

INTERVIEW WITH LEE KINGMAN NATTI
OCTOBER 17, 1991
LANESVILLE (GLOUCESTER) MA

P. Where did you grow up?

L. I grew up in Reading, MA which is not all that far away -- in distance -- but it certainly was far away in its atmosphere compared to Cape Ann.

P. Tell me where Reading is/

L. Reading is near Stoneham, Woburn -- very homogeneous community that gradually over the years has just turned into a bedroom community for Boston.

P. And went to Reading HS?

L. All Reading schools.

P. Tell me how you chose Smith.

L. Oh, well, some of this I'm sure you may want to use and some of it -- [laughs]. This is family. I had a great aunt -- Aunt Jenny -- who used to compare her great nieces. And I had a second cousin named Nancy and a second cousin named Martha -- different families. And Aunt Jenny used to say, "If Nancy is doing this, why are you doing this and that?" Well, our backgrounds financially were extremely different for one thing. And Nancy went to Smith and was in the same freshman class into a college as I was. So there were two reasons why I didn't go to Smith. One was that my cousin Nancy was going there and the other was that the math teacher in high school took me aside and said you can't pass college boards in math, don't even try. So I went to a junior college. I went to Colby Junior. It's in New London New Hampshire. And now it's a four year coed Colby Sawyer and like Bradford they are having a tough time. So when it came to the end of my sophomore year at Colby Junior, it was obvious that I should go on to college. My family was broke -- it was during the depression, but

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Smith in my junior year. Colby Junior was no accurate preparation for it. I was on scholarship, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] AND it was really miserable. Well, senior year Mary Magna Maletskos

*Lee
Natti
11/11*

I went to

came back from Italy where she had her junior year. We met -- she was just great -- things turned around in that my social life was easier and happier.

[REDACTED]

P. Then what happened?

L. My father made me take a secretarial course. It was 1940 and I needed to know how to earn money. After which I worked in an enormous insurance company in Boston as a receptionist -- a switchboard operator who wept at the switchboard [laughs]. It was one of those great big PBX boards with the plugs -- Lili Tomlin had nothing on me. One morning I spilled over a cup of coffee and wiped out all the calls on the switchboard, and was praying to be fired, but they didn't. There was a woman who was connected with Plays magazine in Boston. It still exists -- put out by the people who do The Writer and a lot of books on writing and plays. And a friend of mine from high school had some connection with it and suggested that I write children's plays bc she knew I was interested in writing and wanted to do something that would be published. So I wrote about 3 or 4 short plays that were published in Plays magazine. And again thru relatives [laughs]. I was an only child but I had a huge network of second cousins. There was a cousin of my mother who knew that I just hated working in the insurance company -- I 'd been there for 2 years and was absolutely miserable. And a woman they had met thru a mutual friend was named Grace Hogarth, who was then editor of children's books at Houghton Mifflin. And so my cousin Stanton suggested that I get in touch with Grace Hogarth at Houghton Mifflin bc they knew she was looking for an assistant to come into the children's dept. And actually, Grace had come over from England -- she was an American who had married an Englishman before the war and had two kids and she came back on a boat that brought over British women and children as the war tuned up. And bc she was always involved with children's books, she went to Houghton Mifflin and sold them on the idea of setting up a children's book dept. They had published children's books over the years, but it hadn't been a separate dept. And Grace was an amazing woman. She's still alive and we still write back and forth. And she's back in England again. So she had really carte blanche to start this dept on children's books. And she had maybe been there four years doing this but she wanted to go back

to England despite the war and everything else bc that's where her husband was. So she wanted someone in the dept that she could train to take over when she left. And I did get the job, and when she left a year and a half later, then they made me children's book editor.

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Which was absolutely ridiculous! I was 24, knew nothing about business procedures, went into a panic when it came to estimating costs or having any practical idea of that situation and had no experience in dealing with men in business. [laughs] All the others who were heads of depts were men. The salesmen, of course, were all male sales force and couldn't have cared less about children's books except for one man who adored children's books and who saved my life at more traveler's conferences than I care to think about. It was again -- having had a little experience with writing something in the children's book field that really nailed the job for me.

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More than my college training, which was -- liberal arts is -- you've got to find a focus for it. The fact that this woman was really just taking somebody into the dept to train so that she could go back just in time for the V2 bombings and just in time to meet my later husband -- we were engaged -- who was sent to England as an ~~FM~~ in the Army and used to take whatever big rations in the meat dept he could find up to London to see Grace to give ...

P. Had he met her over here?

L. No, no

P. Oh, you knew her

L. So that was the connection.

P. So then in the meantime someplace in here you had come to FC.

L. Right. And the reason I came to FC was bc Grace Hogarth, the editor, decided that bc I was going to be working with illustrators I needed to come and study with George.

P. Oh!. So Jinnee had already done Choo Choo

L. She had done Choo Choo and Mike Mulligan and The Little House was in the works. She [Grace] sent me to study with George for 2 weeks, and not to be able to draw myself -- altho I'd taken an Art 15 course at Smith -- a beginning studio course, but it was more introduction to the use of media and gosh I think we drew cubes and prisms and triangles -- it was basic stuff -- there wasn't any design involved -- so I did know how to hold a pencil and paintbrush. But the idea was that this was a life drawing class [laughs] and I needed to know what the human anatomy looked

like. Well, my background was pretty prudish. It was Baptist Church twice on Sundays and my parents taught the Sunday School and it was extremely religious [laughs]. And when I walked in to the studio -- I met Jinnee and she took me up the hill to George's studio -- and it was very dramatic. BC there was the nude model -- the female model on the stand -- and the light pouring down thru the windows and George smoked cigars so there was this theatrical haze and smoke around this model too. [laughs] And I was supposed to figure out how to draw this. It was incredible. George was a wonderful teacher. Absolutely amazing. If I had been able to keep on studying, perhaps in the end I would have gotten more of the human figure to hang together the way it should, but he certainly made you look and that was why I was there -- to look. To look -- to learn how to see -- to know what to look for and you couldn't spend -- we had a female model the first week and she was a ballet dancer and could do the most incredible poses and hold them -- didn't do her dancing muscles any good to stand still, but she managed. The next week it was a male model so I was there the right period of time to get the two contrasts. It would have helped to have had children [laughs].

P. Was that just a segment of the course? Did his course last most of the summer.

L. It lasted most of the summer for most people, but I could only have 2 weeks away from Houghton Mifflin. He required his sculpture students to take his drawing classes. They could not study sculpture with him unless they had also studied drawing -- somewhere, but he liked to have it with him if possible. BC again -- this how do you see, what do you look for -- that was the basis of it all. So while I was there, Robert, who grew up around here, came home on a week's leave from the Army. George was doing a bust of him -- altho he had modeled for George and he had also modeled for his brother-in-law, Walker Hancock. Robert's brother-in-law is Walker Hancock who is a sculptor and Robert had modeled for him.

P. Oh, that's right, bc Isabel Natti

L. Is Robert's niece. It's pretty complicated -- it's a huge family.

P. So George was doing a bust of Robert

L. So that's why Robert was around, and we met.

P. And did he go back immediately?

L. He went back at the end of the week. And we saw each other when he was moved from MN to NJ on his way to Europe. And we saw each other 3 times in NY and got engaged. [laughs] [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. And then we wrote to each other for 2 yrs and got acquainted thru correspondence and letters.

P. So you didn't see him for 2 yrs?

L. Didn't see for 2 yrs. He came home and we got married 7 or 8 days he....[laughs] And we've spent the rest of our lives trying to get adjusted to each other. BC I was an only child and he was one of 12 children -- there's been a lot of adjusting.

P. It's been so much fun reading The Quarry ^{Adventure} ~~Mystery~~ -- that's what I've been reading this week -- and knowing that your insights -- or what you bring to it is probably thru him [tho Garnet is an only child!]

L. Right! Absolutely!

P. All those little kids in that family. I was thinking of you the other night and I thought "I wonder if they really did play house hockey?"

L. Yes, they did. And it was a room that wasn't as big as this and the holes in the wall were incredible.

P. So when you at HM were you writing books then?

L. Oh maybe about 6 months before Grace left, there was an illustrator who came in with some wonderful pictures of the Gaspé -- he actually was a guy who designed

P. Is this the Peter Pigeon?

L. Pierre Pigeon right. ^d ~~And~~ ^{Arnold Bare} he was a fellow who worked in G. Fox in Hartford and did window design for them, so his illustrations were quite striking -- they were almost like stage set things -- he had a story but it didn't work. In other words his art was wonderful and Grace really wanted to use his work. so she said well why don't you try and write a story using the Gaspé as a background. And I did. And then he did pictures over for that story and that was how it got started. So I actually had 2 books published with HM before I left. The second one was Ilenka ~~sp23~~ ^{Ilenka} and that was bc we were all being friendly with Russia -- it was not Bundles for Britain, but it was everybody be friends with Russia -- they're our allies time -- so I did a book about a little girl who wanted to -- she could be anything she wanted to be, which is the Russian woman being able to do this, that, and the other. And I went to the American-Soviet Friendship Council in Boston for background material, and after the war my book was banned in Ohio bc we weren't speaking to Russia -- it was banned in the public libraries in Ohio. And some years later I found out that the American-Soviet Friendship Council was a set-up for

propaganda [laughs] of course it was, but I was too stupid to know, and also we were all being friendly to Russia at that point. So probably I'm in an FBI file -- isn't that funny.

P. That's probably a mark of distinction.

L. Well I'm glad [laughs]

P. So when did you leave HM?

L. I left Houghton when Robert and I were married. Well, no. We were married in 1945 in September and I stayed until the following September when I left bc he'd been getting his PhD at Harvard and he got all the classwork done and all his credits and never wrote his thesis so he never got his PhD.

P. What field?

L. Education. But he was anxious to start teaching then. We always said well he'd go back and do it later -- well, you don't. So we always said that he taught so that I could write and I wrote so that he could teach. It took the 2 of us. So at that point I was pregnant with a child that was subsequently stillborn, but we moved down here at the end of '46.

P. And where did you live?

L. We lived on Woodbury Street in a house that a friend rented. And that was when Mary comes into it again. Mary Maletskos. Bc I was really devastated by the loss of this child and so Mary being a dear good jolly friend came down and she lived with us in the house for January and February that year -- it was quite a long time -- to cheer me up, which she certainly did. She'd been my attendant at our wedding so Robert had already met her. And at that point Costa came home.

P. Oh, because Costa was away at that time?

L. Yes, and that was where he met Mary when she was living with us down on Woodbury Street. And Costa and Robert had been best - - good -- friends [laughs] -- small world. So we ended up two good sets of best friends marrying.

P. So did she then get you interested in FCD?

L. No. I had started to do the lessons with Jinnee -- or had I - - this is all getting hazy. Mary went and took lessons with Aino Clarke bc I don't think J was teaching at that time -- or she might have been working on a book or something -- but straighten that out with Mary -- bc I know Mary studied w/ Aino. I wish you could get Aino to talk to you. I think there may be a way around it. Mary knows Aino pretty well.

P. Louise had a good idea. This was not about Aino. She said she thought it would be good if I got all of you together.

L. She's really important.

P. Bc she taught some of the courses -- and her stuff is so wonderful. So then Mary studied with Aino.

L. I took the lessons with J. When she was developing the course bc I think -- I'm trying to remember when HM suggested she do a book -- the design book -- the famous design book that never got published. But I think she'd already begun to set some of the lessons out in those mimeographed pages.... This is what Dorothy very sweetly did [notebook I have xeroxed from CAHA]. I don't know if she gave them to everybody. Now somewhere I've got the mimeographed sheets. But I know that was how I did it -- was doing the homework when we had the FCD meetings, and J would say now for next time do this, this, and this, and it was so frustrating bc J had household help. She had Aili who came and coped with the housework. so she was free to go out to her studio and spend her days doing wonderful books and design. And she devoted her time to doing that, and she spent time with her children and loved to take walks and took lots of walks with Aino and was always concerned with what her kids did and of course there were innumerable people coming and going thru that house all the time bc George was gregarious and people came from all over to see him. but when the rest of us would go and try and fit lots of FCD homework into our lives, you didn't have that amount of time. I certainly didn't with 2 little kids.

P. That's what's so amazing to me [Libby's story re Dorothy standing up to J for Libby re L's role as mother] Where for Peggy -- I think Peggy just thought the homework was the fantastic thing ...

L. And she had the time to devote to it.

P. But the rest of you. You writing books. When you came here, that was your profession -- book writing?

L. I had written the 2 books, and when I was on Woodbury Street I thought I was writing something that was more episodic and non-fiction -- that was the Rocky Summer -- and the editor who followed me at HM said well, this is obviously a continued story -- turn it into a whole continuous novel instead thinking you're chopping it up into little pieces. So that was when I did my first long book -- in the children's book field -- during college, of course, I wrote the great American novel that never went anywhere [laughs] but anyway. So that by the time I got involved with design, it sort of worked so that I tried doing homework and design and developing a block during the winter, and then during the summer I would hire a babysitter mornings and do

my writing. And for years I sort of did it that way until the kids got into school. And then I turned it around more or less and did my writing in the mornings when they were in school and at that point was printing much more -- it took me a long time to be a good printer -- it was not a technique that came easily. And as my orders grew, I spent all summer down in the dungeon with that printing press.

P. Did you have it downstairs?

L. Down in the cellar. And I used to just get extremely annoyed [tight laugh] On the other hand, we depended on it for income.

P. That's a question -- ^[income] it's obviously different for different people. Peggy said it was nice to have -- it made a difference. Libby said, at least her recollection is -- oh, I don't think I made anything -- we got our check and we would go out and use it to buy more material. But for you, it really didn't help with the income?

L. It really did. But I worked terribly hard for it, and I regret all those summers now that I slaved down in the basement while people were running over my head enjoying the summertime.

P. Why did you do it then?

L. Well I think it was on many levels. I've always wanted something to do with my hands. I sewed, I knit, I've tried painting -- to my utter frustration -- I like craft work. So that if I had had to go and earn money outside of the house or something, I wouldn't have enjoyed that kind of work -- if I could work at home and do something that at least was in the art field, that was more of a compensation even tho it was hard physical work, pulling that printing press

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You don't need to put in your book that my doctor once said to me Why is the whole right side of your body more developed and strong than the left. [laughs] It was from pulling the printing press all those years.

p. [Libby's arthritis in her shoulders] Did you make more money writing books than from FCD?

L. It was sort of like a seesaw bc there were times when you had a book out -- altho when I look at the jackets at the books now and see the prices -- a dollar and a half! Barbara Cooney and I split the royalty on that [The Best Christmas] and we each got seven and a half cents. Over the years they did raise the price a little bit, and Doubleday kept it in print for 30 years, but you didn't make a lot of money from children's books except for Jinnee, whose books were mega-sales for those days.

P. Did she make a lot of money from her books. *Billy*

L. Having been her editor and sent out some checks at various points, I would say that she was one of the top in HM's children's book list top earners. H.A. Wray and Holling C. Holling and Jinnee were the ones who come to mind as being the ones who sold well. H.A. Wray was a dear man. He did Curious George. Gosh, he was so sweet. *Billy*

P. Did George make much money at this time?

L. I think a sculptor's life is pretty difficult, and I don't know how much you want to go into this, but I think that Jinnee carried the weight of it and it did not make for family peace.

P. [June Vail's recollections -- her impressions of George and Jinnee's temperaments]

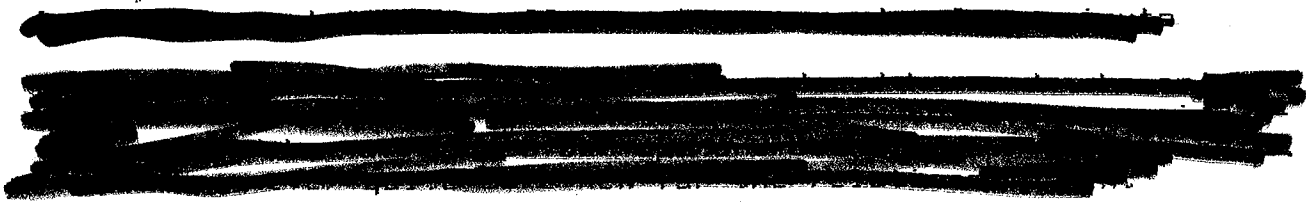
L. Well, she was 15 years younger. And in the beginning, of course, it was a pupil -teacher thing. And also the Greek temperament. We have known 4 gentlemen and they all have behaved in the same manner so I can't help but feel that there's a lot of

P. Truth to the stereotype? [Lee laughs]

L. Right! It's pretty strong and it's pretty hard, and sometimes at Sunday dinner George would get on Jinnee's case about something. And by the time he'd gone on -- she would just sit there-- and she wouldn't answer him -- but there'd be something that had set him off. And you just felt like sliding under the table. It was so uncomfortable, and she wouldn't give him the satisfactions of Maybe if they had been alone she might have, I don't know, but it was a tough relationship.

P. Was she pretty strong?

L. Oh, she must have been. BC she stuck with him all that time.



Jinnee at the last few years did not feel all that well with the lung cancer that was creeping up on her Eino printed her blocks for her. And of course Jinnee had always had somebody else preparing her material -- she'd never done that except in the early days.

P. What do you mean -- it had to be washed?

L. Oh, you had to take these huge bolts of material and rip them up, and iron them, and try and straighten them if they were crooked and fringe them and so a friend of mine, Grace Murray, fringed for -- I think she fringed for Weezie and I think she fringed most of J's stuff. I always did my own and you were just -- the fluffie -- coming off -- you'd just be covered -- and of course we didn't think of lung damage and silicosis and all that kind of thing you know. You just [blows] when you got thru

P. Peggy said you would just sneeze and sneeze and sneeze.

L. It was just clogging. So one of J's principles all thru the years that kept the standards high had been you do not let anybody else do your work for you. You do your own designing, you do your own cutting, you can have your material prepared, but you do your own printing. So it was very quiet that Eino did the stuff for her, but I don't think she could have done very much and of course her stuff sold so that as long as she had stuff in the shop and people ordered it she had to have a way of having it done.

P. Certain designs were on-going?

L. Yes. It was up to you. If you got sick of doing a block and you couldn't face printing it any more, you could say, "I'm not going to do that; don't take any more orders for that. I'm not going to put that in the barn." Or you could say, "I'm tired of printing this in this color this year, I'm going to do it in another color." You usually tried to print up your old designs and have a stock to put in the barn before the barn opened. So that you wouldn't have to spend all your time down cellar -- altho I think I did. And then when you found out whether your new block sold well, you might put more time into getting stock in that and let some of the older stock go for a bit if you couldn't do everything all at once. Taking orders, we used to just suffer over them bc some -- we took turns in the shop selling -- and somebody would say, "Oh, I like that design of J's but I would like that in this color." And it might be keyed to a color that somebody else might be using for their designs. Well, J was pretty strong in the sense that she only had certain colors that she would do hers in. There were a lot of colors she didn't like. So you had a pretty good idea that you could say to that person, "Well, I know that VLBD would not take an order in that color. But others of us who weren't that strong minded or who really thought "Oh, well, we'll try," we'd get stuck with trying to match colors that [laughs]. I was not good at it. Louise was wonderful. She could mix any color and match it. And the colors always dried a little differently -- you'd mix it and it would look great in the paint and the not on the material. So it wasn't easy.

P. It gets more complex the more I learn about it I didn't

realize re wholesale]

L. Oh, yes, Johnny Appleseed's catalogue

P. Why did you use Lee Kingman in your books and Lee Natti in FCD -- and the same thing with J.

L. Before I was married I had had 1 book published as Lee Kingman and so it was just my professional name and I kept on with it. Around here I was Lee Natti, and I really did separate the two parts of my creativity, and it was sort of a break to think of myself in two different ways. Where Jinnnee used her design in her books, she didn't make such a separation really in her creative processes.

P. But she uses the two differnt names.

L. I think -- her diesigns were VVirginia Lee Demetrios - right? Well, it's kind of interesting. This whole feminist thing which smote us all a few years back didn't hit me with such ferocity bc I had kept my maiden name. And that was a whole side of me that had never got swept under the rung, I guess. And my husband had great respect for that and encouraged it -- I was really fortunate to be able to do what I wanted to do. And Suzanna, my daughter, who is a children's book illustrator, had begun working before she was married and she's kept her name.

P. [Libby's recollection - re working w/ Dorothy's press at night -- Bob stayed with kids] I wonder if there's some sort of freedom that enabled you -- that you had husbands that said ...

L. Partly it's this place. This is not a homogeneous neighborhood where the husband would expect a wife to conform to neighborhood practices. Actually my husband studied design with Jinnnee,. He has a little design of ants on a little piece of paper. His brothers were doing it, and it was something he was interested in. He's doing ceramics now. So he had a great understanding of creativity and wanting to do something creative. Now Libby's husband was an architect, and I think he had respect for Libby's abilities. Of course, they got divorced after a while but that was personalities more than anything else, I think. Mary's husband, Costa, was certainly exposed to all of this. George's sculpture, J's design, and Mary has never had the amount of time she should have had in her life -- she's a wonderful artist but she's had so many family problems that have kept her from being free -- and it's a self-sacrifice on her part, and how. But I think that's rather interesting; I hadn't thought of that point of view. But I think Cape Ann is an extremely creative area and you don't have to be a conformist. And it's interesting now that I think

SIDE 2

P. Why so few men?

L. There were men at various times, but it kind of -- there were only 2 who stayed with it. One was Eino Natti and one was Tony Iarrabino.

P. I'm going to see him on Monday

L. Oh, good, and Betty, his wife, well please give them my love. We don't see each other but they are really just wonderful people. Tony is an extremely talented artist and Betty is too. Their visions of things were quite different. It was very interesting they way they worked. Now Bob Holloran, am I right that he studied design for a bit, Libby's husband.

P. Yes, he did a couple of -- Mountain Laurel and Trumpet Vine.

L. I don't think men had the time to do it. And of course Jinnee wasn't going to let them off on homework.

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If they had a business, they really didn't have time to do this. And Mahlon Hoagland who was in the group was a doctor, kind of a Renaissance man, he did everything under the sun.

P. Is he still alive?

L. Yes.

P. Is he in Worcester?

L. The Hoaglund Foundation was connected with his family. I don't know -- I think he lives in NH -- I think he's retired from the Hoagland Foundation. His former wife, Betty, who -- was Betty in the Designers too?

P. She isn't listed.

L. Loomis is her name now -- Betty Stratton Hoaglund. Isn't that funny -- if Mahlon was and Betty wasn't -- how odd.

P. He did Cruisin 1 and Cruisin 2 in 1949 and then Hunting Season in 1950. But that looks like just a couple of years -- but you think he was in it for longer?

L. No, no. He was living in Annisquam then, and then they went off to England where he was working with somebody and they went to Denmark and they just weren't around. But I don't think he would have stuck with it anyway; he had too many irons in the fire.

P. Eino and Tony and Bob Holloran and Do you think that it

had anything to do with the fact that it was craft.

L. I think it did, yes. It seems to me that Mahlon had done other art forms -- as you might take a water color painting class or you might do this or that or the other. I think it was more the experience of working with block prints than it was wanting to be part of a guild producing group. Bc I don't think Mahlon ever really printed very much.

P. But I was thinking that maybe men weren't attracted to this bc it is a craft as opposed to a fine art -- it isn't sculpture -- it's more associated with women's -- it was fabric

L. I don't know. It's something I can't answer.

P. Did it feel -- it's hard to use these terms now bc they've changed so much -- but did it feel like a women's group. When you had classes was it?

L. It definitely felt like a women's group. Altho I have never belonged to a post-feminist era women's group. But it had all the dynamics of any group of people trying to get along together and be creative and yet keep a control on the processes.

04.3

There was definitely a hen pecking order [laughs] Jinnee was the top and she and Dorothy were both very strong people and there would be quite a bit of fusage back and forth between the 2 of them bc Dorothy's point of view was business and she wanted artists to be businesslike and it made her life miserable when we weren't bc she was the liaison between us and the public. And J had very little understanding of what it meant to run a business. She liked to make rules from the artistic end, but she was not sympathetic with things that had to be crass business [laughs].

P. Thinking about a group -- just the dynamics of a group -- Louise used a phrase that I thought I understood at the time but listening to it again -- if you look at the pictures in Life magazine it looks like a very homogeneous group -- all those white young women. And yet certainly there were Finns and Nortons came from -- they brought their particular background -- the phrase that Louise used when I asked if it was all one big happy family -- bc I tend to see it in a very romantic way [Lee laughs] -- now this is paradise on earth -- why couldn't I have lived here -- why couldn't I have been a Designer -- and she said well, I'm pretty independent -- and so I had a lot to do and so there may have been some undercurrents but I ... And then she said there were some people -- well we used to say they'd never been across the cut bridge.

L. Right, that's a Cape Ann expression. The cut bridge would be

the one down where the drawbridge -- that's the cut bridge. Down by the esplanade where the man at the wheel is on the statue and you go across -- that's the cut bridge. And that was the only bridge when I first came down here. 128 -- we were looking it up the other day -- the A. Piet [sp?] Andrew Bridge I think was dedicated in 1950. That's the big bridge that's on route 128. Even after the bridge was built there was a missing link on 128 I think between West Gloucester and almost up to Gordon College. BC when my daughter was born in 1948, you could come on 128 as far as Gordon College and then you had to go off around thru Essex and come all the way around and over the cut bridge. But that expression "Well, they've never been over the bridge" is something I've heard from the time I

P. So it just means they're provincial.

L. Yes. Their experience is limited to this area.

P. so would she then have been referring to the Finns essentially.

L. No, bc most of them -- well, no, which generation are we talking about -- naturally the ones who came [laughs] from foreign countries had been more than just over the bridge. Hmmm. When Robert was principal of the HS

P. Was he principal of Gloucester High?

L. Yes. He was a science teacher and reading teacher; then he was a guidance counselor on the junior high level. And then he was a guidance counselor in the high school. And then for 10 years when the pendulum was going [swish/swish] from liberal to fundamental and back again -- I mean fundamental to liberal and back again -- he was principal of the HS. I think it took 10 years off his life. Then he ended up as principal of West Parrish Elementary School w/ the little kids and just loved it. He had a great time, and then he retired -- more than 10 years ago.

09.2

But Gloucester HS I would say two thirds were people whose lives were on this side of the bridge. And families didn't expect their kids to go on. And there was the one third who were college bound. Maybe that's not a fair proportion. It certainly wasn't 50-50.

P. So I guess, then, what Louise is saying that there different social classes within the group -- is that accurate?

L. Certainly diffeent backgrounds. And this is one thing that struck me coming from the homogenized community of Reading. When that summer that I was down here and met George and Jinnee and

all, there'd be a party, and it could be a three or four generation party. It was little kids, and it was mothers and fathers and the grandparents and in some cases great grandparents. Not only was it a generational thing but there were so many different ethnic backgrounds that were new to me. There was the Greek, the Tolpords brought in the Russian element; there were French people around during the war who were more or less refugee -- they weren't part of the group of anything but they were at the Folly Cove Inn bc I always remember poor Madam So and So and her daughter who had lived on turnips [laughs] and they were [gestures fat] I mean turnips had done them very well, that's all I can say. And there were Italian and Portugese and Finn and there were basic Irish in Lanesville. And the fun part of the parties was that everybody liked to sing and there would be all these songs in differnt languages. It was just fantastic. It was such an eye opener to me bc it was totally different.

11.9

p. I grew up in NJ in the NJ equivalent of Reading so it's good to be reminded of this variety. This helps me a lot.

L. One thing that was very strange was the sense of very, very small community within Cape Ann. It wasn't a whole -- it wasn't -- I think I can get at it this way: They were trying to build a school in Plum Cove, and it was almost impossible bc Annisquam had their little school [elementary], Bayview had their little school, Lanesville had its school, and none of them wanted to give up any power -- they did not want this school building for the 3 communities. I was on a committee before Susie was born with Jinnee's brother, Ross Burton, and Mary's husband Costa (no, he wasn't around then) but anyway we were trying to get a shcool built down here in Plum Cove, and when Susie graduated from HS they build the Plum Cove School [laughs]

Sue

P. So what school did she go to?

L. She went to the old Lane School that her father had gone to and all her family, which was a fire trap. All the little schools were fire traps, and they were trying to build one nice - - and now, of course, the school, which is a beautiful school is closed bc the school population is way down.

P. Where do the kids go?

L. They go the Beamon which was built later on. What I'm trying to say is that there were all these disparate backgrounds, but that didn't make everyone one happy family. It was very small community -- and the Finns were here and summer people were there

P. There were never any summer people in FCD?

Roewer

L. Now ask Peggy Norton about Peggy Rohre [roar] -- I'm not sure how you spell that -- Roewer [?] ^I have a feeling that she did not live here during the winter. And there was some fuss about Peggy Roar that I don't remember. And I don't think it had to do with the fact that she wasn't here year round; it had to do with something about one of her desing or something -- I don't know.

P. Were people's designs ever turned down?

L. Yes. Oh, yes. I had one that I was trying to do of cats and as I say I don't draw animals awfully well, and I think that J felt that with her Zaidee and Her Kittens there wasn't any need for any other cat design -- and I certainly was not trying to cash in on her -- I was just trying to come up with a block. I think the first couple of times I brought in sketches for it, it was, you know, well everybody when they brought sketches in would find that they were highly criticized.

15.7

P. Did you bring them in just for the jury?

L. No, no, no, you brought them in at a meeting, and you'd go around the table and people would show what they were working on, and you got a lot of criticism, and it was a to somebody who wasn't secure in what they were doing, as I was not in the drawing end of it, it could be a little bit devastating, bc you could understand what they that you ought to do but you didn't know whether you were capable of doing it or not. So that could be

P. Did you give up your cats, then?

L. No, I stuck with it and I finally did one and it passed the jury and it sold a certain amount -- it was rather seasonal -- there were cats with Halloween pumpkins....[laughs]

P. Oh, I saw that this morning. Etc. Etc?

L. Yes -- was that the name of it? I don't even remember.

P. I think it is bc it was in the sample book and so I was making some more copies [tho I didn't of that], but I do remember bc there are little cats

L. And a Christmas wreath and a pumpkin [laughs] I was not copying J in any way, shape, or form -- it had nothing to do with Zaidee and Her Kittens. I think we had cats at that point and I was interested in drawing them. I had trouble getting that. Well, I had a lot of trouble with a lot of my designs -- you know, bc I wasn't doing probably what could be done with the subject. A. bc of time to draw for one thing -- I mean J could

sit down and whip off --- and Peggy too -- all these different combinations and permutations and have the great fun of seeing something change and pick the best. But w/ somebody who was limited in time and limited in the ability to draw, it was a luxury to take time to do things over and over until you got them to pass.

P. did you have a work room of your own.

L. No! I had a desk in that -- this house was much smaller -- we've added on to it a lot during the years -- this used to be the front door here and my desk was somewhere over there.

P. You had one desk?

L. I had one desk -- that was my work table. And as far as writing went, I had a portable typewriter that I have typed thousand -- of, wouldn't word processors have been facilitating! -- and I wrote anywhere in the house that I could sit down and To this day I write with pen and pad -- I never even write on a typewriter

P. [me too] -- talking about your place to work

L. It's always been in the midst of whatever was going on. I've never had a bolt hole -- altho now I have -- once Peter got out of the house, I have what was his bedroom as my office for all mybooks and my reference materials

P. I think that's just an amazing -- you read so much about women writers and trying to find

L. A room of their own.

P. But this is messy stuff -- isn't it pretty messy to

L. Yes, that's why I had my press down cellar. It was the only space that was strong enuf to hold a press that's enormously heavy.

P. Did you have a press from the very beginning?

L. No, I used J's when I was on Woodbury Street and whose press did I use I never really got into much production for about the first 4-5 years and maybe had one block and was trying to work on another one, so it wasn't that vital, and that's why it took me a long time to get to be a good printer. It takes time to do it.

P. Which is the most difficult part.

L. Well for me, I think the drawing was difficult. And it wasn't

that I was afraid of holding a paint brush or anything. I wasn't afraid of the medium -- it was just -- if you don't draw naturally and you really have to struggle to get something that looks like something that's the difficult part. Then the printing finally got to be just almost unbearable. Bc we were printing for Johnny Appleseed's catalogue, who ordered lots of Seagulls

P. What do you mean you were printing for their catalogue?

L. Johnny Appleseed years ago had a catalogue from their store when it was much smaller and they had not gone into clothing as much. They had gift items and stuff like that, so for about 10 years they had FCD in their mail order catalogue.

23.1

And they had my Seagulls and I'm sure they had Zaidee and Her Kittens.

P. Just for mats?

L. Mats and napkins -- and I don't know whether they had runners or not. And they would order 100 sets at a time, but their catalogue only came out once or twice a year, but still you had to have that up there on the dime for their orders at the same time that you were trying to print stock for the barn here. And when we were open just during the summers -- this was before the Johnny Appleseed time I'm pretty sure -- you'd spend your time in the spring getting ready for stocking the summer, and you'd print maybe April, May, June, July, September -- finish up the orders that you had from the summer in September, October, but then we began doing our little catalogue -- those little -- it was Dorothy's idea -- it was a wonderful idea to have those designs each one on an individual slip bc then if you wanted not to print or you couldn't print or you wanted to take a design out, she could just take those out of the sets. It was a wonderful idea. But then we began having the barn open -- oh, I think from the middle of April right thru December -- plus our mail order catalogue plus Johnny Appleseeds and there were fewer people doing it -- in the end it was really only eight of us who were carrying all that business -- just doing our own blocks except for Eino who was doing J's to the detriment of getting his own blocks done I might say.

P. So there was Louise and Peggy and Dorothy ...

L. But Dorothy never had that much stock bc she was doing the business end of it -- which was upsetting to her. She could see the Designers, especially the ones like J who were the heavy hitters coming in with checks that she wrote out for them but she wasn't getting paid that much to manage the business and she

didn't have time to print, and this was very difficult.

P. Everyone just praises her and says we couldn't have done it without her

L. No, we couldn't have, and she didn't realize that -- it was a very adversarial relationship between [tape off- her and J -- tension underneath at meetings] [It's amazing] Given normal human relationships and tensions in any group that the group did survive. Of course there were new people coming in, old people dropping out, but the core was there for a long, long time. The other thing that absolutely amazed me was when the Historical had the retrospective. It was beautifully hung -- it was just a knockout exhibition and I walked in there and saw it and thought I'm glad I had part of this. And at the time we closed down I never went down and pulled my press again. My brayers are all dripping. I have only one left and I looked at it the other day and it's all dripping gelatine out of it. I have never wanted to print a block again. It was physically difficult to make myself go down there that last summer and print -- I'd had it. It was just too few people trying to carry on too big a business.

P. So if you have Louise, Peggy, Dorothy somewhat, Mary....

L. Well Mary never printed that much. She did beautiful designs, but given her family situations and her time and her urge to be a painter and go into monotype and all the wonderfully creative things that she did, it was hard for her to do something over and over and over by rote. And she had some gorgeous designs that people loved, but she couldn't put that much time and energy into it. So she was in it to the end but she wasn't a major printer.

P. Libby Holloran was in it till the end?

L. Yes

P. Who am I leaving out? Louise, Peggy, Dorothy, Jinnee

L. And Eino [and Lee]. Louise, Peggy, Eino, and Jinnee were the big printers. Their designs sold more than anybody else's combined. They were the big four.

E. Did Eino do other things.

L. Everybody would call Eino when they needed something done around their yard, their house -- he kept a lot of households together. He was in the army....

P. He had had art training

L. After the war, he took his GI bill and went to the Museum School.

P. Is it true that the only art he did was the blocks?

L. FCD, yes

P. Were there people who wanted to join the group who were not ...

L. Yes, there were people who did want to join the group and Jinee would never allow anyone to join the group until they had taken and passed her design course. And you weren't officially a member of the group until you had had a design passed and had it in one of the summer exhibitions. We always had a party after the opening as it was called, and if there were new people in the group at that time J would give them the hanging (the diploma).

P. Tell me about the jury. Did it remain pretty much the same over the years? Were you elected to the jury or was it just an ongoing group and there's not question about it or

L. Well, it seems to me that Louise was on the jury most of the time, did she have any memories of this?

p. [Peggy not on jury]

L. Never on the jury?

P. The reason I ask is that Hilja said -- in her early conversatin when she decided she was going to talk to me -- said "I will tell you all about the jury -- that was a very cliquey thing and my prints never had to go thru the jury and people thot it was bc I was J's sister-in-law, but it was bc I was so good -- so

L. I don't have that memory of it at all. I think that everybody's prints had to go thru the jury if they were going to be exhibited in the barn and called FCD. Of course people's memories change over the years, too, you know.

P. Did you have any sense that this was a select little group?

L. Isn't that funny, I've got a real block about that. I think Eino was on the jury, Louise, and J and probably Aino. But by the time something got to the jury, it had been pretty much shown and discussed and developed, and in some cases that last step was pretty much just a formality. It had been hashed over so much before it -- unless you secretly did something over the winter and waltzed in and plunked something down that the jury had never seen before, it would have been thoroughly gone over along its route of development. At least that's my memory of it.

P. [if younger blood had come in over the years]

L. It would have gone on

p. [Louise's comment re lull in crafts --rising now]

L. It certainly has zoomed. And also I don't think the buying public always was cued into what crafts was all about. BC there's a certain texture that you get with inking a block print that could be not intensely inked -- in other words there'd be some subtleties in the inking -- when you're doing prints on paper or maybe doing it for your own pleasure, you might not want that almost commercial looking solid look, but unless people were really tuned into what block printing was all about they would come into the barn and if there was any unevenness in a place that was obviously meant to all one color they'd say [mimicing mimicry like Holloran and Norton's anecdotes] "Oh, this mat has a ... this is spoiled ... this isn't pretty, well ..." We never let things like that really go into the barn if there was anything that was obviously... but if you were at the end of the day of printing and you came with one little place that wasn't as intensely inked as something else, you might let it go thru and say "Well, ever one is hand printed, hand done, we're not machines. And the appreciation of art that is not machined came along a little after we did and I have always felt commercially we killed ourselves bc it was just before the Merrimekko the came in. And you didn't always use Merrimekko for sheets and tablecloths, but you framed it and put in on your wall. Well we had been doing hangings but charging the same price really for hangings that we did for four table mats. Now table mats are disposable. You don't expect them to last forever and you do not charge as a piece of art, so we weren't smart. We were dealing with disposable items instead of framed art on the wall. And given a couple of years later and the Merrimekko impact, and our stuff would have had better prices.

P [Louise -- art or craft -- unless framed]

L. But you see the basis that J started it on was a group of women who wanted to do decorative things for their own home so she was teaching it as a craft, but she was using art principles. And where the follow thru came for me -- really which helped me as much outside of the FCD was with working with book publication. And I to this day have had arguments with people who are book designers bc I can still see things very strongly in different sizes, different spaces, different layouts, and when it came to laying out pages in books, it had an enormous influence on me and I did a lot of -- I designed several books that the Hornbook had printed and laid out one whole book -- it's called The Illustrator's Notebook -- using articles from the Hornbook and illustrations from books and I never could have laid that book out if I hadn't had that built-in sense of design.

P. What's amazing is that everyone I've talked to so far with the

exception of you has had some art training.

L. Well, I don't know as Hilja did.

P. There must have been some interest you had in art even before SMith.

L. Oh, yes, mymother had gone to art school. And she painted, and I grew up making paper dolls and painting -- I'd always been around art materials. And I had tried to paint when I was at Colby Junior -- I used to take oils and canvas out and go out and look at the landscape and paint the fall colors, so it was an inclination to do it, and when I got to Smith I did take this -- maybe it was Art 101 -- in the studio.

p [seems extraordinary to me that you could take virtually untrained people -- who had an inclination -- and have them do what you did -- quite extraordinary.

l. [laughs] I guess it is, but it's almost as if the FCD principles are so clear and so strong that that really defines the kind of thing that you'er doing. The problems for an untrained hand again comes back to the basic drawing. The idea and the basic drawing would be the difficulties. the FCD is the structure underneath that gives you the ability to come out with a design. In other words, if you followed J's homework and tried several different ways of doing something, you might come out with four different designs about the same subject but what would emerge really is a FCD almost more than that subject. And I hope you get to talk to Aino bc she was the one who was the most adventuresome in some ways w/ her subjects. There's a block called My Friday -- now underneath that there's some FC design, but that just is such an iconoclastic kind of thing. And the other -- one woman who has since died who was the one everybody decided was the most creative and used to have hysterics over it bc she was a really eccentric little personality was Alma Tompkins. She did a hanging which was a one of a kind -- this was art -- this was not disposable goods -- this was Portugee Hill. And she knew why she wanted every single block on that hanging put just where it was. And J would have to back down if she had a different idea. Alma knew -- that was where it went. And she got away with it. Now there are some people whose designs did breeze thru the jury pretty fast. But they were the ones who were on the jury [laughs] and theones who were really very strong and committed and knew as Irma, my water color painting teacher would say, make a statement. I mean they knew what they wanted with that design and could defend it. Whereas somebody like me who was trying to draw something would be much more influenced by the confines of the design and using that as a -- I don't want to say crutch, cause it wasn't a crutch, but a framework.

[Hetty Beatty wrote children's books -- ask Lee more about this]

[Did most of the women do some other kind of work outside or inside the home ?]

step

[the barn on J and G's property was one part J's studio. The barn had a pot-bellied stove. That's where all the entertainment was.]