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, I had been able to see what you could do with your hands, because this was long before you could stamp out engraved things.

GLENN ADAMSON: And were you also interested in making things yourself when growing up?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: What kind of things?

FLEUR BRESLER: Doll clothes, that kind of thing. I was taught to knit at a very early age. I knitted, made doll clothes, and clearly collected things.

GLENN ADAMSON: Already as a young person.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, tell me about that. What kinds of things?

FLEUR BRESLER: I remember having a metal trunk, doll trunk, that had a shelf in it, and the shelf had little compartments on the shelf, and I would very meticulously collect bobby pins, hair pins, acorns. And they were all meticulously put in little separate areas.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, it wasn't that they were necessarily special things. It was that they --

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: —they were organized.

FLEUR BRESLER: No, they were organized.

GLENN ADAMSON: Can you describe what the satisfaction of doing that was? [00:14:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: I really don't know. I think it just may have been an innate need for things to be organized. I know I had stuffed animals on my bed and that I probably put those in exactly the same position each day.

GLENN ADAMSON: May I ask—and the reason I ask is that some collectors say that they had a chaotic life otherwise, and their collection was something that they could hold onto that was organized. Was that true for you?

FLEUR BRESLER: I have a feeling that my mother was probably quite strict, but I had a very distant relationship. I was late enough in life that they were financially very comfortable. I don't think they were ecstatic, 10 years later, of another child. I'm quite sure that my father desperately hoped it would be a boy.

GLENN ADAMSON: Because there were three girls already?

FLEUR BRESLER: Because there were three girls already. My three sisters each had been born four years apart, so that was a very organized pattern thing. We had a household of help, and I had governesses. And I would assume that part of being a governess was that you taught children to pick things up and follow directions.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, when you were growing up and going to school, was making things part of how you were educated as well?

FLEUR BRESLER: Absolutely not. No. And I was driven to school by the chauffeur. [00:16:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: A private school?

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: Public?

FLEUR BRESLER: It was D.C. public school, but the chauffeur drove me. And that school, by the way, is still standing in D.C.

GLENN ADAMSON: What's it called?

FLEUR BRESLER: It was called John Quincy Adams. I think the school is a new building, but there's still a John Quincy Adams on that same ground. So, what I remember about kindergarten was nothing to do with any sort of art work, and actually, other than being driven by a chauffeur and picked up by a chauffeur, the only other thing I remember was that the playground had cinders, because I've still got a cinder scar on my knee.

GLENN ADAMSON: Cinders from what?

FLEUR BRESLER: It was covered in what we called cinders, which were little black flecky things.

GLENN ADAMSON: Were they from some nearby factory or—

FLEUR BRESLER: I have no idea. That was what they apparently used as a playground cover.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, I see. It was put there intentionally.

FLEUR BRESLER: It was a playground cover.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. Right. The bad old days. [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, the bad old—[laughs]—yeah. I mean, far worse than artificial turf, let me tell you.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right, right.

FLEUR BRESLER: And the only other thing that I remember is that, at least in cool weather or winter weather, I wore high white socks, and they were pretty much a bloody mess with this fall and the cinders. [00:18:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.] That's quite a picture, Fleur.

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Okay, yeah. And curls. And I do have a picture from that vintage.

GLENN ADAMSON: And am I right in thinking that both sides of your family were Jewish?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Is that right?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. Both sides were Jewish. And again, reflecting back on the Macon, Georgia, and the Charlotte, North Carolina, we were very, very much in the minority, and the family that I still have in Charlotte have long since ceased being Jewish.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. And what about in the school? Were you unusual for being Jewish, or was that not so much of an issue?

FLEUR BRESLER: That was not—well, I can assure you that in today's climate it was absolute heresy. I absolutely thought Christmas carols were lovely songs, and we definitely did a pageant, and I can remember being an angel, using a sheet. But we thought nothing of it.

GLENN ADAMSON: It was just what you did.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. And to expand on that even further, it was absolutely a segregated school system.

GLENN ADAMSON: Of course, in those days.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. And—

GLENN ADAMSON: So, no African-American children at all?

FLEUR BRESLER: Absolutely not. A block away was their school, and it just wasn't something that was in anybody's, really, conscious. We're talking about back in the 1920s.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, can you walk me just quickly through the rest of your schooling, going into

high school years? [00:20:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, I went to John Quincy Adams Elementary School. After my father died, we moved to an apartment in the same general area, but then another—it was a different school. That was H.D. Cooke. That was where I graduated elementary school. My mother then died; my middle sister became my guardian. We moved to a house in what is now called American University Park. I went to Alice Deal public school for junior high, and in those days that was seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. And I was the second full graduating class from Woodrow Wilson High School, which was again a public school, and I graduated in the midst of World War Two.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. And how would you describe yourself at that age, at the age when you graduated high school?

FLEUR BRESLER: Thoroughly miserable. [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Really? Why?

FLEUR BRESLER: I clearly had very deep wounds from, so-called, being orphaned by the time I was nine.

GLENN ADAMSON: Having lost your parents.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. I was raised by my middle sister, whose husband ultimately turned out to be an alcoholic. And that was not the days where you either rushed children off to a psychiatrist or you popped pills. I can remember a couple years ago at a party at Jean McLaughlin's house after the end of the Penland auction sitting at a table with Julia Woodman, and the other person at the table was what I call a sweet young thing, complaining bitterly about the problems she was having with her elementary school-age child, and Julia turning to her and saying, "We were told to suck it up." [Laughs.] And Julia and I became very good friends after that. [00:22:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Because that was your experience.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. I mean, that was it. You either survived or you didn't survive, but you pretty much were told to suck it up.

GLENN ADAMSON: And was making things still a part of your life at that stage—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —as an adolescent?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. Listening to phonograph records, reading, and making things.

GLENN ADAMSON: Often by yourself?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. I mean, basically were all solitary pursuits.

GLENN ADAMSON: And were you making clothes for yourself or—

FLEUR BRESLER: No, I was making doll clothes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Still?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, really needlecrafts?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. Not anything that I would call practical. I was not—in other words, I was not making things for myself at that point, certainly not a sewing machine. Later, when I—that translated into more larger craft objects such as needlepoint, knitting, yes, I did make for my children sweaters, things of that sort.

GLENN ADAMSON: Later on?

FLEUR BRESLER: Later on. [00:24:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: And did you have exposure to art at that age? Say, in high school?

FLEUR BRESLER: I don't remember art class as part of our curriculum at that point. My basic art exposure, earliest art exposure, in Washington was to the Phillips Gallery. I predate the National Gallery. Corcoran was certainly here, but that was not high on our list. Clearly, in my early twenties, when I found a group of other single female Jewish women, we did go to concerts at the Phillips Gallery on Sunday, and they were free concerts. And that would also have pre-dated that large addition that was put on the Phillips. It was still a house—strictly a house museum.

GLENN ADAMSON: And do you remember the impression that the paintings in the Phillips collection made on you?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. Yeah. Two very strong memories. The concerts were in the first-floor library, which I remember as being a paneled room, but as you entered, on the side wall where the entrance was, they owned one El Greco, which was very much sort of out of keeping with their collection. I think they still have it. And that I was very enamored of. And I wasn't that much taken with Impressionistic paintings, but I liked Paul Klee, because it was funky, and it was whimsical, and they had a large collection. [00:26:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: So, he was an early—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —passion of yours.

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] And did that lead immediately to you exploring other art?

FLEUR BRESLER: No, but I think it probably was a residual memory because I do still go quirky.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. It's a big part of the collection.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. It's quirky.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, Paul Klee's influence is maybe still felt.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, and I did one needlepoint pillow.

GLENN ADAMSON: Based on his work?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. It's out in the room out there. I have it in the sunroom.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, what happened when you graduated from high school?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, I started at a junior college, which I did do—I didn't—I did, I think, a year. Well, a year and a half. I don't think I graduated. It was close to home; I could walk to it. This was still during—this was the end of World War Two. And it was a—more of a finishing school kind of junior college.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: It was more of a more socialized—[laughs]—thing.

GLENN ADAMSON: Was it all women? [00:28:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Yep, definitely. Absolutely, all women. It was—well, it was within walking distance of where I lived with my sister, and there, yes, I did take an art history class.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, okay. What do you remember of that?

FLEUR BRESLER: That I liked it, yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: And it covered what? Renaissance and Baroque art?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Sort of classic European art.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: I was still living with my sister and her husband. By then she had two young children. Mine probably was the earlier generation that most of the girls did go off to college, but the idea was you became either a teacher or a nurse.

GLENN ADAMSON: Those were the two main professions—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —open to you?

FLEUR BRESLER: Those were—well, those were socially acceptable, and basically the theory was it was a backup if anything went wrong with your marriage. But you were pretty well expected to marry after you graduated from college—

GLENN ADAMSON: And is that—

FLEUR BRESLER: —if not before.

GLENN ADAMSON: And is that what happened for you?

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: So—

FLEUR BRESLER: [Laughs.] It did not.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, what's the next part of the story?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, the next part of the story was I completed most of the two years, and it was in preschool education. And I got a job at the National Cathedral in their nursery school as an assistant. And it was called Beauvoir, and I think Beauvoir still exists. And if you were the lowest person on the totem pole, the first thing that you got was bus duty. [00:30:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Bus duty?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. You got to ride the early-morning bus that picked all the children up and the bus that dropped them off.

GLENN ADAMSON: And oversee them en route?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. Coming to school was harder than taking them home, because taking them home they were a little bit tired, but coming, they were full of energy.

GLENN ADAMSON: And did you teach during the day as well?

FLEUR BRESLER: They called it—yeah. Yeah. Well, we assisted the qualified teachers.

GLENN ADAMSON: You're talking about very young children here?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, we're talking about—well, we're talking three- to five-year-olds, which was the nursery school. And I then moved up to kindergarten.

GLENN ADAMSON: Promotion?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. That was the top of the hill. Still Beauvoir. Kindergarten was on the first floor, and it was above where the kitchen was, and to this day I will not eat liver, because they started cooking—[laughs]—calf's liver at eight in the morning or nine in the morning that they were going to serve to you at eleven, and you could have soled your shoes with it. [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, dear.

FLEUR BRESLER: Aside from having smelled it. No. And basically, we were teaching the socially non-Jewish elite children of Washington. [00:32:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, it was a prosperous—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —group.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, they were a lot of spoiled brats.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: And how long did you teach at Beauvoir?

FLEUR BRESLER: I think between kindergarten and nursery school it was close to five years.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, you didn't progress to another college after junior college, then.

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no. No, I did not. And it was an interesting experience. It was not—it was certainly not the Montessori teaching methods. It was clearly structured, and we had some very disturbed children. [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, really?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, at least by today's standards. We didn't look upon it that way. We had Evalyn Walsh McLean's granddaughter, who got picked up by security each day and brought to school by security each day. I mean, she was sort of the epitome of the poor little rich girl. And it was children of very notable people.

GLENN ADAMSON: And how were you treated in this context? [00:34:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: We certainly were underpaid—[laughs]—but I wouldn't say that we were treated at all badly.

GLENN ADAMSON: And you didn't experience explicit anti-Semitism—

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: —or anything like that?

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no. Absolutely not. But, Glenn, we also—again, this is something that at least my grandchildren find very difficult to either understand or accept. We did two things. Where we knew we were not wanted, we reproduced for ourselves the same or better, meaning we started our—my family was part of a group that started a bank. My family was part of the group that started the country club. And secondly, we knew exactly where we didn't fit in, and we just avoided it.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, you were living a life in parallel institutions.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. It was parallel institutions, but in certain instances, even better than what didn't want us, and we didn't rock the boat. We knew absolutely the areas where we didn't look for homes. But we also knew, because Washington was a small entity at that point, the margins of where we would be accepted. In other words, I was born in a house in Kalorama. Kalorama today is the height of the super-center of Washington. I mean, this is where the Clintons live; it's where Ivanka [Trump] lives. I lived there in the late '20s. But we knew that, socially, we were accepted enough that if we lived in the same manner as our non-Jewish neighbors, that we would be accepted. But we also knew that there were areas of Washington that had restricted covenants. [00:36:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Where you were not welcome?

FLEUR BRESLER: Where we were absolutely not welcome, and we didn't go there.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, returning to the time that you were teaching at the National Cathedral School—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —you were still living with your sister?

FLEUR BRESLER: I was still living with my sister.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, I assume you were not involved in any collecting activities, then?

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. Okay. So, just advancing the story, then, to the point where you were able to start developing that interest, what happens next? Did you move out of your sister's place?

FLEUR BRESLER: I moved out. I got a job at what we called in those days a settlement house. Okay? I therefore had a salary coming in, a regular salary. Also, I had reached the age of majority. I got my inheritance; I therefore had income, regular income, coming in from investments and from the jewelry store. So, I moved into what we called an efficiency apartment. It was a building right next to where the Marriott Wardman Park is now. It was an air-conditioned, manned front-desk building, and I had the opportunity to work with a decorator and from scratch make my own home. [00:38:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: So, what age were you at this point?

FLEUR BRESLER: It was after I was 21.

GLENN ADAMSON: So—

FLEUR BRESLER: I think I was probably about 23 by then. Now, it was still of the age where the comment was, "What is it she was going to do that she couldn't do at home? Why is she living by herself?" It was still, to a degree, frowned upon.

GLENN ADAMSON: And can you tell me just a little bit about the settlement house, is it one that had been founded earlier, and servicing immigrants?

FLEUR BRESLER: It was a Jewish-run settlement house. It was called the J.K. Nye Settlement House. It was supported by the local group of the National Council of Jewish Women, which is a very old Jewish charity, German-Jewish-based. In other words, it helped settle Eastern European Jews when they came to this country. And at that point, it was still segregated. [00:40:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: So, you were only working with white immigrants?

FLEUR BRESLER: Only working—we were working with predominantly Catholic white children from out of Appalachia.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, I see. Not from Europe?

FLEUR BRESLER: No. No, no. This was in southwest Washington. And the thruway cuts through where the settlement house was. I was still teaching at the settlement house when the first urban renewal in southwest Washington took place.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, these were poor folks from the Appalachian Mountains who were moving into Washington, D.C.—

FLEUR BRESLER: Right.

GLENN ADAMSON: —in search of a better life.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, and they were all Catholic—

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —with huge families. And I date back to what is known as the alley dwellings in Washington, and if you look up the terminology you will see pictures of interior dwellings that were in sightline of the Washington Capitol.

GLENN ADAMSON: But they were—

FLEUR BRESLER: You could see the dome.

GLENN ADAMSON: —but they were tenement houses.

FLEUR BRESLER: They were totally tenement houses. Actually, they had been slave quarters. In other words, you had an entire exterior set of houses going all the way around the block, and then, if you looked very carefully, you would see an opening. And if you went through that opening, backing up to the exterior was another whole set of houses, and those were the early slave quarters. [00:42:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Was there teaching of craft programs at the settlement house?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: And is that something you were involved with yourself?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes, but very, very minimal. In other words, yes, we taught knitting, for instance.

GLENN ADAMSON: And that was done because it was thought to be a possible means of livelihood?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: It sounds like it wasn't a great emphasis in this—

FLEUR BRESLER: It was knitting and sewing.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: In other words, you didn't make what I would term one-of-a-kind creative objects.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. Sure. Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: The closest you would come to that would be the kindergarten version of construction paper.

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Or at Christmastime you would make the construction-paper loopy things that went around the tree.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah, just very simple.

FLEUR BRESLER: Very, very simple. In other words, scissors, paper, paste.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right, right. And so how long were you at the settlement house and living on your own?

FLEUR BRESLER: I was at the settlement house for about four years.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, your mid-twenties.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. That was my mid-twenties.

GLENN ADAMSON: And living on your own in this apartment.

FLEUR BRESLER: I was living on my own, yeah; was still dependent on public transportation. But that—Woodley road, where the apartment was, was basically, you know, central northwest downtown Washington.

GLENN ADAMSON: And so, then what happened next?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, I met Charlie.

GLENN ADAMSON: Your husband. [00:44:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. At a friend's house. Our initial meeting was not good. It was a single date, and that was it.

GLENN ADAMSON: You didn't hit it off?

FLEUR BRESLER: No, we did not. That was, like, in January. We had met at a mutual friend's party in December.

GLENN ADAMSON: What year are we at on here?

FLEUR BRESLER: We are in 1953, I think. Yeah. We then ran into each other in September at what was then the Arena Stage, but the Arena Stage at that point was a converted movie house.

GLENN ADAMSON: And it was a theater?

FLEUR BRESLER: It was—yeah. It was a—basically, what you would have called an experimental theater.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: The play was *None but the Lonely Heart*. We ran into each other at intermission. Pleasant conversation. He called me shortly after that and said that he was involved with the Junior Chamber of Commerce, and that he was the speaker chairman, and that they were going to be

having a dinner at the Willard Hotel. And would I be available that evening? That it was a formal type of event; it was cocktail attire. I said—the standing joke was that I had a little black dress. Okay? I was living at 2800 Woodley Road. He came and picked me up, and on the way down he said he thought he ought to inform me that he would be at the head table introducing the speaker; that I would be at the first table right below where the head table was; and that I would be sitting next to the speaker's fiancée and the fiancée's mother; and that, by the way, the speaker was Senator Joseph McCarthy. [00:46:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

[They laugh.]

GLENN ADAMSON: So, he was already involved with politics even then.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: It was a very interesting evening.

GLENN ADAMSON: And what was your opinion of Joe McCarthy?

FLEUR BRESLER: I was a liberal Democrat—

GLENN ADAMSON: You were?

FLEUR BRESLER: —though we couldn't vote in D.C.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, then—

FLEUR BRESLER: I was appalled.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah, yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: [Laughs.] I was dying. And I'm sitting next to his fiancée, Jean Kerr. And I don't know if you know that story: She wrote the Lustron pamphlet that he took credit for and got paid for. And Mama, Jean's mother, sort of blackmailed him into marrying Jean. She'd keep her mouth shut that he took the money and the credit for writing this Lustron pamphlet. And every time they—well, I don't know if you've ever been in the Willard. [00:48:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: No, I haven't.

FLEUR BRESLER: Okay. Well, it was a very old grand hotel that has subsequently been refurbished, and it's still an old-style grand hotel, but down the center of it is this hallway with rooms, public rooms, off of it. Well, the first thing was that down the hall were the Gold Star mothers who thought McCarthy was God. So, the Gold Star mothers keep coming in the room to see him. I'm sitting next to his fiancée. Every time they clapped during his speech I blew my nose.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: If they stood up I sat. [Laughs.] It was an interesting—and then, guess what? We got to go out with the speaker afterwards.

GLENN ADAMSON: Lucky you.

FLEUR BRESLER: Lucky me, yes. And we went out. Oh, he was an obnoxious, raunchy guy. No. So, we got married in spite of that. It was a miracle.

GLENN ADAMSON: I was just going to ask, because Charlie remained very involved in the Republican party.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, the Junior Chamber of Commerce was, at least in D.C., highly political, because D.C. was totally disenfranchised at that point. We voted for nothing. [Laughs.] I mean, this predates a non-voting member of Congress. This predates Home Rule. [00:50:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. So, you were in one sense disenfranchised, and yet, in another sense, completely embroiled in the political world all at the same.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. So, maybe we could just talk briefly about that aspect of your relationship to Charlie. Did you stay a liberal Democrat or—

FLEUR BRESLER: I considered myself an Adlai Stevenson Democrat—

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: —at that point. [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: And yet Charlie would be—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yet I didn't vote or anything.

GLENN ADAMSON: —but—and Charlie would be very close with Spiro Agnew, and—

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, Charlie was clearly a Republican.

GLENN ADAMSON: —right.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. Junior Chamber of Commerce tended to be business-oriented. No, I had grown up—the only political thing I knew was that Roosevelt was president for life.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. That's all you ever knew.

FLEUR BRESLER: And that our livelihood was dependent on government employees. [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: So, did you essentially agree to disagree about politics with Charlie? Is that how it worked out?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, mine was not really based on anything other than the Democrats were always in power. [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: And that was all that I knew. And it didn't truly touch me, because I couldn't vote anyhow.

GLENN ADAMSON: Sure.

FLEUR BRESLER: And it was, I suppose, socially correct to be with the party that was in power. And the party that was in power had been Roosevelt forever. [00:52:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. So, getting back to the story, you did marry Charlie.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: In what year?

FLEUR BRESLER: We—well, we started to re-date in September. We talked about eloping. He worked for his family, which was the poultry, butter, and egg business. It was five a.m. three days a week and six a.m. three days a week. There were no frozen turkeys. Thanksgiving and Christmas was prime time, and if we didn't elope before Thanksgiving, which meant we would have only been dating—re-dating—for about eight weeks then, it wasn't going to happen until after the first of the year. We did decide that eloping after eight weeks, even though we were both past 25, was not the brightest thing to do, that he had already made his mother's life a living hell. Anyhow, let's not do that to her. [Laughs.] So, we got married on January 10th.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see. Of—

FLEUR BRESLER: '54.

GLENN ADAMSON: —'54. And he was also from a Jewish family.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes, but a very different background.

GLENN ADAMSON: How so?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, both his parents had been born stateside. None of his grandparents had. His parents had come from Eastern Europe; mine had come strictly from Germany. We were totally—my family was totally assimilated. My family had been Reformed Jews since the 1860s; Charlie came from a Conservative family whose grandparents were Orthodox. So, there was a lot of negotiating and melding there during our lifetime. Charlie had started to drift more towards Reform. His sister stayed Conservative. His grandfather had died the year before, but up until that time his parents had kept a kosher home. [00:54:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Which was not the case for you?

FLEUR BRESLER: No, absolutely not.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: And was he interested in art before he met you?

FLEUR BRESLER: No. No. Mm-mm. [Negative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. So—

FLEUR BRESLER: Nor were his parents. I mean, his father worked two jobs.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. No time for art, maybe.

FLEUR BRESLER: No. And my mother-in-law was bipolar.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: My sister-in-law was bipolar.

GLENN ADAMSON: Very difficult. So, when you got married, presumably you then moved in together.

FLEUR BRESLER: Not before marriage. You simply didn't—[laughs]—

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. Sure. No, after.

FLEUR BRESLER: —no, you didn't do that. You know, if he stayed the night you made sure he was gone before the desk clerk woke up downstairs, you know. [00:56:00]

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no. Things were different in those days. Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: But you would have made a household together after marriage.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: And where was that?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, almost immediately, I got pregnant.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: I was 26; Charlie was 25. Sidney was born 10 months later. As soon as we realized that I was pregnant—my in-laws had bought some lots. They gave us one; we started building a house.

GLENN ADAMSON: In Washington?

FLEUR BRESLER: No, in Montgomery County. A small house on a cul-de-sac. And Sidney was born—we were married in January, Sidney was born the end of October, and we moved into the house that following January.

GLENN ADAMSON: And did you continue to work at the settlement house after that?

FLEUR BRESLER: No, I never went back to work. I got pregnant immediately.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. So, you shifted into that mode—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —of being a mother.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: And so, maybe we could sort of now look ahead to the collecting activities—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —and get into that. How did that start for you?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, the first thing that I actually would term a collection probably was the decoys. And that was almost—well, that really wasn't until—well, we did collect prints, but more from the point of view of something to put on the wall. And that's all of those Dalis. [00:58:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: The Salvador Dalis—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —that you still have?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah—

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —that ended up down in the other apartment.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, that was really art for the home.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, that was art for the home.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: I did receive from my parents what I would call everyday household items. In today's terminology, you wouldn't. In other words, I got linens and all of that to be ironed. My parents—all entertaining was done at home, and they entertained. I got sterling silver flatware. Because we were in the jewelry business, if it was made in silver, we had it. I still have sterling silver dinner plates, salad plates, butter plates, and water goblets. Okay?

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. And you had porcelain and crystal and things like that?

FLEUR BRESLER: I had some porcelain and crystal. I didn't look upon them as collections, but from an aesthetic point of view, today they are. [01:00:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. And did you appreciate them as objects—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —of craft—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —do you think?

FLEUR BRESLER: No, I don't think I looked upon them as craft.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, as objects.

FLEUR BRESLER: I looked upon them as beautiful things to be able to entertain—

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: —and as far as the silver service was concerned, it was primarily because my sisters no longer wanted it. In the case of the water goblets, they had already gone to another sister—

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —who said, "Oh, boy, let's, for a wedding present, give them to Fleur."

GLENN ADAMSON: So, when did the duck decoys episode begin?

FLEUR BRESLER: The duck decoys started in the '70s, and the impetus for that was that I was at that point then thoroughly involved with politics alongside of Charlie.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: I was working from the female angle, and he had at that point graduated from what I call the club standard to—I had said to him, "You know, if you're going to complain, either put up or shut up," and he put up.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: So, the week before our sixth child was born, he was running for the Maryland House of Delegates.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, lots happened in the intervening—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —time period—

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: —so you have some—

FLEUR BRESLER: He had then become openly politically active and was running for office.
[01:02:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: As a Republican?

FLEUR BRESLER: As a Republican in Maryland.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And as I say, we did this as a duo. And being a Jewish Republican in Montgomery County was a bit offbeat.

GLENN ADAMSON: Rare.

FLEUR BRESLER: Rare, yeah, very rare. I then graduated from the single club president to the county federation president to the state president, and I decided that I wanted to collect something that had a reference to Maryland.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, I see. So, it was really to symbolize your position as a—

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, decoys—the basis for it are the Ward Brothers, who were barbers down in —on the Eastern Shore. So, the roots of decoys is the Eastern Shore of Maryland. And it just seemed like a logical thing to collect that was related to Maryland, that had a Maryland-deep history, and that was available.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, I'm really fascinated by this, because it sounds like you chose duck decoys almost because they were symbolically appropriate to your social role.

FLEUR BRESLER: To a degree, yes. Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: That's fascinating.

FLEUR BRESLER: And the fact that this was the early age of the Waterfowl Festival in Easton, so they were available. My very first decoy I bought, I believe, in 1976. It is a mallard drake, and I bought it strictly because of who made it. And his name was Larry Tawes. [00:02:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Tawes?

FLEUR BRESLER: T-A-W-E-S. But my husband was in the legislature when J. Millard Tawes was governor.

GLENN ADAMSON: And they were related?

FLEUR BRESLER: Absolutely.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: All the Taweses were related. [Laughs.] Yep.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: And I—it struck me, you know, that there was this tie-in with the governor and the decoy carver. And it was \$165, and in 1976 that was high-end.

GLENN ADAMSON: That was expensive for a decoy.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, that was expensive for a decoy.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, there were already other collectors of these artifacts?

FLEUR BRESLER: Not a whole lot, Glenn.

GLENN ADAMSON: No?

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-mm. [Negative.] No. There were no such things as things like this, or like this. It was strictly flat-bottom working decoys, only these really weren't working because they were realistically painted.

GLENN ADAMSON: And can I just say, Fleur was just pointing to these extravagantly crafted sort of vignettes or scenarios with these bird forms—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —but they're in a kind of setting—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —that are here in the apartment. But you're saying that the decoys that you were looking at, at that time, were just very simple, painted—

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, they were flat-bottom.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: I believe the one, the Tawes one, is sitting over there.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. [00:04:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: No, they were absolutely based on working decoys, the difference being they were realistically painted.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, they were really art objects rather than utilitarian hunting gear.

FLEUR BRESLER: Absolutely. It was the very beginning of them being art objects, but they had not progressed to the fact that they were using armatures—

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —because, clearly, once you get something that is moving there are armatures in these. So, I bought this Larry Tawes. Then, each year we went back to the Waterfowl Festival, and I bought other flat-bottomed ones.

GLENN ADAMSON: Can I ask you briefly to describe what the Festival was like in those days? What happened besides the, you know—obviously, you had the opportunity to buy these objects, but what else was going on?

FLEUR BRESLER: In my life or the Easton Waterfowl Festival?

GLENN ADAMSON: The actual festival.

FLEUR BRESLER: It became—it very quickly became a whole town thing. Everything from the fact that the stores decorated their windows; there were prizes for the best window decoration—but there was very much a social aspect to this.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And it was around themes of hunting and—

FLEUR BRESLER: Well—

GLENN ADAMSON: —bird-watching and such?

FLEUR BRESLER: —it had an absolute tie—it was totally tied into the issuance of the duck stamp,

of the opening of the hunting season.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, it's very— [00:06:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: This is the official opening of the hunting season and the issuance of the duck stamp. Yep.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, the opening gun, as it were, for the season.

FLEUR BRESLER: Absolutely, yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: And it was in November, because that's when the duck hunting season opened, and it was tied in with conservation.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, you and Charlie weren't hunters yourselves?

FLEUR BRESLER: No, absolutely not.

GLENN ADAMSON: You were just interested in it.

FLEUR BRESLER: And we were not part of that hunting social set.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. But you were interested in the—

FLEUR BRESLER: We were—I was totally interested in the decoys as an art object.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: And they were affordable.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, that's a key point, because you wanted to collect something that wasn't necessarily an extravagant expenditure.

FLEUR BRESLER: Absolutely. I mean, we had six young children.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: And they weren't perishable.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: Which was a big thing.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, you could have them and keep them and—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. They were wood.

GLENN ADAMSON: Did you also give them as gifts to people, or were they all for yourselves?

FLEUR BRESLER: No. I think once I gave a small one as a— I may have given a small one as a gift. And once we took a friend of ours with us, and we always went to the fundraising pre-opening night.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: We took her with us, and she bought a small Canada goose. And it was probably, Glenn, maybe, like, the third year. It certainly wouldn't be—at least the third or the fourth year—that there began to be a change. And I don't know the terminology; instead of being a flat-bottom decorative version of a working decoy, they became more of a—what I would call a scene, meaning that they were on a base, and they were doing something. [00:08:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: So, the bird was in action.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. So, more sculptural, really.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. And definitely no reference whatsoever to being a working decoy.

GLENN ADAMSON: And also, not just ducks anymore, but—

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no

GLENN ADAMSON: —other kinds of birds as well.

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: Out of curiosity, did you actually get to learn a lot about birds because of this interest?

FLEUR BRESLER: A little bit about birds, yes. And—

GLENN ADAMSON: So, you knew which bird was which?

FLEUR BRESLER: In other words, did I know what a roadrunner was? No.

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: Did you get to know some of the artists who were making the decoys?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. Yes, I did.

GLENN ADAMSON: What were they like?

FLEUR BRESLER: Frequently, it was a second life.

GLENN ADAMSON: Like, after retirement?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, after retirement, or a weekend hobby.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Rather than a profession.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, they weren't looking to make money.

FLEUR BRESLER: So, in those days, back in the '70s and early '80s it would have been awfully hard to have lived off of making decoys.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And were there certain makers that were revered as masters—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —as carvers and painters?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. Yeah, but they tended to be—oh, and I can't remember the family name anymore, but it was three generations; they were from Louisiana, and they did not do what I would call birds doing something. [00:10:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: These were definitely flat-bottom ones.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: They were not working decoys, but they were, artistically, replicas of working decoys.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, what's very interesting here is that you actually have—in this field of these decoy makers you have a pattern that we're familiar with in other areas of craft, where you have a traditional format and traditional ways of doing things, and then it opens up—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —it sounds like in the 1970s in this case—to a more artistically expressive and creative field.

FLEUR BRESLER: But it didn't really become what I would call a recognized field—

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: —until I would say the '90s, or even the early 2000s. I mean, now, you can spend five figures. It was two zeroes, really, starting out.

GLENN ADAMSON: And very much an enclosed group of people.

FLEUR BRESLER: And they all knew each other.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. The Easton Waterfowl Festival was national, but it still was a fairly small group of recognizable artists.

GLENN ADAMSON: And was there—

FLEUR BRESLER: And I don't think they thought of themselves as artists.

GLENN ADAMSON: Because it was a hobby for them.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: It certainly was extra income.

GLENN ADAMSON: Was there an organization that was devoted to supporting these people, or collecting them? [00:12:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Not that I really know of.

GLENN ADAMSON: Or newsletters about it that you could read? Anything like that?

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: And book-wise very—the books were on antique decoys.

GLENN ADAMSON: Historic ones?

FLEUR BRESLER: Historic ones. They certainly were not on what I call contemporary decorative ones.

GLENN ADAMSON: And did you collect antique examples also?

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: Just the—

FLEUR BRESLER: Never. Never. And an example of the type of person that was doing—the first decoy was the one that I bought; that was the Larry Tawes. When I retired as president of the Maryland Federation of Republican Women, as my going-away gift they gave me a pintail. The carver was a state trooper.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, really?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: And did you meet him?

FLEUR BRESLER: No, never met him. Mm-mm. [Negative.] No. I still have—you know, I still have the decoy. But that's an example of it as a hobby.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Before we leave the topic of the decoys, can I ask you

one more question?

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: What were the points of connoisseurship, if I can put it that way, about the decoys? Like, what were you looking for in buying one?

FLEUR BRESLER: How—well, the technical skill of it looking like what it was representing.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, a naturalistic—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —quality.

FLEUR BRESLER: But there is another point on the decoys. *Big Bird*, which is out there on the stand, was the centerpiece at the Tidewater Inn which was commissioned the year—they commissioned the carver a year ahead to do the centerpiece at the Tidewater Inn, which was headquarters for the show. I bought the piece in progress, because I knew the artist. [00:14:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Do you remember the artist's name?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes, his—Dan Williams. I don't know whatever happened to him. They are snow geese. Before I had a chance to inform Charlie that this was now something he owned, as we were headed towards the lobby to look at them somebody came over to congratulate him. [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Surprise.

FLEUR BRESLER: Surprise. There wasn't much he could say. They came here; the only place that was big enough for them was in the center of my former dining room table, and you then couldn't eat. So, I had to commission the stand for them to go on. That did, I'd say, engender an interesting conversation, the gist of which was, "Cease and desist, dear. You know, even though I don't want to know what you paid for them, and I don't want to know how you financed them, this has gone too far." So, we came to a compromise, and that was that we would still go to the opening night, we would still be very supportive of conservation efforts in Maryland, but we would now do what was known as the teacup decoys. [00:16:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Small?

FLEUR BRESLER: Which was an auction for scholarships.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: About 57 later—[laughs]—but Charlie liked auctions.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: See, I would pick them out, and then he got to bid on them. So, there are shelves of little ones down here. But that ended the—and we were still collecting when he died.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. So, it kept being an interest for a long time.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, can we now move over to the story of the quilt collection?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, was that something that you started to get interested in around the same time in the 1970s?

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no. Quilt collection was sort of a—well, a little bit of an accident. A very dear friend had become a docent, a general docent, at American History, but with a side interest in textiles. Her husband died; she found she had to go back to work, and she asked if I would be at all interested in becoming a docent at Smithsonian American History.

GLENN ADAMSON: About what year are we talking about here, Fleur? [00:18:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Late '80s.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: Particularly with an interest in textiles, and that she had talked to the head of the division down there. Well—and she and I had become members of a quilting group.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: I had bought an occasional quilt for use before then. So, we joined the—a neighbor of hers was in this group, and she invited me, and they made quilts. So, that all stopped for her when her husband died, and she had to go back to work. I was still meeting with this little quilting group, and it was a good tie-in with textiles at American History. I became the textile docent at American History and did behind-the-scenes tours. And it was early enough in the quilt world where they too were affordable, and the more I learned about the various styles, I thought, well, you know, why not put together a very small overview of quilts using the knowledge I was gaining down there, the research I could do down there, to help me pick out some good examples? Also, I had a family friend whose daughter was a high-end quilt dealer, and I went to her, and she sort of brushed me off. And I got annoyed at her attitude, so I thought, "Well, screw her. I'll find somebody else." And I checked around, and I got the name of somebody, and she and I hit it off. [00:20:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Who was that?

FLEUR BRESLER: Her name was Stella Rubin. And Stella was a private quilt dealer in the Washington area, and she was also a picker for a couple of galleries in New York. So, between being the quilt docent at American History, and meeting Stella, and the fact that for under a thousand you could still pick up something that was fairly decent, I started a collection.

GLENN ADAMSON: And so, at that stage you were still somewhat price-conscious, let's say.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, oh, yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, you know, anything that I bought was strictly out of funds that I had either privately on my own or—which were minimal, at that point. I was no longer getting money from the jewelry store; I had gotten out of that.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] [00:22:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: So, it was really what I could squirrel away from the allowance.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see. So, that was—

FLEUR BRESLER: And I am of the generation where your husband gave you an allowance.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. So, that's how it worked?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. I paid all the household bills—

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —I ran the household, and the first of the month I got X number of dollars.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And incidentally, by this time—we're now in the 1980s—Charlie had a very successful real estate business.

FLEUR BRESLER: Charlie had left the poultry, butter, and egg business. He left that, literally, the night our third child was born—[laughs]—as a surprise.

GLENN ADAMSON: He just told you that that was—that shift was happening?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, that he had told his father that he wanted—that he was giving notice, and his father said, "Don't take the two weeks. Go."

GLENN ADAMSON: Wow. Right. So, it was like that?

FLEUR BRESLER: That was July 4th.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Oh, Independence Day.

FLEUR BRESLER: That was July 4th. My daughter Lynne was born on July 5th.

GLENN ADAMSON: What year?

FLEUR BRESLER: Lynne will be sixty this year.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: Okay.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. So, '58, yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: I was sent to the hospital in a taxi cab.

GLENN ADAMSON: Wow.

FLEUR BRESLER: That's the fastest trip from Montgomery County to downtown—

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —D.C. I ever took.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, we got a little sidetracked there—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —but the collection of quilts obviously opened up a new topic for you, which was collecting historic artifacts. [00:24:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes, plus the fact that this was the first thing that I collected that I specifically had a technical knowledge of—

GLENN ADAMSON: Because you had made them yourself.

FLEUR BRESLER: —because I had actually made a quilt.

GLENN ADAMSON: Whereas you had never carved a duck decoy.

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: I had never carved a duck decoy.

GLENN ADAMSON: Did that make a big difference in your approach to collecting, do you think?

FLEUR BRESLER: Absolutely.

GLENN ADAMSON: How so?

FLEUR BRESLER: I think that was my total introduction to the amount of time and skill that it took to make something.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: This was a big revelation from doll clothes—

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: —particularly since I have never been happy with a sewing machine—it runs away from me—and when I made quilts, every single solitary stitch was by hand, including piecing the seam down the back of the quilt.

GLENN ADAMSON: Which is of course how they would have been made, in most cases, in the nineteenth century.

FLEUR BRESLER: Absolutely. Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: And the quilts that you were collecting were mainly nineteenth century, is that right? American?

FLEUR BRESLER: They were predominantly American. One of them possibly—we weren't sure if it was French or not. It was a white—it was an all-white quilt. They were predominantly nineteenth century. I did have two late eighteenth-century coverlets that I had bought at auction out of the Garbisch collection when it went up to auction, and it did go up to—the latest one was about 1998,

and it was a western Maryland Amish quilt. [00:26:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Did you say 1998?

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. So, a contemporary object.

FLEUR BRESLER: But it was a totally traditional pattern.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right, right. Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: The nontraditional ones I have kept; the few that I have.

GLENN ADAMSON: That are made by contemporary—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —fiber artists, you might say.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. In other words, I have a Carolyn Mazloomi next door. I have a Terrie Hancock in the dining room.

GLENN ADAMSON: But in terms of this collection of quilts, it was really conceived as more traditional.

FLEUR BRESLER: Absolutely.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, it—and it was the first time that, either consciously or unconsciously, there were very set parameters, and the parameters were that it was to be a very small collection, because quilts take up a lot of space, and that what I was attempting to do was to get a premier example of either the technique or the genre. And with the exception of a glazed wool and a traditional Hawaiian quilt, I succeeded.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, those were two on your list that you never managed to acquire?

FLEUR BRESLER: I never—no.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: And that collection now lives at the Mint Museum.

FLEUR BRESLER: That's at the Mint Museum. It went—the show was in 2003, and by my standards it's a small collection. It was thirty-some—was about 38 objects.

GLENN ADAMSON: But each one exemplary of a particular type or technique? [00:28:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes, with the exception of—there were multiple Pennsylvania Amish.

GLENN ADAMSON: And did you get to meet other quilt collectors?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: And what is that scene like?

FLEUR BRESLER: They're very clannish. They are very giving. I've had no contact with them, Glenn, since the early 2000s. That may have changed, and it may have become a lot more competitive, but in my day it wasn't.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, it was really a group of likeminded collectors who were also philanthropic with their collections?

FLEUR BRESLER: I did not have much of a contact with anybody that gave collections. It was more with—it was with makers.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, I see. So, you mean giving to one another and to quilt makers? I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: And once a month I still meet with what I call my mini-group. We are down to a bridge table. Okay? There are three widows and one non-widow, and we're a very interesting collective.

GLENN ADAMSON: And have known each other for a long time.

FLEUR BRESLER: We've known each other for almost 30 years. One is a former—one was a former nurse whose husband was head of Indian Affairs, and they lived on a reservation in the Dakotas. The second one married a fellow Japanese, former samurai family, and she was a school child during World War Two and lived through the atomic bombs. And the third one's husband was our security director at the Russian embassy in—rather, the American embassy in Russia during the Cold War. [00:30:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Fascinating. Can you give me their names, just so we have them on the record?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, we have Yoko Sawanobori; we have Nancy Johnson; and Francie Parrack.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: And Francie's husband, who's retired as a security person, now gives tours at the CIA Museum, which I didn't know had a museum.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah, I just heard that myself recently.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. So, last question about the quilt collection and that interest. Were you also able to meet contemporary quilt makers that were working in a traditional way?

FLEUR BRESLER: Only with the quilt show that we did at the Renwick.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. So, only a limited amount.

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: And—

FLEUR BRESLER: I've met Carolyn Mazloomi.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And do you have thoughts about what are similar and different between the contemporary studio craft world and the world of the traditional quilt makers?

FLEUR BRESLER: I think technique is similar in both instances, but as far as concept, totally different. [00:32:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: So, the intention is completely different.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And what about the social aspect of it?

FLEUR BRESLER: That I don't really know. My only association there has been with traditional quilt makers, because the three that are still in my mini-group, if they make quilts at all—and to a degree they still are—they're still doing traditional patterns.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, you're judged in some ways on the amount of—

FLEUR BRESLER: There's a line, a definite line of demarcation between contemporary quilt makers and traditional quilt makers.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. So, in the traditional case, the standard of judgement is about how ably you are able to execute certain—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —techniques and motifs.

FLEUR BRESLER: No, it's still on technique.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: Very much technique. It has gotten away from counting how many quilting stitches to the inch, but clearly, there's far more of a focus on your sewing skills than the concept.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, it's more objective and less subjective, maybe.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. So, would you like to take a break now, or do you want to keep carrying on?

FLEUR BRESLER: I can carry on.

GLENN ADAMSON: Great. Okay, so let's now get to the great moment when you saw the Jacobson collection at the Renwick Gallery, which was, I believe, 1986.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, first, can you just tell that story about that moment of discovery?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, it was raining.

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: I was in the area of the Renwick, obviously I didn't have an umbrella, and I went into the Renwick to get in out of the rain. And one of the guards said, you know, "There's a new show upstairs." So, I went upstairs, and it was the Edward Jacobson collection, and I was just smitten with wood in that many colors and that many patterns. [00:34:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: So, this was a collection of contemporary wood art.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, I would, you know—

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: — you could call it—I would call Moulthrop and those—[laughs]—yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: And mostly turned objects, but also—

FLEUR BRESLER: They were—no, I think they were all—I think the original Jacobson collection—they were all turned.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, some element of turning.

FLEUR BRESLER: No, they were all turned.

GLENN ADAMSON: Had you been to the Renwick regularly before that?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, if there was a show that sounded at all interesting, yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: But this show had a particular resonance for you?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: What do you think—

FLEUR BRESLER: I was smitten.

GLENN ADAMSON: —what do you think it was that made you fall in love like that?

FLEUR BRESLER: —it was the color of the wood and the patterns which, you know, strictly was nature.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right. So, the way that the artist could find those—

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, you know—

GLENN ADAMSON: —patterns in the material.

FLEUR BRESLER: —I don't even think I was aware that the artist had a heck of a lot to do with how the—in other words, I was not at all aware that you had to center it on the lathe in a certain way to get the patterns to circle a piece. I just was fascinated with the fact that wood had grain.

GLENN ADAMSON: And all of these different colors and different—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —patterns, and the different qualities of the timbers.

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. [00:36:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: And I had this insatiable urge to take those covers off and to touch it.

GLENN ADAMSON: And I'm under the impression that you didn't necessarily connect it to the decoy collection—

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: —but it was two separate—

FLEUR BRESLER: No, because you obliterate the wood.

GLENN ADAMSON: —yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: But it was—

GLENN ADAMSON: By painting over it.

FLEUR BRESLER: —yeah, by painting over it. But still, it was wood. But in decoys you specifically go for wood that has little or no pattern. In other words, you use basswood, for instance.

GLENN ADAMSON: Something very stable and easy to carve.

FLEUR BRESLER: Stable and easy to carve and with little or no grain.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right, whereas this was completely the opposite.

FLEUR BRESLER: Whereas this, you were going in the opposite direction, and you were looking for the grain. But I clearly associated it with not manmade but nature-made in that this was something that was intrinsic to the wood itself.

GLENN ADAMSON: And what about the forms, particularly the vessel forms that you were—

FLEUR BRESLER: They were all vessel forms. I don't think there was anything in the Jacobson collection that really wasn't.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, did that strike you as being important at the time?

FLEUR BRESLER: No. No. The shape had little or no resonance. No, it was the color and the

patterns.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. And so, you fell in love with this group of objects, and then what did you do about it?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, it wasn't too long after that when I went to Atlanta. My oldest daughter was living in Atlanta. She had become involved in the puppetry theater in Atlanta, and they were doing performances at the Atlanta Arts Festival. And the Atlanta Arts Festival in those days was in the spring in Piedmont Park, and she was living close to Piedmont Park, in the center of Atlanta, and she had put me up in a hotel very close by so that we could walk over to Piedmont Park. And there was also, Glenn, a tie-in then, and I don't know what it was, between the puppetry theater, which was in an old school down there, and the High Museum. There was some children's program tie there. And I think it either was right after—is it Meyers who did the first major addition down there that was all white? [00:38:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Richard Meier.

FLEUR BRESLER: Meier. They were children's programs. My daughter was tied in with the puppetry theater and children's programs at the High, because my daughter taught children with behavior and learning disabilities.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: So, we went over to Piedmont Park for the festival, and they had exhibitors. And there were turned wood pieces. [00:40:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, I see. So, you reconnected suddenly with the same medium—

FLEUR BRESLER: So, I reconnected, and I bought that first piece that I showed you.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yes, can you describe it? We were just looking at it earlier.

FLEUR BRESLER: His name is Bill Hildebrand. Never seen or heard from him since. Absolutely, it looks like a piece of Native American pottery.

GLENN ADAMSON: But done in wood, different colors—

FLEUR BRESLER: Done in wood.

GLENN ADAMSON: —of wood.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. But shape-wise, definitely a pottery shape, and the band around it with the pattern is clearly a reference to a Native American pattern.

GLENN ADAMSON: And when you bought it did you realize that what you were looking at was the polychromatic turning technique, where the timbers are glued together in a certain pattern and then turned on a lathe? No idea?

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: No, absolutely not. I liked the color, I liked the shape, and I'm sure it was

inexpensive.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. So, again, not risking too much on the acquisition front.

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no. Fast forward. As I told you in casual conversation, the next piece was a different shape. The first piece was squatty; next piece was tall. And, knowing nothing about what I was doing, it—I wouldn't have known what an occlusion was from fly to the moon.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: But, you know, something shape-wise and color contrast spoke to me.

GLENN ADAMSON: And who made that second piece?

FLEUR BRESLER: His name is [. . . Knud Øland –FB].

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. And when you say it has an inclusion, you mean it has a—it's probably, what? A sapwood inclusion of a different color that you can see?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. Also, on the other side—

GLENN ADAMSON: On the back of it as well.

FLEUR BRESLER: —it does have a split.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: And it does still have the label on the bottom that says, "Campbell School."

GLENN ADAMSON: So, that's the John C. Campbell Folk School—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —in North Carolina?

FLEUR BRESLER: Absolutely. I—

GLENN ADAMSON: So, did you buy it there?

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: It was made there, though?

FLEUR BRESLER: It—well, no. He was an artist there. He was at the Atlanta Arts Festival demonstrating and selling.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see. Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: So, somewhere I may even—I think I even have a picture of him in his sweater and his knitted cap, turning. And I had no idea what Campbell School was either.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: Fast forward. Still collecting quilts. My daughter had an operation for something,

and the hospital was right across—it was on Peachtree Street—this was a couple years later—and on the corner was a store that was named "And Granny Taught Us How," and it was a quilt store. And at lunchtime I took a break from seeing my daughter and wanted some fresh air, and I walked out, and I crossed the street, and I went into "Granny Taught Us How" and sort of looked at the quilts and stuff. And when I came out—and this was a highly cluttered store—I noticed that the store next to it was exactly the opposite. It had these very pristine windows, with very minimal objects in it, but they were turned wood. And it was the Great American Gallery. [00:44:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: It was Martha Connell.

GLENN ADAMSON: Martha Connell, yeah. The great, late wood art dealer, yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: Right. And I wandered in, and this steel magnolia, dripping-Southern-charm lady —

GLENN ADAMSON: Like that, yeah?

FLEUR BRESLER: —came out. And, "Could I help you?" And I said that I just wanted to look around, and she said fine. And apparently, I had hit just as she had finished a show, and I bought two pieces. I bought a Dale Nish and a Bruce Mitchell. I bought the Dale Nish because it had those funny little holes in it that worms had made. Again, it was nature, and I was fascinated. And then the Bruce Mitchell piece went off at an angle. And they had two zeros. And I had not the faintest idea who Bruce Mitchell was, and I certainly didn't know who Dale Nish was. But after I bought the two pieces, she said, "Would you like to come in the back room?" [00:46:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Dangerous question.

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: I didn't know it then, and I didn't know I had passed the test. I had bought something, no questions asked. And she started opening up cabinets, and that was my first exposure to Rude Osolnik and the plywood pieces. And I thanked her—oh, and she also opened the cabinets out in the other room that were below the open shelves.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Okay. So, I would visit my daughter fairly regularly and each time would then go back, but this funny piece that was plywood kept sticking in my mind. And my oldest son, Sidney, was going to be visiting his sister for something in Atlanta, and I said, "Will you go to this gallery? Here's \$1,000. I want one of those bowls that has concentric rings." [00:48:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: And this—just to explain, this is because the plywood is oriented with its grain —

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —vertically, and then Osolnik would mount it and then turn through it, which exposes a concentric ring pattern.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. Okay, so—okay, he's been given his marching orders and his limitations. I

get a call; it's \$3,000.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, really?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. Okay. "Do you still—?" You know, "Have you lifted—[laughs]—the limitations?" And I said yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, was that a big moment for you to commit that kind of—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —money on an object?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Had you been spending that much money on anything else prior to that?

FLEUR BRESLER: Quilts, yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Quilts, yes—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —but those are historic artifacts, so that's a different thought process, maybe.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. And subsequently I bought the modern quilts from Miss Martha.

GLENN ADAMSON: From Martha Connell—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —also?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. Yeah. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: So, that was your first, let's say, major purchase, or what felt major to you.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And I still have the piece.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: At what point did you start to get to know the makers in the wood art field? Did that also come early?

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no. That again was somewhat accidental. At that point, the pattern was pretty much that a couple times a year I would buy, and if I was buying a squatty piece one time, it would be a taller piece the next time.

GLENN ADAMSON: The same idea. [00:50:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: It was—I mean, there was no rhyme or reason or logic. And I still didn't look upon it as something that was going to be a lifelong pursuit or that it was going to become a major financial commitment.

GLENN ADAMSON: And were you still buying mainly from Martha Connell?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. Martha was absolutely—I don't know if Veena Singh was showing here simultaneously or not. I think Veena came—Veena came a little bit later, I think, and she was the only one that really was doing it here. The acceleration and the total change in the wood collection occurred when Arrowmont had a weekend where they were honoring Rude, and the honoring Rude was to establish a scholarship in his wife's—deceased wife's name, in Daphne's name. And I think I must have heard about it through Sansar, which was Veena's gallery, and I think that was the late '90s. And Veena and I went down together—I don't know where she stayed; I stayed on campus in one of the older houses, which I discovered was the cut-through, but then I learned to lock the door. [00:52:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: The cut-through—in other words, people would just pass through on their way from point A to point B?

FLEUR BRESLER: You got it. Yeah, you got it. There was a door on both sides of the room.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: I didn't realize that the door nearest to the campus was the cut-through—[laughs]—when I all of a sudden had an elderly turner going through.

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: I quickly learned to lock the door.

GLENN ADAMSON: But that was the first time you met a large number of turners in person?

FLEUR BRESLER: That was the first time, yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: And it was a big gathering. It was a good couple hundred.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And it was an auction to seed the scholarship for Daphne Osolnik. And other than Veena, I knew no one. And we went out to lunch in scenic downtown Gatlinburg, and there was this little man with a couple of other people, and I don't know who introduced—I guess Veena did—and it was Rude. And that was really basically the first turner of note that I met. And it was, like, a couple-day thing, and they had an auction. [00:54:00] And I was all the way in the back of the auditorium with Veena. And a what I called doughnut of—a Moulthrop doughnut, an Ed Moulthrop doughnut—came up for auction, and it was about yea big.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, about eight inches in diameter, maybe?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. It was small. And somehow, I knew by then that he made the doughnuts,

and I think I had seen a very large doughnut. I had found a second gallery, which was the Okun Gallery out in Santa Fe, and I had been to that gallery. That was the second—that—well, Martha was, I think, the first, then Veena, because she was still in D.C. then; and then I went to Santa Fe for something and went to the Okun Gallery and had seen one of these very large doughnuts, which I did not have room for.

So, it was this little one. And I'm in the back of the room, and most of the pieces were going for two zeroes, and I started to bid on this little doughnut. And there was somebody bidding against me in the front of the room, and I got carried away, and \$3,000 later, knowing I had woefully overpaid, I won. Towards the end of the—it was towards the end of the auction. The auction's over maybe 10 minutes after that, and this little man comes up to me, and he points his finger at me—and it's Rude—and he said, "I wanted that piece." [00:56:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: He was the other one bidding?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And I was so taken back that the only thing I could think of to say was, "But it's going to a good home," at which point he says to me, "Well, I'll just ask Ed to make me another one." And I knew damn well at that moment he had deliberately run it up.

GLENN ADAMSON: Sure. Of course, because he was raising money for the event, right?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. It was appraised for five when I gave it to the Renwick. [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: For \$5,000?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. Maybe—

FLEUR BRESLER: It's at the Renwick.

[They laugh.]

GLENN ADAMSON: So, at that point, did you—

FLEUR BRESLER: And at that point, I was out of the dark and—

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: —a whole group of people realized that it was this crazy lady—

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, I see, it was like—

FLEUR BRESLER: —who was going to overpay—

GLENN ADAMSON: —your cover was blown.

FLEUR BRESLER: —and had started to collect.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, people actually started coming to you?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see. And so—

FLEUR BRESLER: Before that I was totally—I had bought, but I was totally under the radar.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, at what point would you have met Albert LeCoff, then?

FLEUR BRESLER: I met Alfred in—Albert in 1992.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, earlier than that—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —okay. Tell me about that.

FLEUR BRESLER: That was through Peter Lamb and Lucy Scardino, and they were early collectors. Peter was a turner. Lucy was a decorator, but Lucy collected, and theirs is the seed collection at the Renwick. [00:58:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: That's right.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. And I don't know where I met them, but went to their house—

GLENN ADAMSON: Are they Washingtonians?

FLEUR BRESLER: They were Washingtonians at that point. They lived off of MacArthur Boulevard.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And they had a collection.

GLENN ADAMSON: And did that come about because he was a turner and was interested in it for the—

FLEUR BRESLER: I guess so, or—I don't really know.

GLENN ADAMSON: But at any rate, they introduced you to Albert.

FLEUR BRESLER: Lucy was a decorator, yeah, and clearly, you know, she had an aesthetic.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And the collection, as far as I know, was mutually theirs.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see. And they introduced you to Albert?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, they introduced me to going up to a symposium—

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: —at—well, it wasn't at the Center. It was the *Challenge IV* show, and it—I never went to the *Challenge IV* show. That was shown somewhere over by the river—

GLENN ADAMSON: In Philadelphia.

FLEUR BRESLER: —in Philadelphia. But they were doing a symposium in conjunction with it, and one of the speakers was Irv Lipton.

GLENN ADAMSON: The collector.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right. So, this was actually before the Arrowmont visit, is that right? You said this was '92.

FLEUR BRESLER: It could have been simultaneous.

GLENN ADAMSON: Around the same time, maybe?

FLEUR BRESLER: It could have been around the same time.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: I don't really know. I'm pretty sure, though, the *Challenge IV* was, like, 1992.

GLENN ADAMSON: [The show was at the Port of History Museum in 1991. –GA] And you met Albert at that event? [01:00:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, I met Albert at that event. Either Peter or Lucy was on the Center board—I think it may have been Peter—

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —and he suggested that I join the board. And by that time, my—I and my aesthetic had clearly gotten out of the two-zero range.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: And I, at least at that point, had enough sense to realize that I wasn't going to go backwards, and that this, though it was still very much an affordable thing to collect—

GLENN ADAMSON: Relatively speaking.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, in comparison to glass, absolutely.

GLENN ADAMSON: Sure.

FLEUR BRESLER: That there was no way that I was going to be drawn to lesser objects.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And by then, you know, I had discovered Bill Hunter; I had discovered Giles—

GLENN ADAMSON: Gilson.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. And that my aesthetic was going to be expensive.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, and also it was becoming a more recognizable thing to collect.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You weren't the only one.

FLEUR BRESLER: No, and therefore, if there was a market—

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —there was going to be value, and if there was going to be value, then they were going to try to make a living off of what they made.

GLENN ADAMSON: Just as a brief interlude, was Charlie very supportive of this collecting? Was this—does this change the allowance—

FLEUR BRESLER: No. [01:02:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: —situation? No?

FLEUR BRESLER: No. Absolutely not.

GLENN ADAMSON: This is really all you?

FLEUR BRESLER: It's very clear this was my collection.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Unlike the Masons, for instance, who—or the Waterburys—

GLENN ADAMSON: This is Arthur and Jane Mason—

FLEUR BRESLER: —yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —and Ruth and Dave Waterbury, also art collectors.

FLEUR BRESLER: That they both had to agree—

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —on a purchase.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Absolutely not. He had nothing to do with the purchasing. He had not come from a background of art at all. He was colorblind, and he absolutely did not trust his own taste at all.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: There are a few pieces in the collection that Charlie purchased, but they were purchased specifically—he knew I had already said that I liked it, or that it was something that I had admired, and it was not available, and he asked an artist to make one.

GLENN ADAMSON: As a gift to you?

FLEUR BRESLER: As a gift.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: But out of the blue, absolutely not. And while we're on that subject, there was only once that he ever said, "That's not coming into this house."

GLENN ADAMSON: Did that actually mean you didn't purchase it?

FLEUR BRESLER: I wasn't going to anyhow. It was something that arrived.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: We needn't name the artist. I didn't like it.

GLENN ADAMSON: You didn't like it either?

FLEUR BRESLER: I didn't like it either. [00:02:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: So there was no conflict there.

FLEUR BRESLER: There was absolutely no conflict at all.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, financially, Fleur, did you have enough resources to be able to collect what you wanted, or was it always a feeling of, you know, "Do I dare spend that much money on this thing?"

FLEUR BRESLER: It was more like a shell game. [Laughs.] I learned very early you could buy on time.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] In other words, put down a deposit, and then give money—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —over time.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, if it was something that was fairly expensive. And I became very adept at saving out of my allowance, and I can thank worldwide gambling casinos for a number of items.

GLENN ADAMSON: How so?

FLEUR BRESLER: A couple times a year we would take junkets. My husband found gambling a very

relaxing activity, and he was good at it.

GLENN ADAMSON: Really? [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And we had a very interesting arrangement. I was an atrocious gambler. I hated losing money; I didn't gamble. I learned very quickly that it was not my thing, and I learned it in Atlantic City when you had to knock on the door, and they looked at you through the peephole to let you in, that it looked easier than it really was—and I didn't like losing—but that I was more than willing to stand there for multiple hours. And my husband was a very controlled gambler, a very good gambler. [00:04:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: What would he play?

FLEUR BRESLER: Primarily—well, early on it was craps. As he got older and less healthy, it was blackjack, because you could sit down. He set aside X amount he was going to gamble; once he went past that he would pass me chips from his winning, and once they got passed to me he never got them back.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, you could use that to collect.

FLEUR BRESLER: And that was my pin money.

GLENN ADAMSON: Wow, fascinating.

FLEUR BRESLER: Any other collectors that collected on gambling winnings? [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: That's fascinating.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Can we go back to the—well, now it's the Center for Art in Wood, but when you joined it would have been the Wood Turning Center.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, you joined the board then at some point in the 1990s.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay, can you describe a little bit about that organization as it was then?

FLEUR BRESLER: It was very informal. We basically met at Bruce Kaiser's house, which was fascinating and a riot of color.

GLENN ADAMSON: Also a collector.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes, and whose wife was also a collector. [00:06:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Have you ever met Marina?

GLENN ADAMSON: Yes, and I've been to the house, so—

FLEUR BRESLER: Okay.

GLENN ADAMSON: —yes, it is a polychrome, wondrous environment.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: I've known a few people who have walked out the door, because they couldn't take the—

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah, it's a lot.

FLEUR BRESLER: —sensory overload.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And I spent a number of nights there, too. But we would meet at Bruce's. It was quite informal. Bruce, as far as I'm concerned, had an extremely fine eye and aesthetic, and I clearly absorbed his collection—

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: —as far as the artists he collected and his aesthetic. And it was a learning—very much a learning experience.

GLENN ADAMSON: What was your own role on the board?

FLEUR BRESLER: At the very beginning, just as a member. I think I became, rather quickly, vice president, because I don't think anybody else really wanted it. As far as becoming president, they had never had one other than Bruce, and I think at that point behind the scenes—but I wouldn't swear to it—that there was clearly a movement on the part of someone such as our friend Charles Hummel that you can't have a viable organization that's only had one president, and that, you know, you really need to have a line of succession. [00:08:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And I think at that point, you know, Bruce was very happy to have somebody take it over. At that point, I was beginning to be known in the wood turning world as somebody that was collecting, and that the Center was poised to have to become more of an establishment type organization. And at that point, Tina just said, "You've got to get out."

GLENN ADAMSON: This is Tina LeCoff, Albert's—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —wife.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. We would also occasionally meet at Albert's, and, literally, she didn't have a home.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah. Well, the Wood Turning Center was actually their house—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —in those days.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, the collection—

FLEUR BRESLER: I mean, that's where the collection was.

GLENN ADAMSON: —the archive was there, yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. And not only did she have the collection there, the archives there, she had artists going in and out all the time.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah, and curators like me.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Because when we worked on the Yale / Wood Turning Center exhibition, *Wood Turning in North America Since 1930*—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —[Albert and I did all our conversations and work together there. —GA]

FLEUR BRESLER: But she didn't really have a home at that point. And at that point, my children were older. My husband had long since left the family business; he had become successful as a builder. Our resources were considerably more liquid—

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] [00:10:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: —at that point. Though my allowance had gone up some, I still didn't have huge discretionary funds to put into a collection.

GLENN ADAMSON: Or, for that matter, to just give philanthropically.

FLEUR BRESLER: Didn't do that, no.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: I was not—we were not—we only did one philanthropic thing that I would say was at all major before Charlie died. That was not his thing.

GLENN ADAMSON: What was the one thing?

FLEUR BRESLER: We underwrote the Secretary of State's office at the U.S. Department of State, and that was strictly based on the fact that there had been some sort of settlement with the Metro over the subway, which came up right in the middle of our shopping center in southwest Washington.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Because my husband was involved with the first urban renewal in southwest Washington.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Oh, I take that back. There were two—Charlie did two things during his life. [00:12:00] We underwrote the Secretary of State's office at U.S. Department of State, and when I say that, that was architecturally; it was not aesthetically. And the other was through another business association we did give \$100,000 one-time to the National Gallery.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: But I'm sure—I'm positive that that was a quid pro quo. [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: I see. Whereas after Charlie passed away you had the freedom to give philanthropically to the organizations that you had come to know—

FLEUR BRESLER: That's right.

GLENN ADAMSON: —through your collecting. Okay. Just to finish up with the—

FLEUR BRESLER: Also, in Charlie's will a foundation was set—a small foundation was set up.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, that became a mechanism by which—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —you could give.

FLEUR BRESLER: But we had no foundation in his lifetime.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see. So, just to finish up the story with—now it's the Center for Art in Wood—can you just say a little bit about moving that collection and organization down to Cherry Street in Philadelphia, to the new facility?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, it was no option. [Laughs.] Tina said, "You've got to get out"—you know. And the space—the rental space was found next to the—it was Caviar? Yeah, the Caviar store. Yeah. And I was president at that point, and it was basically, Albert did it; Albert arranged for it. I learned early on that Albert was an ulcer-giver, not an ulcer-getter. [00:14:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.] It takes both types, probably.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, I had a child that was—that had some of the same qualities that Albert had. In other words, Albert works backwards. He starts with the conclusion—[laughs]—and then goes in the other direction with little or no sense of what it is going to cost.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. So, practically speaking, he often starts with a great idea and then tries to furiously fundraise for it and get it to happen by hook or by crook.

FLEUR BRESLER: Oh, but he's already started the idea.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah, yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. No, my favorite story of Albert was I get this phone call, and he excitedly announces that the catalog has just come off the press, and it is absolutely beautiful; we are doing this show in collaboration with the Furniture Society, and it's double the budget.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: But he's holding the catalog, and it's beautiful. But I'm going to have to call Andrew Glasgow and tell him it's doubled. And where are we going to get the money?

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: Okay.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, were you involved with not only helping to support the Center ultimately, but also doing fundraising on their behalf as—

FLEUR BRESLER: Oh, yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —part of your role?

FLEUR BRESLER: Oh, yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Can you say a little bit about that? [00:16:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, I learned the hard way that the money had been spent, it was already a fait accompli, and that psychologically I'd better prepare myself at the beginning to know that we were going to spend double what he said it was going to be, and I'd better have some backup resources.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. So, you sort of built that in.

FLEUR BRESLER: There were a couple of times that I was very happy that—my family knew the Abramson family, and I could call Ron and say, "Help!"

GLENN ADAMSON: So, that's what I was wondering. In terms of the fundraising that you did, was it very much about friends you had made in the collecting community and other acquaintances? Is that—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —how you did it?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, who were the important supporters that you had allegiances to?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, Ron Abramson helped me out a couple of times. My own, at that point—some resources that I had myself, and, you know, other collectors.

GLENN ADAMSON: Did you work closely with Robyn Horn—

FLEUR BRESLER: Not then.

GLENN ADAMSON: —at that point?

FLEUR BRESLER: No. Robyn and I have developed a slightly informal relationship as far as fundraising is concerned far more recently.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: It's definite—well, philanthropically, we just didn't do philanthropy when my husband was alive, so it's definitely been since Charlie died, and it basically started with CCCD. [00:18:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: The Center for Craft, Creativity, and Design in Asheville.

FLEUR BRESLER: Which was, you know, rather odd, because, no—that isn't local. But as I've said before, I do have North Carolina roots.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah, and you also are involved with Penland.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right? And not so much the Campbell School, despite the label—

FLEUR BRESLER: No.

GLENN ADAMSON: —on the piece. [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Nothing with the Campbell School, no. My philanthropy in North Carolina has been Penland, CCCD, and the Mint, and my direct connection was the Mint.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: And my grandmother, my mother's mother, was one of three children. She had a sister and a brother. The brother stayed in Charlotte, and his family line was directly supportive of the Mint.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And Mike—well, Mike Blair still is, and is still in Charlotte, but there is a rather incestuous relationship in North Carolina in the arts community, particularly between Charlotte and Penland, because I'm also very, very distantly related to Jean McLaughlin.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, the former director of Penland.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, right. Okay. Small world.

FLEUR BRESLER: And, no—[laughs]—she has no Jewish blood at all.

GLENN ADAMSON: No. [00:20:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: But the brother's family became evangelical Christians, and the other sister's family became Quakers.

GLENN ADAMSON: From your family?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, maybe we'll get on to those other organizations in a moment, but is there anything else you want to say about the Center for Art in Wood and your involvement there?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, I'm glad to see there's a degree of stability there now, and it has become a lot more professional. And I am deeply indebted to Albert and to Charles Hummel. And in many cases Charles served sort of behind the scenes as a mentor to me.

GLENN ADAMSON: We should say Charles was a very learned curator at Winterthur—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —Museum in Delaware and came at it from the perspective of a historical decorative arts specialist but also somebody who knew a lot about nonprofit and museum management—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —and was involved with the *Wood Turning* show that I worked on that I mentioned earlier.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. So, he had a lot to offer.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes, and also, when we, you know, go back a little bit, the first collection that I ever gave away was my quilt collection, which went to the Mint Museum. It went to the Mint Museum because I had first met Mark Leach at the Center.

GLENN ADAMSON: Who was the director of the Mint at the time.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. And he had curated a show at the Center. And when I became a docent at the Renwick, one of the first shows we did there was the Michael Lucero show, and that was his show from the Mint. And I reconnected and said to him, would they be interested in a quilt collection. And he said, "When can I see it?" and I said, "Tomorrow." And he came, and that was how the quilt collection went to the Mint. [00:22:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And Charles was very instrumental in guiding Charlie and I in our first direct business relationship with a museum and guided us through the process of giving the collection.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, through your connection with the Center, do you have a perspective on the overall change in that field, which started as wood turning and now we tend to call it art in wood or wood art, and what's happened in the time since you first became involved with it?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, it has become far more sculptural, first of all, now, clearly. The vessel almost doesn't exist anymore, and I date back to—clearly, it was the vessel. And the broadening of what

we consider wood art has expanded tremendously, and hopefully I'm flexible enough, even in my old age, to be open to new materials, to new forms, to a new outlook on what is art. [00:24:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Because your own taste must have changed tremendously, given that your first exposure—you really thought these were works of nature, and now we're talking about this multimedia, exploratory, sculptural medium.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, it very—well, it's gone from almost a functional object, which a vessel was—and absolutely, my first objects were vessels in one form or another, which technically are functional.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: They may be of nonfunctional material, but the form is functional.

GLENN ADAMSON: Notionally functional, I guess.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. To now; we're concept. There is no function whatsoever to some of the things that are being made. I think I still base what I look at or what I like on how well it's made, meaning technique. Certainly, I am looking at the creative or the imaginative aspect of it. I don't think that's changed. But clearly what I'm bringing into the collection more recently has no reference whatsoever to a vessel.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Are there particular makers that you've had strong friendships with or learned the most from? [00:26:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, one thing I remember Irv Lipton saying at that first *Challenge IV* symposium was that if you find an artist that you like, buy—start off by buying two pieces, but two pieces that are dissimilar. And if you really like the artist, follow their career, even if they go through a period of work that you don't like. So, I do have a strange-looking piece of Bud Latven's.

GLENN ADAMSON: This is the one that he—where he was using papier-mâché—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —and silver and gold, looking nothing like his other work, pretty much?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. And it has no—you can't see it, but it has no opening. And there are maybe a half a dozen artists in the collection that that's pretty much what I have done.

GLENN ADAMSON: In other words, collected—

FLEUR BRESLER: I've collected them—

GLENN ADAMSON: —everything that they've—

FLEUR BRESLER: —from the very beginning of their career through—

GLENN ADAMSON: So, who would be on that list?

FLEUR BRESLER: —there.

GLENN ADAMSON: Bill Hunter?

FLEUR BRESLER: Bill Hunter is one.

GLENN ADAMSON: Bud Latven, who we just mentioned.

FLEUR BRESLER: Bud Latven. Janelle Jacobson. John Jordan. Todd Hoyer.

GLENN ADAMSON: David Ellsworth, maybe?

FLEUR BRESLER: David, yeah. Also, I have a large collection of Phil Weber's boxes, for instance. So, there is that—oh, and Norm Sartorius. Robyn Horn and I could do a complete Norm Sartorius show of probably every period he ever went through, because I have fifty-some pieces.

GLENN ADAMSON: When you're collecting an artist in that much depth, how much of it is about wanting to follow them artistically, and how much of it is about wanting to support them and make it possible for them to do their work? [00:28:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: It's a bit of both. There are a couple of instances, Glenn, in the show where I have bailed an artist out.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: But I've bailed them out in that I've purchased when they're not selling anything.

GLENN ADAMSON: And you're quite aware of that from them?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. It's very—they're—there's two instances.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And you also mentioned to me that there are artists who are not actually able to make a living in the field, and so they stopped making—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —in a couple of cases.

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: So, this is not an easy thing to do—

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no.

GLENN ADAMSON: —for the artists in many cases. I suppose that's one reason that you formed this organization called the Collectors of Wood Art with Robyn Horn and others.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, I was part of the original group that met at John and Robyn's. At that point, I chose not to become active. I was thoroughly involved with the Wood Turning Center at that point, and I thought it was a conflict. So, I've never been on their board. I have always belonged. I've always belonged at and above the straight membership level, but I've never been involved organization-wise.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But what do you perceive the goal of that group to be?

FLEUR BRESLER: I'm not sure. [Laughs.] I still think there's a conflict. They've gone more to the educational level so that there has not been an open conflict there, but I still in my heart of hearts

wonder why we have two organizations. [00:30:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: And I suppose with the AAW, the Association—

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, the AAW is—you know, they're makers.

GLENN ADAMSON: They're makers and—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —amateurs, yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. So, that's very different.

FLEUR BRESLER: That's very different. I don't see the same conflict there.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And they're a lot of hobbyists, and they continue to grow. I see both the Center and the Collectors of Wood Arts memberships as stagnant.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. You know, I was going to ask you about that later, but maybe we can pick up that point now. It seems to me that there was this kind of golden generation of collectors from, let's say, maybe the '70s but certainly the '80s, right through the '90s, and then, just after 2000, that seems like the peak of it, and now there are a lot of collections that have been formed—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —and are very large in scale and are being given to museums, but that group doesn't seem to be replicating themselves. So, do you have thoughts about—

FLEUR BRESLER: No, and though we're giving to museums, there's a limit to what museums will take, and we're all in the same boat, stuck.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And the upcoming "putting their toe in the water because they're being forced" of the first part of the Lipton collection doesn't bode well. [00:32:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Is it because that's gone to auction, you mean?

FLEUR BRESLER: A hundred and some odd pieces are now going—are now on the website for auction, and it's a very hit-or-miss thing. It's not something that Kevin wanted to do. The Lipton children have insisted. He's fought them—

GLENN ADAMSON: Kevin being—

FLEUR BRESLER: Hmm?

GLENN ADAMSON: Kevin?

FLEUR BRESLER: Wallace.

GLENN ADAMSON: Wallace, who was formerly at del Mano—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes, yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: —is that right?

FLEUR BRESLER: And now is at the Beatrice Wood [Center for the Arts].

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, right.

FLEUR BRESLER: He's now director at Beatrice Wood, and he is the one that catalogued Irv's collection and is working with his—the children and with the wife, and they've become insistent that they want to liquidate.

GLENN ADAMSON: And Irv is someone who did collect artists and definitely gave them a lot of support as well.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, he bought good, bad, and indifferent.

GLENN ADAMSON: That's right.

FLEUR BRESLER: He bought en masse. And I think there are about 130 items—

GLENN ADAMSON: On auction?

FLEUR BRESLER: —on this first auction, and no reserves. And clearly something Kevin has made abundantly clear he didn't want to do, and it's—we'll see what's going to happen. But I think it's going to be a fire sale.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. Well, clearly, this generation of collectors needs to find ways to support the artists that they've collected and also make sure that their collections can be preserved for the future. So, how have you approached that yourself, making sure that there's a kind of legacy?
[00:34:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: What I have done is in my will each of my five children, by rote, get 25 pieces, and in some instances, they've already listed what they want. My nine grandchildren—and, now, I have not done anything yet; I have a great-grandchild—will each get 15 pieces, and in some instances, those lists are already in. My youngest daughter, Carol, is my executor. She's collected all these lists. I have then gone to the Wood—well, I went to the Renwick first, then the Mint Museum, the Asheville Museum, and the Center for Art in Wood. They have all put in their lists. They've all been cross-referenced against the children and the grandchildren.

It was made abundantly clear to the museums that they would be considered in order of when we contacted them and when their lists came in. Carol has all of those; those are all cross-referenced.
[00:36:00] Then everything—if any of my children want anything additional after their 25 or 15, and after it's gone to the museums, at market value, they can purchase. Then everything else goes into our foundation, and Carol then will slowly—and not flood the market—dispose of it, and I have named three charities that will get the proceeds. But one of the charities is the Smithsonian American Art [Museum].

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative], which is the parent organization of the Renwick.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: And I have indicated what I would like those funds to support, and my wishes are that they go into an educational fund and that they be used for educational programs or docent activities, and I would prefer it be centered on D.C. schoolchildren.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. Speaking of the Renwick, of course, there's also a gift that's already been made there of, I believe, 66 pieces.

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: And that happened a few years ago now—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —and there's a book that—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —covers that collection. Can you tell a little bit of the story of how that came to be?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, the first collection to go was the quilt collection, and that was back in 2002—well, approximately 2003. My husband had nothing to do with any purchase of any quilt. He developed separation anxiety. [00:38:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Really? Did that surprise you?

FLEUR BRESLER: It floored me.

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: It didn't surprise me; it floored me. Okay. [Laughs.] All right. Prior to that, I had met with Ken Trapp, and Ken had come to the apartment, and I had said, "You're totally free to pick anything you want, but I have the right to say no."

GLENN ADAMSON: Veto.

FLEUR BRESLER: Veto. And the veto will be based on whether some family member has mentioned that they would wish to have the piece. So, Ken picked out 60 pieces, and our arrangement was going to be that over a three-year period 20 pieces at a time would go to the Renwick. Well, Charlie developed separation anxiety, and I wasn't going to rock the boat. So, it just sat, but it sat with a little sticker on the bottom that said one, two, or three, meaning first group, second group, third group.

GLENN ADAMSON: And those were priorities that Ken had made?

FLEUR BRESLER: These—well, he—

GLENN ADAMSON: Or requests?

FLEUR BRESLER: I don't know if we had picked out what he wanted in group one or two or—I don't know. But we had divided it 20, 20, and 20.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, I see, the three phases of the— [00:40:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, the three phases.

GLENN ADAMSON: —got you.

FLEUR BRESLER: One, two, and three. And there it sat, and I was not about to rock the boat after this quilt bit. Then one day it's announced that Ken is going to retire, so I thought, "Well, I'd better hit this head on." So, I said to Charlie, you know, "We've either got to fish or cut bait." "Okay, if you really want to." So, at that point, I said to Ken that, you know, it was time for some of these things to leave, and at that point, he said, "Well, you know, I'm leaving. I think we'd better have Betsy come." That was Betsy Broun, his boss, who was not a crafts person. And up comes Betsy, and six hours later, because she was kind of fascinated, we have looked at the 60 pieces, and she has vetoed one.

GLENN ADAMSON: Just one?

FLEUR BRESLER: Just one. But she has fallen in love with a Rolly Munro piece which I said, "But he's from New Zealand."

GLENN ADAMSON: And they only collect American art, of course.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. "Can't we make him an American?" I said, "No, Betsy, we can't."

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Okay. So, Betsy says yes. So, I think it had been close to eight years—

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh.

FLEUR BRESLER: —from the time we picked till they finally went, and at that point I said that I was giving them in honor of Ken, because he was leaving. But it was actually 59 pieces, and because it had been so long—and at that point, Ken was going to curate the show, though he had left; we had done the interview, and he all of a sudden said, "No, I ain't—you know, I ain't doing it." He's now back in Arkansas. And this young temporary employee with a bow tie has arrived, and it's dumped in his lap. [00:42:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: And this would be that whippersnapper Nicholas Bell.

FLEUR BRESLER: That's right. [Laughs.] And I had already gotten into a little bit of controversy with the docents, who were very much askance of this young kid with the bow tie. And I'm saying, "Anybody that has been trained by Brock Jobe and Charles Hummel—"

GLENN ADAMSON: At Winterthur.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes, at Winterthur—is going to be good. "Come on, leave him alone." So, Nicholas has this—has his first project. I don't think Nicholas had ever seen a piece of turned wood. So, the first thing he does is he goes to the AAW, at which point I have called Albert, and I said, "Do

me a favor. There's this young kid arriving wearing a bow tie who's going to stand out like a sore thumb. Take care of it." [00:44:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: And he literally went there and saw people—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —turning and learned about—

FLEUR BRESLER: Oh, yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —the craft and—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —I never heard that story from him. That's—

FLEUR BRESLER: Oh, yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —fascinating.

FLEUR BRESLER: Oh, yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: And then he did a fantastic job with—

FLEUR BRESLER: Oh, no, he did an absolutely fantastic job. But because of this interim between my husband going ballistic and the pieces actually coming to the Renwick, something didn't make sense, and what didn't make sense was these were all late '90s.

GLENN ADAMSON: There was nothing recent to really—

FLEUR BRESLER: There was nothing recent, nor was there anything early. There was this '80s and '90s aesthetic, but nothing before and nothing after. And that's how it came to pass that the entire collection was in the back of the book.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: That was to give it continuity.

GLENN ADAMSON: And also, a few more pieces did get added to the gift, correct? Because it was —

FLEUR BRESLER: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —and it grew a little bit.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. There were other things ultimately added—

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —but if you look at the catalog for the Bresler collection, it's a basically a 20-year time period.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right. So, what thoughts do you have about the

Renwick today now that the renovation has happened, and this amazing show *WONDER* opened at the building, which was a totally different direction?

FLEUR BRESLER: Have you been to the Renwick?

GLENN ADAMSON: I have not seen *Burning Man* yet.

FLEUR BRESLER: You've got to go.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.] It's—[inaudible]—the moment.

FLEUR BRESLER: It's already surpassed.

GLENN ADAMSON: That's incredible.

FLEUR BRESLER: As of last Sunday, 66,000 people.

GLENN ADAMSON: Amazing. [00:46:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: I think from the point of view of—facilities-wise, we did an excellent renovation. Most people are not aware of what's behind those walls, which is basically where the \$30 million went. You would never have had *WONDER*, nor would you have *Burning Man* if we hadn't structurally done some very, very expensive things behind those walls.

GLENN ADAMSON: And when you say "we," what exactly was your involvement during the process of the renovation?

FLEUR BRESLER: I bought a gallery.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, philanthropic involvement, clearly.

FLEUR BRESLER: It was major philanthropic.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And I was instrumental in a couple of other major gift leads.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And were you also involved with the James Renwick Alliance?

FLEUR BRESLER: Gift? No. And it was made abundantly clear to them that they would not get anything from me, that I had already made my major commitment.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: And they didn't, and—

GLENN ADAMSON: I guess what I'm wondering, though, Fleur, is whether --

FLEUR BRESLER: —and that commitment of theirs has caused enormous problems.

GLENN ADAMSON: It has caused them enormous problems?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Because they overextended, or—?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: I see.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: What I was wondering, though, Fleur, was did you have an existing relationship with the James Renwick Alliance for this whole renovation project?

FLEUR BRESLER: I served—no, no. I served on their board at one point. I've been a member since very early on. I have very strong views about them— [00:48:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Can you say a little bit about that—

FLEUR BRESLER: —which they—

GLENN ADAMSON: —on tape?

FLEUR BRESLER: [Laughs.] I think they've outlived their usefulness.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Because?

FLEUR BRESLER: They are not attracting younger members. They're clearly in the same position as a lot of entities in that we are very elderly now; we no longer can take an active role in running them; and their major source of fundraising was an auction, which is dying on the vine, because we are over-collected.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: We are not buying, and the younger generation is not interested in objects. They're interested in things.

GLENN ADAMSON: Big difference.

FLEUR BRESLER: Huge, huge difference.

GLENN ADAMSON: I've never heard anyone put it that way. How would you distinguish between an object and a thing in that sense?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, an object is clearly—[laughs]—oh, gee. A thing is an experience. It's a dinner; it's a trip; it's a visit to behind the scenes. It's not—an object is something you possess. I guess that would be the only way I could explain it.

GLENN ADAMSON: As opposed to an experience.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, you have a major generational shift there.

FLEUR BRESLER: Huge.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. And artists, I guess, are making that shift as well, because so many artists are now getting involved in making experiences happen for the public instead of making objects to put on a shelf. [00:50:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: My grandchildren—and they're actually an exception because they're—they've been trained, and they're being bombarded by Grandma—if they do buy an object, they do not buy it with the idea that it's necessarily a long-term possession. It can be of the moment, and then they're going to go in a totally different direction and dispose of it. I mean, I do have three grandchildren who have bought objects, but whether that's for the long term or because it fits their aesthetic now I don't know.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, Fleur, there was one other organization I did want to ask you about, which is Penland—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —and your involvement there and your perception of what's happening there now. Obviously, Jean has retired; there's a new director coming in. What—can you just sort of chart your experiences there over the years?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, I find Penland unique, and I've never quite been able to put my finger on it. There's an atmosphere or a vibe there that's very different from any other experience I've ever had. Now, my family is not all of one mind. I may be going to Burning Man.

GLENN ADAMSON: To the actual festival?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Not to the Renwick, but to the real thing in the desert? [00:52:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no, to the desert.

GLENN ADAMSON: Okay. [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: For my ninety-second birthday, which will be during Burning Man.

GLENN ADAMSON: Fleur, that's amazing. I hope you get there. That's great.

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, it's definitely being worked upon. And the reason that I bring that up is that I understand, you know, that Burning Man definitely has its own vibe that it's known for. Penland has a vibe.

GLENN ADAMSON: Very much so.

FLEUR BRESLER: It's almost like—well, it's very down to earth, and it's almost like a family. And a couple years ago, Tim Tate, who's involved with Penland, encouraged a good-sized group from the Renwick Alliance to go, and there were a couple people that were miserable. This absolutely was not their thing.

GLENN ADAMSON: I was there. I remember they wanted to leave the auction dinner early. I remember.

FLEUR BRESLER: There were a couple that got into it, and I can't exactly explain the personality

that does and the one that doesn't, but there's definitely—you either are thoroughly happy and comfortable there, or you're utterly miserable.

GLENN ADAMSON: As I remember, they were glass collectors, and they were used to a very different kind of experience that was maybe a bit more—I don't know, slick or something. [00:54:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. Well, I thoroughly enjoy Penland, because there is no—I guess there's no hierarchy. And I can't explain it; I can't offhand tell you which—I can pick some people out that I know are going to be miserable there. And as far as their gallery is concerned, Kathryn Gremley I think has probably one of the better eyes and aesthetics for gallery display and purchase of many of the galleries that I have been in that—it's high-end and well displayed. That's, you know—

GLENN ADAMSON: And they've clearly had such an important role in fostering—

FLEUR BRESLER: Now, what may—you know—

GLENN ADAMSON: —skills and careers.

FLEUR BRESLER: —what the difference is going to be with Mia [Hall], I don't know.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] The new director.

FLEUR BRESLER: The only thing I have seen so far—there's a very interesting connection in western North Carolina—it's almost incestuous—between Penland, Charlotte, and Asheville also thrown in. But along with that there is an undercurrent or tone of competitiveness. [00:56:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Maybe healthy. [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. You almost get a vibe that sometimes they step on each other's toes, and there's clearly the same people involved in more than one of those organizations, which can make for some conflict, too. I think because Mia doesn't come out of that background that—the nearest thing is she was in Little Rock—that there is either a hope or the beginning of a little more cooperation between the four entities: Asheville, CCCD, Penland, and Charlotte. Now, what I found interesting is the natural competitiveness or irritant to me would have logically been Arrowmont and Penland, but that was not the case.

GLENN ADAMSON: Because they seem like direct competitors.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. Uh-uh. [Negative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Or the Campbell Folk School and Penland, but also not really the case.

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no. No. There's definitely an undertone. They don't advertise it, but there is slightly bad blood between Penland and those other entities.

GLENN ADAMSON: That's fascinating. I didn't know that about—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —any of that, as a Northeasterner. [Laughs.] [00:58:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: No—

GLENN ADAMSON: I thought that—

FLEUR BRESLER: They don't—it's there, but it's below the surface.

GLENN ADAMSON: So—

FLEUR BRESLER: It's almost snide remarks.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. So, we've covered so much territory—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —that if there are other things you want to talk about, please tell me. But I thought it might be really interesting just to talk about a few objects that are—

FLEUR BRESLER: Okay.

GLENN ADAMSON: —of particular importance to you that maybe haven't come up. Because, after all, you are a collector, and it seems like a nice way to conclude. So, are there things, either looking around this room or elsewhere, or things you've even given to museums already, that you would isolate as particularly significant or emotionally powerful for you?

FLEUR BRESLER: Well, do I dare mention the beast? [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: The beast. Yes, let's talk about the beast.

FLEUR BRESLER: The beast.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, this is the incredible Danny Lane dining table—

FLEUR BRESLER: Table, yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —that you had commissioned.

FLEUR BRESLER: Okay. Then the Danny Lane dining room table. I have very strong opinions, and I have done a brief presentation on collectors doing commission. And I have now promised to my children that the Danny Lane table was my last commission.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: I feel very strongly that there are people who should never do commissions, and those are the people that have an absolute set-in-their-mind completed picture of exactly what it should look like. And my advice to them is find it and buy it; don't get it made, because it's never going to meet your expectation. And you are putting chains on the artist, and you're not going to be happy, and they're going to be miserable. [01:00:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: That's great advice, Fleur. So true.

FLEUR BRESLER: So, let's get to Danny Lane. Danny and I went back to meeting originally in Charlotte, North Carolina at a Founder's Circle fundraiser. He and my husband hit it off very well, and it was a lovely weekend. After my husband died, I did take a trip with the Founder's Circle, and we went to Danny's studio. I ultimately bought the Etruscan chair to give as a gift to the Mint Museum.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, and, Fleur, you mentioned, just as an aside, an alternate name for the Etruscan chair.

FLEUR BRESLER: The Etruscan chair is lovingly known as the Jimmy Choo chair, because the points on the feet made holes in the floor, and therefore Danny thought that maybe if he put shoe tips on that that would solve that problem. And it was a nice little young man making shoes down the row, and so he went down and asked for the tips and got them. They worked beautifully, and the nice young man was Jimmy Choo.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: So, it is known as—so, the Mint Museum has the Jimmy Choo chair in honor of my husband. So, I knew Danny made furniture, and we did see a few pieces when we were there, and that was in 2011. [01:02:00]

When my youngest grandson turned 16, I joined him, my granddaughter, and my oldest daughter on a trip, and we went to London. And after doing all the things they wanted to do, I said I would like to go visit Danny. So, we did go over and visit Danny, and at that point I said to him that I'd love to commission a table, and that the next time Danny came to the States, to come by and see the room. So, he came to settle his father's estate in Baltimore; he came over. He looked at the room. He walked the hall. He looked at the freight elevator, because this is a [. . . 53 –FB]-year-old building with a very dated freight elevator that is not kind to large objects, having taken four attaches and having to cut them to bring them in. Okay, so that was where we left it. Then Danny started making what I call squibbles, and I started my file, and we have *Running Rabbit*, we've got *The Heart*, but these are more like doodles.

GLENN ADAMSON: You're talking about drawings here—

FLEUR BRESLER: [Laughs.] Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —nothing that's been fabricated yet.

FLEUR BRESLER: No, no, no. They're drawings, but they look like doodles. So, we finally get past that stage, and we agree on the general configuration. It took a year. Danny kept me apprised all the way. My file is now probably two to three inches thick; there were regular color photographs. And finally—and Danny has now replicated the room on the floor in his workshop. [00:02:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Actual size?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes, actual size, complete with support columns that abut, that come out in the room. We are now to the tabletop stage. So, he has made this huge paper template which is on the floor in his studio. So, because we've had mishaps, my son Edward said, "Send me the template." So, we empty the room, and we lay the template on the floor. We put garden stakes around the inside of it to stiffen it, and we pull in the old armless dining room chairs to see how many we can get around, and we then slightly reconfigure so that it will fit in the room and a waiter could actually get behind the chair to serve somebody and send that back to Danny. The walls in the dining room were the original stippled walls, sort of—they were the same color as these. [00:04:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: So, kind of yellowish—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yellowish.

GLENN ADAMSON: —[inaudible].

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. That's not going to go.

GLENN ADAMSON: Right.

FLEUR BRESLER: Meanwhile, it also has a chair rail and baseboards. We've now stripped the room down to the cement floor. The chair rail has come off; all the molding has come off. But it's now time for the color of the walls. So, my designer and I decide that the best thing to do is for Danny to send us a sample of the metal for the table.

GLENN ADAMSON: By your designer, you mean Judy Weisman?

FLEUR BRESLER: Judy Weisman, who's a minimalist—

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —and I'm a clutterer. It's rather interesting to watch us work together. Two highly opinionated Jewish ladies with different aesthetics. Okay, so she wants a sample, I want a sample. So, we get on the phone with Danny, and we say, "Will you send us two pieces of the metal?" "No problem." Okay. A couple days later I get a slip saying that it's time to go down to the package room, which is in the basement—I'm on floor 17—to pick the package up. And I go down there, and there's this box, but it's on the floor. [00:06:00]

[They laugh.]

GLENN ADAMSON: I think I can guess what's coming here.

FLEUR BRESLER: Which I thought was a little strange. I mean, the Koreans run the package room, but okay. I sign it out, and I go to pick it up, and I can't.

GLENN ADAMSON: Sure.

FLEUR BRESLER: It's about the size of a shoe box. I mean, it isn't big.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, I see. But it's incredibly heavy.

FLEUR BRESLER: Thirty-eight pounds.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: I get Edward to go down and bring it up, we open it, and that's when it hits me. It just—pictures are one thing, but in your hand it's quite something else, and I panicked. I did not realize with all these pictures, and the metal being bright red, and clamps on it, and machines pulling—it didn't dawn on me that this is a full, thick inch-plus, and it weighs 3,100 pounds. [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: That's how much the table base weighs?

FLEUR BRESLER: The whole thing weighs 3,100 pounds.

GLENN ADAMSON: Including the top?

FLEUR BRESLER: With the glass.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, that's over one-and-a-half tons.

FLEUR BRESLER: According to my son, Edward, I've got a Mini Cooper in my dining—

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: "What—Mother, I mean, what have you done?"

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: And I don't know what I've done—I literally scared myself to death. [00:08:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: And this is made. I'm paying. You know, I've already paid in pounds sterling, two payments.

[They laugh.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Okay. That's just when I totally panic. Meanwhile, we have reinforced the floor. We have found a manmade flooring which is 11-ply thick, which is made in Canada, but when it came in, fortunately, Edward decided to open—we got it in, so the boxes would sit in the other apartment and acclimate. He decided he wanted to see how it was going to lay out. Fortunately, he opened them. They didn't match.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, no.

FLEUR BRESLER: Half of the order was made in Canada and finished in Canada, and half the order was made in [. . . China –FB] and finished in Canada, and they didn't match. So, that was the first catastrophe. So, we had to have them see if they could find the same dye lot. When they finally did, we bought it all.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: So, they came, took back the [. . . Chinese-Canadian. –FB] We re-stacked it in the other room to acclimate. Okay, so the floor's now down. That catastrophe's taken care of. We are now at the stage where we're going to box and ship.

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] [00:10:00]

FLEUR BRESLER: So, Danny may be totally doodles, but he is very, very good mechanically.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah, sure.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes. No, he's phenomenal, because the six crates were all custom-built. The pieces, the three glass pieces, each had a crate. The base was in three pieces, and the base was cradled in the crate, and there was a framework within the crate holding them so that you could take the top and all the sides off, just have it sit on the base, be put on a gurney, and brought up. And then the hoist, which came in broken down and was put together in the dining room.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, you actually had the hoist in the room—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes, the hoist—

GLENN ADAMSON: —to rig the pieces into place?

FLEUR BRESLER: —yes. Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Extraordinary.

FLEUR BRESLER: But when the piece—the six boxes were picked up in London to go to Heathrow to go to Kentucky to a secure facility in bond which would then fly them to Dulles where they would go through customs, and the truck would pick them up with the lift. Meanwhile, Danny is going to fly over. I have to get the freight elevator reserved, and I've decided I want to document, so I've arranged for Marty Huberman to video it. [00:12:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: It doesn't go to Heathrow. It went to the wrong airport.

GLENN ADAMSON: The whole thing?

FLEUR BRESLER: All six boxes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, no.

FLEUR BRESLER: All six crates went to the wrong airport. It gets to the airport, and it can't get on the plane, because there's not enough room—

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —but it can get on the plane the next day. So, Danny changes his flight, it goes out the next day, but it goes to Philadelphia.

GLENN ADAMSON: You're kidding. [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: But the paperwork said Dulles. We offer to go to Dulles, get the paperwork, drive to Philadelphia. Uh-uh. [Negative.] Nope. So, in bond, they drive it from Philadelphia to Dulles, where it goes through—[laughs]—with the paperwork, is met by the truck with the lift, which comes here, now two days late. It's on my birthday.

GLENN ADAMSON: Oh, really?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: That was my ninetieth birthday present to myself. [00:14:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: That is a fantastic story, Fleur.

FLEUR BRESLER: And we did not get the extra miles on it.

GLENN ADAMSON: No—[laughs]—with the frequent flyer.

FLEUR BRESLER: Danny—no—Danny is meanwhile changing his plane reservations. [Laughs.] No.

GLENN ADAMSON: So, that was a labor of love—

FLEUR BRESLER: So, it was a labor of love, and a—oh, and by the way, there is a nickel and a dime somewhere under there to level it.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Fifteen cents?

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah, there's fifteen cents under it. And it was nine people in that room, ultimately. So, I have promised that I will never do—[laughs]—another commission.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.] No more commissions?

FLEUR BRESLER: No more commissions. I did mention that I did get two pieces out of *Wood Turning in North America*—

GLENN ADAMSON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FLEUR BRESLER: —that originally were not for sale. I had seen Mark Lindquist's *Meditating Bowl* originally in a retrospective show of his in Richmond, years and years ago, and had admired it. And it was a gift of his to his wife Kathy and was not for sale. And at that point, Mark said to me, "I still have a piece of that wood left." Well—

GLENN ADAMSON: From the same piece of timber?

FLEUR BRESLER: Same piece of timber. "And I'll make you a piece," which he did, which is probably the only Mark Lindquist that looks exactly like a Mel. [00:16:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: A Mel Lindquist, his father.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yes.

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah.

FLEUR BRESLER: It has absolutely not the remotest—[laughs]—relationship to *Meditating Bowl*. And he clearly marked on the bottom, you know, the dates for the wood and that it was, you know, much older. Many, many years later I did hear from Mark, and apparently where he is in Florida they were going to do a subdivision, and he desperately wanted to buy the acreage adjacent to where his studio is. And he had maxed out on his credit cards and couldn't get a bank loan and said that both *Root Bowl* and *Meditating Bowl* were for sale if I wanted them. So, I did buy some acreage.

GLENN ADAMSON: [Laughs.] You bought some acreage—

FLEUR BRESLER: Lots of acreage.

GLENN ADAMSON: —via some wood art.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah. The only other sort of interesting story is the little turtle box—

GLENN ADAMSON: By David Sengel?

FLEUR BRESLER: —of David Sengel. David was in a very, very bad accident in Canada after Emma Lake. I think a group of them were headed further north, I think to go fishing, and there was an automobile—bad, bad automobile accident. And David was badly, badly injured and was in a coma.

They did finally get him back to the states, but he went through major rehab, and one of the things was learning to walk again. And he references crawling like a turtle, and that little box is one of the first pieces he made when he finally got back into the studio. [00:18:00]

GLENN ADAMSON: Like a totem of that experience.

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: Yeah. Well, Fleur, I'm so happy that you brought up the story about the Lindquists—

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: —at the end here, because, of course, we first met when I was working on that show—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —*Wood Turning in North America*, and that was when I first came here to this apartment.

FLEUR BRESLER: Yeah.

GLENN ADAMSON: And that was a long time ago now. [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: It was a lot less objects.

GLENN ADAMSON: It was not—yeah, and there was only half as much apartment also. [Laughs.]

FLEUR BRESLER: Oh, yeah. And I've learnt and spent a lot more money on shelving and lighting since then. [Laughs.]

GLENN ADAMSON: And it looks great. But it's been so great to come here—

FLEUR BRESLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

GLENN ADAMSON: —and share this time with you and hear all of your recollections. It's been an amazing interview.

FLEUR BRESLER: Hopefully, some of them were at least in chronological order. Okay?

[They laugh.]

GLENN ADAMSON: I think we did pretty well. Okay, thank you so much—

FLEUR BRESLER: Okay.

GLENN ADAMSON: —Fleur. Okay.

FLEUR BRESLER: Right.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]