

INTERVIEW #2 WITH LEE KINGMAN NATTI
LANESVILLE, MA
JUNE 2, 1992

P. [comments on folk art reading]

P....if you all talked about being part of an arts and crafts movement or whether there was any consciousness of kinship to some William Morris ideals.

L. Thinking of the Wm Morris idea that was really designing things that would fit into everyday life and into the community -
- give artisans a chance to develop things that were useful, functional and in good taste. it's funny I hadn't thought of that as folk art so much as

P. no, no, you're right -- I jumped from folk art to arts and crafts too quickly -- they really are two separate things.

L. My definition of folk art is untrained

P. Passed down from generation to generation usually orally

L. It has a tradition of the same form coming down from generation to generation. I think Wm Morris having been an artisan and working with groups of artists approached it from a different point of view, wanting to use art in a manner that everyday people would enjoy, which is a little different from the approach of traditional patterns coming down in folk art.

P. Do you think that that Morris concept was something that you all had in mind.

L. I wasn't in on the beginning when this was starting out. And J felt so confident that she had developed this idea of design technique without borrowing from anything but nature for her inspiration that I don't know how connected she felt to what other artists did or traditions. I really can't answer the question.

P. Did you all feel that your placemats, etc. were a cut above what was manufactured by machine [Lee. Oh, yes] and would therefore in that sense raise the level of....

L. yes, definitely. Bc it was done with artistic intent rather than commercial intent.

P. Did you all at the meetings at any time discuss the wider issues of art and craft or was it very much Okay this is work?

L. It was very much what was in hand at the time. I don't even remember having any conversation with J about this. It's rather -- this is the kind of thing that is your own analysis of two people and I don't know whether other people would see it in the

same way or not, but I felt that both J and George kind of had chips on their shoulders about other artists' work they - I hate to put this on tape. They did a lot of put down of other people -- what other people did. And I don't think people who have that sort of analytical approach to other people's work see a very large picture -- the old phrase Where other people are coming from or where it fits into the whole artistic range of things. It was a rather difficult thing. George was a fine sculptor and probably the best teacher of drawing that you could possibly get, but the commercial aspects of his work -- and he was always -- it was difficult for him to praise anybody^eelse's work, let me put it that way, rather than putting down other people's work. He found it hard.

P. With J, when you say that both of them felt this way -- I can see where it would be easy for George to talk about other sculptors and not praise their work, but what would J focus on.

L. Well, J's training was largely dance and theatre, and then when she studied drawing, that's one compartment of art. In other words, I think what I feel is that she might not have had an enormous background in history of art from which she came. It was very focused, and her talent for drawing was what led her into developing her design thoughts [?]. So it isn't like somebody who goes to college and has a whole study of what people have done thru the centuries in different kinds of art. Now Mary and Costa may have a different sense of this bc Costa, having grown up hearing George for years, may have heard George talk in more general terms about art that I ever remember his discussing.

06.1

And also I might not have been the kind of person he would have discussed this with. He might have had very different discussions with someone who was a sculptor, who was an artist.

P. I've read somewhere that his viewpoint on what was good art was a 19th C viewpoint -- representational -- and that, for example, no use for Picasso & that one of the differences between Aris and his father is that viewpoint [Lee. Yes]

Lee. And I don't know who George's teachers were bc so much of what a person does in the beginning is influenced by who they learn from, and I don't have that information -- Mary might know.

P. He studied at the PA Academy of Art and then in Europe -- very traditional.

L. Which was typical of that period, yes. Where he went a little differently from some sculptors is in the humorous things that he

did -- his little figures which had a lot of humor, but they also had a lot of bite to them -- if you looked at what they were doing -- they were very ironic I think rather than sarcastic.

P. [Interesting re reputations in the Art World -- deadly serious all must be -- people who dare to show the irony and humor are often seen as minor -- it is all so arbitrary -- like the divisions between art and craft are so arbitrary.

L. yes. The winter I taught at the Museum School in Boston, which was a fluke [laughs] -- that was a real fluke. I taught How to Prepare Drawings for Mechanical Reproduction in Illustration. I didn't know what I was doing.

P. I bet you learned tho

L. I did, especially when I had a GI in the class who knew more about printing than I did. When the woman who was editor at Houghton Mifflin left during the war [Grace Hogarth] to go back to her husband -- she had been teaching this course and she had studied art and really knew a lot about and had worked with printers and reproductions and everything, and I took over for her. I think I finished out that year and did the next year. And I had no more idea what I was doing than the man in the moon.

09.5

But it was very apparent that in the Museum School then there was a line drawn down the middle between the Fine Arts and the graphics. And w/ illustration, you were trying to combine both because you were trying to get things that had sincere qualities and not just magazine art, but that stood on their own as art work, but you also had to know what you could do and couldn't do as far as reproduction. And in those days it was extremely limited. This whole burst of being able to inexpensively reproduce full color work didn't come along until I was out of publishing. I know when Suzie [her daughter] -- her first color job she had to do separations for it, and that was early '70s, mid-'70s, so it's only been in the last ten, twelve years that they've just said to any artist coming in, Well, you can do that in full color and we'll take care of it.

P. [newspaper --paste-up --seems like the dark ages]

L. Now the other thing going back to J and her background. Her mother -- I had forgotten a lot about it until the exhibit of her work came along and the material came from the Cherry Foundation. I had forgotten that her mother was an artist. And until I was talking with Aris before we went over to the opening and Aris got going on J's mother, I had forgotten all the periods of their lives when they were not communicating with each other. And so I know her mother's artistic talents had an influence on J, but for

a long time that wasn't part of her thinking. And it wasn't until maybe the last ten years of her life when she began going out to California to visit her mother again. In fact she stayed with her mother for several months, several winters, to get away from the climate here. So I know her mother had an influence on her, but her mother was very abstract and very fantastical in her paintings. I remember seeing a couple that J had and they were, oh, who can I think of that would give you an idea. I'd say kind of dark abstract Arthur Rackham. I mean it was that -- almost a fantastic fairylike quality but very dark connotations. Mary, again, could tell you more of that. That's just a very brief memory of maybe one or two things that I saw. And I don't know if the arthur Rackham bit -- thinking of one particular illustration of his where there were trees and all kinds of tiny little figures around in the background, but sort of dark expanses, and very dramatic in a way. I guess her mother was an extremely dramatic woman.

P. [you can see the drama in J's posture and in her work -- there's a sharpness, a clarity -- Lee Steele = like a dancer's movement = very clean.

L. Making a statement! [laughs] Part of that comes from the medium bc where you have to cut an edge -- you can't - it's not like lithograph where with little dots you float into an area. But in order to have a dark, a positive or a negative, you have to have a very sharp image. J was the closest of anyone who came to making gray areas. For instance in Zaidee and Her Kittens. That is really the way printing is done with the little dots. But even so you have to realize that those all had to be carved; it isn't like taking a crayon or a conte [?] and going over rough grained paper and coming up with a texture.

conte
crayon

P. Your choice of fabric -- what determined the choice of this particular fabric?

L. In the beginning it was what was inexpensive and I think they even started in with unbleached cotton bc it was cheap even tho it had those little flecks in it. And then as people progressed and they began selling to the public, the mills in Salem, the Pequot Mills, used to sell bolts of material. And as the group got together that was the cheapest way to buy material was to buy it as a group.

P. So that meant that everybody was using the same color?

L. They had colored sheeting as well as white sheeting, so depending on your budget and the amount of money you had to spend on your materials, you could vary it by getting -- they had some beautiful blues -- gosh, they were gorgeous. And it was good material, and this was before all the resins came in. That was one of the problems as time went on was trying to get untreated

material, which was limiting. That's [Mary's Deer Crossing] the percale. It's a gorgeous color [blue\green]. so you're trying to get a good quality, untreated cotton that you could rip and fringe, that would fringe easily -- some of them were buggers to fringe. Also that wouldn't be too crooked because if you were doing a big tablecloth and you had crooked material you could spend hours trying to iron it straight and then it would get wet and it would go right back.

18.3

P. The choice of the material, then, is not related to the medium of the block? Fine designs etc.

L. All right, yes. For instance, we did buy Indianhead too which was a coarser material and you would not have printed a block that was very fine on Indianhead or if you did try it once or twice you'd get pretty discouraged and you wouldn't do it again. So in that sense, you had to relate the carving of the block and the material to get a good print.

P. That's why I haven't seen anything in linen?

L. Well, yes, Eino did some beautiful prints on linen. And we used to buy linen tablecloths that were all hemmed. Some of the designs looked absolutely gorgeous on linen. His Pheasants was beautiful -- the open design in one color was absolutely stunning. But if he had gone to print his five color pheasants on linen that would have been a waste of the material. so there did have to be some correlation between the block and also what you wanted it used for.

P. What determined the size of the block.

L. I think it was the standard 11 x 17 bc that made a 12 x 18 table mat.

P. so you are thinking of use?

L. You're thinking what -- yes -- you're thinking about the use. And that 11 x 17 block could be used for a table mat (single). You could do 2 prints or 3 prints horizontally and you'd have a runner. You could do 3 prints vertically and you'd have a hanging, depending on whether it was a good visual design for a hanging. We had 6-block tablecloths -- I've forgotten what the -- maybe 42 x 42 -- And then we'd do those quite often to put in the shop, but anything bigger than that was a special order. Then you could have two blocks wide or 8 blocks long or... And also they did square blocks which were 17 x 17 -- Mary's Peony design I think its one, and J's Square Dancing.

P. As you're coming up with your design are you conscious of

repeats, etc.

L. Yes. Oh, I just gave the block to the CAHA. The final Gull design of mine very stupidly had an edge that was almost straight, and it was very hard to match that when you were setting it down to match an edge. So after that, after I suffered really around with that, I did a lot of design [laughs] that had open edges that could be matched much more easily. so it was a conscious decision if you finally knew what you were doing -- to have either an open or a--- Something that had a straight edge like that with a lot of closure and spaces you didn't want to overlap too much bc you'd lose a lot. And it was very obvious if you overlapped, you'd get a line that was much too obvious. See these nice open edges. [we are looking at xeroxes of her prints] This is the one. Only that wasn't my best gull block, that was halfway through -- that's not my final gull block. And that was a stinker of an edge to match. Peggy Norton could put them down beautifully and not overlap, but to this day I even have trouble centering pottery on the wheel bc I just don't have that visual gift of putting it down steadily in the right place [laughs]. so it was a real pain. So again, when I got to this one, I had an open edge, and the same with that. That I got to trying again to cope with an edge. Oh, when I look back at those early seagulls, I'm very unhappy [laughs]

P. But then when you think of how far you went after that....

L. Flying milk bottles. It was design but it wasn't a good concept of what the gull was. J's point over and over again was the more you draw something, the more you can do with it bc you're aware of really all the aspects of the form and how ;you can use them to advantage. Whereas somebody who couldn't really draw, as I can't really draw, was struggling so hard to come up with something that was recognizable -- that's why I did an awful lot with leaves [laughs]. I think seagulls was about the hardest thing I tried to cope with.

[She gets a mat of Flight and we can see the difference between her first and last designs -- would be excellent for the book]

L. [re "wet material"] When you were trying to sqaure up your material to print, if you had a very, very crooked piece, you could pull it and you could wet it and pull it, and then you'd iron it and you'd think you had it and then it would go out again. So I think that's what I was trying to say. It was very difficult if you had a bad piece of mateerial to ever get it so it would stay.

P. Did that happen frequently?

L. Sometimes you'd get a bolt that was just so bad from the beginning that you might just as well as have used it for

cleaning rags. Generally speaking it was okay, or you just might get one end near the end of the bolt that was bad.

P. You cut and fringed first before you printed? You didn't have a long length you printed and then cut off?

L. No, no

P. but for a tablecloth you're working with a pretty large piece of material?

L. Yes.

P. It must have been damp after the ink?

L. YOU had to hang them up or spread them out to dry. It wasn't a good idea -- well, with some prints you could lay them down one on top of another, but if they were too wet, they'd offset on the bottom. I'm trying to remember, I think I had lines down -- yes, I guess I did have lines and hang them up as I printed them.

26.4

P. Does printer's ink smell?

L. Not badly -- in fact, it was pretty innocuous. One of the reasons we went into printer's ink rather than silk screen inks -- because right after the war the silk screen inks smelled so badly none of us could stand it. And also the printer's ink smelled when you ironed the mats after they were printed -- when you were tagging and ironing your stuff to take into the shop. It would be so bad -- if I'd ironed, say, one hundred mats, you would open the door and the window, and anybody coming into the house would say Phew. If you were just printing it without the heat, it wasn't too bad. And you did not have to iron them to set them as you do silk screen stuff, but we just did it so they would look nice in the shop.

P. How did you know what color ink to order.

L. Well, there were basic colors. You had a white that was your base, that was mixed into everything, bc it was a smoother as well as -- And then you had, I don't even remember the names of them now, but you could get a really good black, you could get a cobalt blue, you could get deep red -- there were several shades of red -- you could get a green or you could mix your own greens from blue and yellow. So it was more like getting your primary colors.

P. The particular color then would depend on you?

L. On your mixing it. And if you had an order to match, it was

an awfully hard -- I was never good at that. Louise Kenyon was wonderful at it. BC when it's wet it's not the same color as it is when it's dry. I was terrible at it. I used to hate getting orders that meant matching a color.

P. Did Dorothy order the inks for all of you?

L. I think we got them on our own, but we got them from one place so that they were standard and we all were getting the same stuff.

P. What about material?

L. Material, Dorothy would order a lot of -- or you would tell Dorothy what you wanted and then she would order a whole lot of material.

P. Did she get it at discount bc it was in bulk?

L. Yes. That's why we all ordered it thru her. Or she would order a lot and then you'd say Gee, Dorothy I need a couple of bolts, do you have any at the barn. so there was sort of a, as I remember it, a stock that was there in case you hadn't ordered your own, you could get it thru her for the same price.

P. In these little pieces from the catalogue -- [most on white and eggshell]

L. Yes, there were two basic things that came in the bolts that were 36 inches wide and that was the white or the eggshell. Then if you wanted colored materials, they were wider things, and that was separate.

P. Suppose you didn't want to use the white or the eggshell

L. Then you'd have to fish around and find something on your own. I'll take that back. When we got into skirts, the percale, that used to be ordered thru the barn bc then it could be gotten at discount and you'd say I want so many yards of....And Dorothy would have ordered bolts of it but you could buy it from the barn stock by the yard. There were some pretty good percale colors. When we got into Indian head we could order thru the barn and order different shades of Indianhead. There was a gold that was gorgeous. In fact my living room curtains for years -- these are not it -- were gold Indianhead ordered thru the barn.

P. If you print on gold, let's say, and use a blue ink, that design is going to be greenish?

L. It would have some effect, if only the psychological mix in your mind -- as well as they -- bc if you printed the same shade of gold on white or on a colored material, it would look

different.

P. Who wrote the catalogue copy.

L. I think Dorothy did.

P. It's clever.

L. Dorothy and Peggy both had a wonderful way with words

P. How is Peggy?

L. I don't know if she's back from Oakwood [in Manchester] or not. She, in January, she'd been having a couple of dizzy spells, and her niece (Marsha) just felt ;it wasn't right for her to be there alone. It was always the calls in the middle of the night, and Peggy was getting a little confused. so Dorothy had left Peggy some \$ and Marsha said, Okay, I know that Dorothy would want you to use it to be in a comfortable place with people. So she's been able to come and go -- it hasn't been like being consigned to a -- it's a very elegant nursing home facility. It's private in an old mansion and every room is different. If you called and said to Peggy Is it all right if we come to see you in the afternoon, and she said Oh, do come for tea, that they would provide tea for her and her guests. It's that kind of ambiance. so she's had a wonderful time over there and enjoyed it thoroughly. But I think if she's able she'd like to be in her own house for ;the summer, but it's just terrific for the winter. I think Peggy's content there bc it's an open-ended thing; she has the feeling she can come and go.

32.4

And that makes a lot of difference in people's attitudes about the future. And Peggy is really is getting more and more crippled -- it's so sad. so anyway, I'm sure she had input into some of the twists of -- for instance, you're sitting on a "four-passenger couch." [laughs]

P. How do you clean up from printer's ink?

L. It was turp or leptine, which is a form of cleaner. You really had to clean and scrub, especially if you had a design that had very fine lines in it.

P. Clean and scrub the block.

L. Yes, the block.

P. What did you use for yourself?

L. You used the leptine -- and clean your glass and clean your

roller and really do a thorough job or you would be in trouble because if the paint dried it was very hard -- The day my mother died, I knew she was going -- she was in a hospital over here and she'd been in a coma for two months, and I got a call and I was down cellar printing and as one does at a time like that one thinks one is very calm, cool, and collected, but one isn't. And I cleaned my glass and I cleaned the roller and I never cleaned the block. I didn't discover it for several weeks and it was either the Sturbridge design or Collector's Items, so it had a lot of fine lines in it. I think it must have been the Collector's Items, and it took me many, many hours of putting that leptine on and then trying to

P. With a rag?

L. You could use a toothbrush and a rag; for instance that Chicadee design -- I could whip out a pine needle at the drop of a hat. And there was no way then -- they didn't have good glues - - I think now you could probably glue something back and get a few prints before it fell out, but if you were trying to do a thousand prints it wouldn't stand up.

P. Were there FC colors that predominated?

L. Well, there was what was known as J's green, which was that dark almost black green that she used in a great many of her designs. She used it in Winter Borders. She used it in her Low, Low Tide. And she mixed it with black and yellow -- deep yellow -- there were several different shade of printer's ink yellow, and she knew how to do it and get it right. The rest of us, I think, felt kind of funny sort of if we did anything that was close to J's green -- it was sort of her trademark with a lot of her designs. But other than that, I don't think anybody had any particular trademark colors that they used.

P. So that if you went into a room, color would not be a distinguishing FCD characteristic?

L. No, it wouldn't. It depended on your design and what you felt about it and how the design looked in different colors.

P. Did you individually think of the titles for the designs?

L. Yes. You might get a comment from the group when you said I think I'm going to call this Flight, and people might ask you why. It got to the point where a lot of us tried to think of the shortest titles we could to write on the tags. [laughs] My spelling is a little weird, and Dorothy every now and then would call up and say Do you realize you're writing Crystals on your tag wrong; it's crystals, not Chrystals, and I said Oh [laughs]

P. And you all wrote your own tags?

L. Yes.

P. When this was displayed in the barn there would be

L. A little tag.

P. On each one?

L. Well if it was a set of mats it would just be one, and it would designate on the tag, 4 mats -- it would say on the top of the tag. Or if you had a runner, it would say a two-block runner or a three-block runner -- that would be written on the tag.

P. With your name?

L. Yes, you would write your name and the name of the design, so there was a lot of that kind of thing.

P. It's interesting that the tags carry your name but none of ;the blocks.

L. No, no, they didn't. I hadn't thought of that. In a sense it was the design and the Designers group that was important and not yhour individual name on each....

P. But then the name comes in with the tag, which is interesting -- kind of a nice combination of the group anonymity and ...

L. Do you have some of the tags -- I have some.

P. I know I have some xeroxed.... That was Lee Steele's Geranium.

L. That was a nice design.

P. I thought for someone who was in in for a year or two

L. I think she was in it for three or four years.

P. But for someone without much experience, I thought Wow...

L. Well this is how effective the course was bc it taught you to see and it taught you how to put elements together.

P. She pointed out the importance of this shape there [space between geranium blooms] & the importance of this curve. And she said originally these pots had been much bigger, and J or someone or the group pointed out how much more effective the smaller pots would be. But she said But a geranium could never grow in pots that size [both laugh].

L. That's a very nice design. I'd forgotten all about that. The other thing that develops from doing the exercises is that if you

just set up a pot of geraniums and you said I'm going to make a design out of this and you drew what you saw, there's a great deal that you'd miss that comes from doing the exercises. For instance, this way the leaf is turned [in Geraniums] is probably something that you would develop as you tried to draw different things about the geranium for your exercises. Remember Peggy's study for Apple Pie and all the different things she did with the apple slices. That's the kind of thing the homework would help develop for you. so that you'd come to using the geranium with much more ideas about how the different elements of it could be worked into a design.

P. And you were forced into that by the way you had to progress step by step through

L. Yes. Hmmm, I'm very proud of Lee for having done that bc her background I don't think was art at all.

Side 2

L. [re Aino] She has a wonderful turn of phrase that would be too bad to miss some of her specialities. And she's very opinionated.

P. She and I have become penpals.

L. Oh good. That's wonderful bc she leads a very secluded life. She's an extraordinary person, and she played the violin beautifully and enjoyed being in a string quartet and playing in groups and everything so she's an extremely talented person.

P. She's such a learner -- a mind that works all the time. Going back to the groups in Lanesville.

L. Lanesville was predominately Finnish and Irish. I don't think that -- you got sort of ethnic differences and opinions and but you didn't get the economic layers until you got over in Annisquam and the summer people. If there was an intermixing there it was the Finns who did the domestic work and the summer people who were the employers, so that Robert had lawn jobs around here and there and his sisters sometimes did -- well, some of them actually did housework, I think.

P. For people in Annisquam. But for people in Lanesville

L. In Lanesville, boy, you did your own. In fact when I was terribly ill after Suzie was born and nearly died and couldn't do anything for a long time, it was kind of moot around the village She's married to a Finn but she has to have household help [laughs].

P. So was Lanesville economically

L. There were not a lot of wealthy people in the Lanesville area. There were artistic people, but they were not the kinds who were coming in with money. I would say that -- Robert would know better than I would -- but probably the doctor -- I think there were one or two doctors who probably were the ones who were the Important People in the community, put it that way.

P. I couldn't decide whether economically there wasn't much difference or there was but it didn't matter.

L. It didn't matter around in Lanesville or Bay View, but in Annisquam, believe me, it mattered [said in Royal hushed tones -- mimicking].

P. Lee said that her husband played poker with the plumber, the priest etc -- the educational and money level didn't matter in terms of a social group, and it seemed to me that that is true in FCD -- there's a discrepancy, I would imagine, in income, economic status -- don't you think there was a difference but it didn't....

L. I don't know as there was that much difference. I can't think of anybody who.... Well there were people who weren't that much involved in it bc it wasn't a means for them to earn money to live on [important point]. In other words they were doing it to be part of the group bc they enjoyed the design, but they weren't dependent on the income as some of the group were. But I can't think of anybody who had a substantial income who belonged to the group and just did it for kicks.

P. It's interesting the number of Finns in the first group. Oh, I'm going to talk to Vera Seppela Olson [sp?] outside of Camden in a few weeks.

L. Oh, she'll be a wonderful one to talk to about Lanesville when she was growing up and what kind of a community it was. And she would know better than Lee Steele or I would know.

P. That there were so many Finns in that first class -- the one that Robert was in -- wasn't he in the first class [Lee. Yes]. And then except for Aino and Eino the Finns leave that group.

L. Well, you had to be able to devote an awful lot of time to it, and some of them, I'm sure, had jobs or part-time jobs or families that were far more demanding of their time, and so when this got to be beyond a hobby or for their own use and got to be a business, then they couldn't do it, or they lost interest in that aspect of it. Now Vera Seppela grew up in that house that's right down in Folly Cove on the ocean. At the moment it's

P. You mean the lobster place?

L. No, it's -- the yard is all torn up and part of it's dirt and part of it's being paving blocked. It's on the ocean side, and it's two houses before you get to where the Steeles are. There used to be a cow barn in back of it and a sauna. And the sauna was quite a center for the community.

p. Oh, that's where the sauna was.

L. That's where the sauna was where Aino and J would go, so you can ask Vera about that.

P. Somewhere I read that Houghton Mifflin commissioned FCD to design covers and jackets for a series of books around 1949. Obviously that never came about.

L. I don't remember anything about it. Blank to me. I have no idea what that could have been about. If it mentions a name or something at Houghton Mifflin that might give me a clue as to whether it was adult trade or juvenile or educational dept.

P. Did any of the daughters ever join?

L. I'm trying to think. Suzie^g worked there summers. Several daughters had jobs in the shop as they grew up and passed through that age range of kids wanting to work in the summer, and I think Suzie might have worked there for three summers when she was 14, 15, 16. And the first of those summers she was also studying with George so it was sort of part time. She really enjoyed it. She got a great kick out of Dorothy, and Dorothy was always very fond of Suzie.

P. Was Suzie talented in art from the very beginning?

L. Yes. Yes.

P. Did she ever show any interest in doing blocks or in your work?

L. No, she was more interested in drawing. I think she saw that it was a grind for me and it wasn't fun. It was part of our financial picture, and it got to be. She knew that I didn't enjoy spending my summers down cellar printing all the time. But I don't think she's ever made or not. I still have my printing press and I keep thinking She doesn't want it -- it will cost us a fortune to get it out of there. It would be more expensive to try to sell it and move it than it would to leave it there in case she ever wants it. But it would have to be all fixed up again for anybody to use.

P. Your brayers were geletin -- had geletin in them?

L. Yes. Mine have all decayed and dripped and gone. And you had

to send them off every two or three years -- I'm sure J's went off every two years bc she used them so much -- to a place where there was a printer -- a printing supply company -- and they would recoat them bc they would get pitted or they'd get tough from the cleaning with the leptine and you had to have them soft enuf to pick up the ink. So that was a real chore and along toward the end it got harder and harder to find somebody who would do that. It got more expensive to have it done. But I do remember now that was a real pain in the neck.

10.4

p. Were the brayers expensive to buy themselves?

L. Yes. They were expensive. Especially some of the big ones J and Eino had.

P. Bc their blocks were so....

L. yes. They had the big square blocks. It seems to me that the last time I bought a brayer, and I didn't have one as big as theirs, it was somewhere between 30 and 40 dollars.

P. That would be 90-100 dollars today!

L. I'm sure it would. And getting it re-done would be something [laughs]. The bigger your roller -- let's say around \$30 for a medium size one. Mary will know more than I do, I'm sure.

P. [laughs] I just think of these little things you get for two or three dollars

L. in your Prang textiles. Those are really photographer's brayers, they're not really printer's brayers -- the ones that you get for these kits. It's not even geletin coated. It's just a rubber or plastic roller. But the gelatin coatings were really something.

P. In trying to get a picture of all of you, were most people church goers?

L. [laughs] let me refresh my memory here [looks at FCD retrospective booklet]. Well, I was and I wasn't. I mean when the kids were involved in Sunday School in the Luthern Church. I grew up a Baptist but I went along with Robert. Well, I don't know much about Ida Bruno. I doubt if Ross was. Hilja had something to do with -- Hey, Robert, here's a question for you. Penny's trying to get a picture of the community as well as FCD and she was just asking me if I thought many members of the group were church goers.

Robert. The Finns?

L. I was wondering about Hilja? Was she a member of the Finn Church?

Robert. Yes

L. Aino -- or was she a communist

R. Yes [I think this meant she was a church goer -- ask her]

L. Eleanor Curtis. Now she, very religious. J, no. Zoe I have no idea. Mary Greer was a humanitarian but I don't know how much of a ... Gert Griffin I'm sure had to do with the Annisquam Community Church.

P. Is she still alive?

L. Yes she is

R. She's a native [?] -- great mind

L. She's in Annisquam. She would tell you a lot about Annisquam. She's a dear friend of Peggy's. She's contemporary. You can tell Gert that we said for you to get in touch. She's a good rememberer and a good talker, and she would know Annisquam cold.

P. I have a note here to myself that I called her last fall and she didn't want to talk to me. She said her work wasn't good, and she didn't want to talk. But I could try again.

L. You could try again and say that what you need is background of the community and could she please help you out about that. [Lee to Robert. Is she near Peggy's age or is she your age or in between]

Robert. She's class of 1924. She's ten years older than I am.

[Harry (Malone) comes in to plant Robert's corn. Lee asks him if Robert asked about rototilling. Harry says no, but he will. Robert has just had a pacemaker put it -- had an accident last week with Lee in the car. Robert is taking pictures of Annie's pots.

16.0

L. I would say that Ruth Hendy was churchy. Mahlon, no. Libby I don't really know about. Tony and Betty Iarrabino probably were in the Catholic tradition. Hilda, yes. Weezie [Louise] was always involved with the Annisquam Church. She used to do their flowers. Denise Konus, I don't know. Maryann Lash. Eleanor Malmi was probably the Finn Church. Euthemia was certainly brought up in the Greek tradition. And Mary had things to do with the Annisquam Church.

p. When you say the Finn Church do you mean the Lutheran Church?

L. Yes. I probably mentioned the fact to you before that there were several factions among the Finns in this small community. There were the churchgoers and there were the temperance people and there were the communists. There were three groups. The church goers were the predominant group. The temperance group -- now they may have been churchgoers as well but their prime thing was -- I'll straighten this out with Robert. And then there were the groups who were the Red Finns, the Communists who had the Russian Red influence, and they actually had -- I don't think it was a large group -- but it was an active group. And several of the young men in the late '20s actually went back to Russia and were never heard from again. Some of them had been born here. The Russians at that point were really proselytizing in this country for people to come. As a matter of fact I have a booklet about the Finnish community which I got back from Tim Crouse [sp], who was writing stuff about -- "The Role of the Finnish Immigrant in the history of Lanesville [I now have xeroxed]. And I will trust you with it, but I definitely want it back. But that will be useful to you. And I have a sister-in-law -- Robert's sister-in-law -- who gets very upset -- she got very upset when Tim had a piece in which he mentioned the Communist background bc she said Lanesville wasn't like that and it didn't have a lot of Communists, but when you come right down to it, yes there were Finns who were Communists and lived in Lanesville.

P. Was that your reference to Aino?

L. No. I don't think she was a Red Finn in that sense, but she was not one of the church group [me -- remember Aino said she doesn't believe in God]. See they brought their Finnish history with them in that sense bc it was during WWI -- well some of these people came earlier than that -- when Russia was a Grand Duchy, there were Finns who were influenced by the White Russians. And then when the Revolution came along, that's when the Red Finns....

P. I read some beautiful books on Finnish home design, and you can see the different influences -- one area of Finland you would think you were in a Russian home.

L. Yes. Architecturally it shows up too bc when we were in Finland in '65, there were parts where the wooden houses looked very much like what you see in pictures of Russian villages. And then a lot of the public buildings were generic -- now that I've traveled more I realize -- generic European yellow stucco finish -- the kind of thing you see in Salzburg and you see it in Helsinki. It's really fascinating where the modern elements of design in Finland came from. I haven't really read enuf about it to know.

If you
have
this, I'd
like it
back.

P. I think one of the things that contributes to FCD is -- the the books I've read on Finland talk about -- and Aino had a wonderful expression -- she said Finns are born with their brains in their hands -- talking about liking to work with their hands in crafts -- and there's this tremendous historical tradition of decorating the home, of being very aware of wood especially and texture

L. and textiles.

P. And so much of the textiles historically being used for warmth to cover the windows, to wrap, the rugs, and clothes. It goes along in a very traditional country, folk tradition, and then you get, starting in the '30s this explosion of modern Finnish

L. some of it was influence from Sweden I'm sure.

P. And Germany

L. And Germany, yes. When we were Helskini in 1965 -- it's the only time we've ever been there -- we went to the Arabia plant, and they were closed. It was the week everybody was on vacation. And we were just devastated. But Robert had a letter of introduction from Peggy and Dorothy's brother Ted, who'd been the head of the ceramics department at MIT and was the one who got Robert into having ceramics as a hobby at that time. So when Robert called and found that the plant, where they let people go thru, was closed, he was speaking in Finnish -- I didn't know what was going on until he told me later what it was all about, they switched him to somebody in the management end of it when he said he had this letter from Ted Norton. They said Come over! [laughs] BC ted's name was magic. We were given a tour thru the museum which was up on the top floor of one of the factory buildings. You had to take your shoes off and put on -- or put felt things over your shoes bc it was this gorgeous wooden parquet floor. And these cases of ceramics which gave the history of everything. When you mentioned Germany this is what reminded me bc there were one-of-a-kind, gorgeous pieces in this. We had with us at the time our 16 year old daughter and our 14 year old son [laughs] who had hands like And I just am so thankful that nothing happened bc this very kind man would open the doors and take these valuable pieces out and let us handle them. And Peter [he's in a wheelchair now] didn't know what he was handling, and you know 14 year old boys can be pretty But he did very well. [laughs]

23.5

But anyway it was takingf an awful risk. Then they took they down and they showed us the room where all the salesmen came in from all over the world, from different places like Tiffany's

from New York or what have you to pick up what patterns they wanted shipped. We couldn't buy anything bc we weren't -- but we saw all the patterns and things that they were currently offering. It was a fascinating tour; we were there for a couple of hours. It was so nice bc we weren't business, we weren't really craftspeople who were into it in that sense. It was a very nice warm feeling that this guy was glad to take us thru and How was Professor Norton.

P. A number of books I've read have histories of Arabia -- I think it's main branch was originally in Sweden. One of a kind pieces interesting.

L. Yes. These were art pieces. They had the collection from all around the world. This wasn't just Arabia pottery. It was specimen's of different kinds of art pieces. from all around the world. You know why the name Arabia? BC when they built the plant outside of Helsinki it was that far out so people sort of said Oh, way out there, way out in the outskirts, out in the desert, Arabia.

P. [June and I both have Arabia Russka]

[Annie Milanson comes in -- potter -- she looks at my xeroxes of Lee N's designs]

L. This was my first clover design and you see I eventually got to doing -- there's a clover behind you there that's embroidered [Lee has embroidered some of her FCD onto small throw pillows -- beautiful]. That was from a block. What I did was take an old placemat and use that as -- see here's the Lily of the Valley. There's the Chicakees over there. I had an awful lot of time then; I don't know why

Annie. I know. How could you have? You were working, you had the kids.

L. I guess I didn't have television in the evening, so I'd sit there.

P. You did this when you were in FCD?

L. Yes.

P. The difference the texture makes is amazing.

L. And behind you is the butterflies. I've finally learned now when the kids are here to take the pillows out bc they have no idea what they're jumping on and throwing, so I do move them now but they have gotten a little battered.

P. This would make a beautiful skirt -- dirndle skirt.

L. I did have a whole dress made out of it bc every year we were supposed to clothe ourselves for the opening in our newest design, which got pretty bizarre.

P. This moves so beautifully [was it Lily of the Valley?]

A. So you had bolts of fabric that you would use for that?

L. We made yard goods, yes. As a matter of fact, when Suzi^g was working at the barn it was in the '70s -- was it late '60s we were working up to mini-skirts? And I found in a box the other day, I think it was one of the clover designs on a mini-skirt -- she's going to giggle when she sees it. It's a bodice top and a mini-skirt that must have been to there! You couldn't even use that amount of material for a table cloth [laughs]

A. Maybe for her kids it will fit them now.

[Annie^g does black designs of dragonflies and birds done in black on terra cotta

P. [looking at angels around door - one is on wood Joy to the World]. Is that one of your angels [she has done at least one as a fcd] Joy to the World?

L. No, somebody did that on slate. That to me is folk art; it's painted on the slate, and I'm sure it's commercial folk art and may even have been silk-screened on the slate. I collect angels so that's why this whole archway is angels. [goes back to who is or is not church member.] I think Dorothy and Peggy were both involved with the Annisquam Church. I'm not sure how religious -- but Annisquam Church being a community church it meant people were doing community activities to support the church. Hetty was a member of the Episcopal Church in Rockport.

P. Tell me about Hetty Beatty [be'te = long e's] is that how you pronounce it [yes]. You said last time that she was a children's book illustrator. I'll get them for you. Bc the design was important in her books too, and she was also a sculptor.

L. I met Hetty when I first came down her to study with George. Bc she was putting together her house there on Woodbury Street, which is the house that Lee and Bob Steele lived in when they first came here -- it was composed of chicken coups that were amalgamated [laughs].

P. Was she a book illustrator then? Was she older than you were?

L. Yes. I would guess she was probably ten years older than I was anyway.

J was 15 years years older than I was so Hetty was somewhere close to J's age.

P. Was she married?

L. No, she was not married at that time. I think she could have come here to study with either Graffly or George -- maybe Robert would know.

P. Was she primarily a sculptor?

L. Yes. Being a friend of J, began to do the design w/ J [me looking at Hetty's books]. It's very influenced by J, right?

P. yes, enormously.

L. And even the borders around the pages, you see [ie, like J's]

P. I wonder if these are still in print?

L. I don't think so.

P. Did she live heere for a good time?

L. I think I know what the connection was. She had an uncle who was a painter by name of Tracy (Haupin) [sp?], and he had a house right on the edge of Folly Cove. Now whether he came here bc of the painting and the artists and so forth and so on and then she came and visited uncle Tracy and she and her sister bought property....As a matter of fact, I think Hetty and Ann, her sister, owned the Folly Cove barn before J bought it. I'm pretty sure they owned that barn

P. So she never moved away?

L. She was here from the time I knew her until later on she married and she and her husband built a house over in Pigeon Cove. But Hetty -- actually the house next to where she built her house where Leon (Crowell) [sp?] lived for a long time, I think that belonged to her mother, and probably the land that Hetty built on was part of that thing. Then after her mother died that house was sold I guess to the (Crowells). But Hetty built, put her chicken coops together, on the adjoining land. Ann bought a house down further on Woodbury Street, not as far as Aino's -- on the other side from Aino's. When I came down to study with George, I stayed at Millie Frisby's [sp?] on Folly Cove. But after that I had gotten to know Ann, and when I cam weekends pretty much with Ann and then Robert and I were married in Ann's back yard!

P. Hetty was one of the original class members.. It would be fascinating to know whether she did these after her course with

J.

L. Oh, I'm sure she did.

P. She didn't begin writing or illustrating until

L. No, I think it came after the class and while she was a Designer.

P. How did J feel about that?

L. I don't know. I can't remember. In a sense a lot of the FCD was similar bc everybody was using the same principles, so it might not have struck J as a copy cat kind of thing as much as using FC designs.

P. I think we've probably talked about this before: given the rather strict principles of designs -- step by step -- did that feel constraining -- that you couldn't really be Lee?

L. I didn't have any me to be bc I didn't have a background in painting or drawing or illustrating. My only background was in trying to learn the design and make it work as far as that was -- and actually when you're approaching it from that point of view, the structure is supportive rather than limiting

P. [agrees] Then I was thinking about Alma Tompkins.

L. [laughs] She found it limiting

P. I got the sense from Aino that Alma was going to do it her way if she couldn't she was going to take her blocks and go home. Yet Aino is able to express originality.

L. Oh, yes. Her whole mental approach comes out in what she does in her originality. She could take the structure and twist it to suit her ideas.

P. It was interesting to talk to Bob Holloran, who has a very different view of FCD -- an interesting combination of patronizing and admiration. I love houses -- and there are so many houses in the designs -- and I think that's so fascinating and he said, My god, if I ever saw another design with another house I thought I was going to die. [Lee laughs] He said All they could do was houses. To me this is a great strength [laughs]. I thought this was fascinating and also funny coming from an architect. He felt that the FCD liked the few men that were attached bc it added to the FCD image, that

L. it wasn't just a bunch of women, mmmmm [sort of non-committal]. Well, there was an element of that, I'm sure. but I think that men were valued as designers and creators. Certainly Tony

Iarrabino and Eino. Of course Mahlon was so involved with so many different -- he was a real Renaissance man who could do most anything. Have you every had a chance to talk to him?

P. No, I'm going to call the Foundation in Worcester. And there was someone else Anna told me to track down in the first class and that she worked for Gloucester Altzeimers.

L. Oh, Irja Jacobson. Well Irja Jacobson Sheppard has now left the area and lives in New Hampshire. She used to live down on High Street. And I don't think I have an address for her. She and Robert were great pals.

TAPE 2

[re Mahlon Hoagland] Mahlon's ex-wife is Betty (Richard) Loomis - - so the phone might be under that -- and they communicate and I'm sure if you said what you wanted to reach Mahlon about that she could give you his address in New Hampshire.

P. What made you, Lee, different from other people in the group?

L. You mean as far as the qualilty of the design went or the approach to design or

P. You as a person

L. As a person -- I guess what you bring to a group like that is your background, which was always an interest in art, so my approach would be more theoretical than practical. As far as personal qualities that made me different -- I was learning an awful lot about how to get along with people [laughs]. Being an only child doesn't exactly qualify you for being a member of a group. I had a funny relationship, as I think I mentioned before, with J. BC it was on the 3 different levels -- her editor, her friend, and a member of the FCD group. And sometimes you weren't sure which level you were operating on. And I can remember being very -- not taking criticism very well bc I wasn't used to this group approach, and I was very insecure in what I was doing, so it was hard for me first to accept the criticism and then know how to surmount it and what to do with it.

P. Would you ever talk to J about that?

L. It wasn't the kind of thing that J would have much patience with, okay? [laughs]. I don't know if she would have understood.

P. Certainly it seems to me that you all had a lot of things in common but one of them has to be shared values.

L. Yes. We all had to believe in what the group was trying to

accomplish. And there were those who found it hard at certain times to accept the fact that J did not want this in a sense to be "commercial." I mean there were several who would have been glad to sell stuff to more places that would reproduce it for them, and just simply do the design and hand it over. And that was not what J felt the group should be about. And I think she was right bc it made the group last where if we'd all dissipated what we learned and sold it to commercial groups that bastardized it would have disappeared a lot quicker, I think [important point!]

P. That's a neat point -- bc I keep coming back to what makes it last for so long. That's something I hadn't really thought about -- that if you had let go the designs and let them fly to the wind, it doesn't become a whole part of you.

L. Another thing that just sort of went thru my head when you were talking about what different people brought to it. I was not brought up in the women's support group tradition, and this little group of writers and editors that I've belonged to off and on for the last 5 or 6 years, is outside of my tradition. I'm not used to sitting there listening to somebody carrying on for half an hour about their problems with babysittage and all these peripheral things that you have to cope with before you sit down and do what you want to do. And I have very little patience with that. BC I was of the era that you coped with it, you did, and you didn't carry on about it -- by the hour! -- it drives me crazy at these meetings! I don't have that sympathy of support which came out of the women's group caring for each other and trying to help them solve their problems. That was the talking kind of group that FCD was. All of us had kids -- most of us had kids -- most of us had family life to spend seven-eighths of our time with. We all were coping with the kind of things that these writers seem to fall apart over. I can't understand it [laughs]. But we didn't bring that to the group. We solved these things, and the group demanded certain things, and if you couldn't fulfill them, there wasn't any -- well, we just didn't talk about the things that kept us from doing our homework -- other than to say Well, I didn't have time bc I was doing the beans or bc so and so has scarlet fever. It wasn't a [if a whispery, "caring" voice] How do we help so and so to have the time to do this -- kind of approach, which is so much of the women's groups that came along later. And I shouldn't be unsympathetic with that approach, but it was not part of what we were doing. [important] So in that sense the group had a goal. It had a structure, and it didn't change, didn't mutate into different kinds of things [good insight]. It had a purpose and a way of getting that purpose done. Whereas groups that have come along later would be much more supportive about Helping to find ways that so that somebody could free up their time to do this -- which is fine.

P. That's a wonderful word -- mutate. If, for example, you are

in a group of writers and editors -- and I assume you are there to discuss problems of writing and editing

L. That's what I assumed when I got called into this little group.

P. But the minute you talk about babysitting, then it's a mutation and you're going to lose some of the original clarity and sense of purpose. That's a neat insight, Lee.

L. I'm not putting down any of these women in this writers' group; they've all coped with a lot. But I do get impatient with them, seeing them try to solve their problems [laughs] -- when some of them will carry on for hours about how they don't like this babysitter and they don't like that babysitter and they require this and they require that, and the thing is that they don't want to let go of their kids for any babysitter to come over -- and this sort of thing. Well let's get off the subject [laughs].

P. Was there a sense of competition among you?

L. There were times, I think, when you felt that you were putting in an awful lot of time at the barn and maybe carrying a little more weight than you wanted to carry and you got a little annoyed with those who weren't. It wasn't a sense of competing from the point of view of somebody had a very popular design.

P. It wasn't that sense?

L. No, I think we really took pride in what people did and when you were on duty in the shop you were just as glad to talk about somebody else's design and what they were doing and what their strengths were. One of the unwritten things that nobody ever had much trouble with that I know of was you didn't push your own stuff. If somebody asked about your designs, fine. You'd tell them what colors you printed in and all this that and the other, but you wouldn't -- if somebody was looking for something -- you wouldn't go and pick your thing to show them over and above somebody else's -- at least I never did. Maybe there were some who did, I don't know [check libby's transcript]. Didn't happen under my nose.

P. It's so infrequent that you can take joy in someone else's efforts -- clearly that's a product of being a very strong bonded group.

1. One of the things you might want to talk about before Mary gets here is rather than specifics a little more generality about what direction you feel the material is leading you in, about what kind of a book, and what kind of a publisher. Has it taken any clearer shape?