

Gaylord Schanilec
Narrator

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Interviewer

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BB: My name is Betty Bright, and today, July 31, 2015 I am interviewing Gaylord Schanilec at Open Book in Minneapolis. This interview is being conducted on behalf of Minnesota Center for Book Arts' 30th Anniversary Oral History Project, which has been financed in part with funds provided by the State of Minnesota through the Minnesota Historical Society from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

Gaylord, thank you for visiting with us today. You are proprietor of Midnight Paper Sales, which you founded in 1980, five years before MCBA opened its doors. Your involvement with MCBA actually begins well before that, through a longstanding friendship with MCBA's founding Executive Director, Jim Sitter, and your involvement with the field goes much farther with your own artistic practice, but we'll get into that in a bit.

To start us off and before we turn to MCBA, I would love for you to talk about the kind of work you have done at Midnight Paper Sales, and the kind of books you have published, like *Sylvae*, even back to *High Bridge*, which we are going to talk about in a minute. I take it you work with letterpress printing?

GS: Yes, everything for me is an excuse to print something. But I just go from subject to subject, wherever life leads me, really.

BB: Toward the end of the conversation I know that we are fortunate here because you happen to be working at MCBA's studios again, so we will have some discussion about that today, which is great. So, let's start with your move to Minnesota. Give us a sense of where you came from in North Dakota, what you were doing there and why you chose to move here to Minnesota?

GS: I grew up in the Red River Valley of North Dakota. We started out in the very northeastern corner of the state, just south of the Canadian border, migrated south, and ended up basically in West Fargo. After my freshman year of high school we moved to Fargo, and that is where I met Jim Sitter, the first day of class in my sophomore year. I

went to a Catholic school, Fargo Shanley [High School]. Jim and I had lockers next to each other. It was a Catholic school, and most of the kids there had gone to Catholic grade school, and I was kind of an outsider when I showed up. And Jim, actually Jim's brother Joe was rated as the number one chess player in North Dakota, and Jim was like number three, and Fargo Shanley was noted for their football team, and when I moved there it had just broken the record for the longest winning streak in the history of high school football.

So, [the football team] was the focal point of the school, and Jim didn't fit in really well, either, so we were both kind of outsiders. We both ended up in this modern poetry class that year, taught by Christian Brother Don Byrne. I think it changed both of our lives in a big way. Up until that point I was an average kid, I wanted to be a major league baseball player, and I was average. And nothing was really taking hold, but the poetry thing really took hold, for both of us. For me, I started writing poetry, and for Jim, he just started really appreciating literature. So we both kind of started in that direction at that point. We co-edited the school literary journal, Black Pudding I think we called it. It was Black Light before we took over and then it was Black Pudding. Then Jim came here to Macalester, and I went to the University of North Dakota, ended up getting an art degree. Then I moved down here, and through Jim, and since we both had come from that poetry world up the Red River Valley, my connections were more in the literary world than in the visual art world, so I started illustrating small press books. It was easy to get work if you would work for next to nothing, and there were all these little presses jumping up all over the place, and so there was a lot of illustration to do. So that is how I came here, to the Twin Cities.

BB: You mentioned the small presses, and there was an active book community here. How did book people gather? What sorts of things did people do who were interested in books in the Twin Cities?

GS: From my perspective, Jim was working at the Hungry Mind Bookstore, in fact one of the things he took great pride in was that he established the poetry section at the Hungry Mind Bookstore. In fact, I still have the shelves that were the original Hungry Mind poetry section. So the Hungry Mind was kind of a focal point for us, but there started up this Five College Writers' Festival, and they had a book festival. I can't remember what the five colleges were: there was Saint Thomas and Saint Catherine, and, I remember, Jonis Agee and Lon Otto were the two of the central people in that. But anyway, they started doing this small press book fair, and I did posters for them, and there were a lot of small presses that were moving here: Coffee House Press (which was originally Toothpaste Press) came from Iowa, and Graywolf came from the West Coast, and New Rivers had come from New York, and they were all coming here for the money, basically, so there was all sorts of activity and opportunities to work on books.

BB: The book arts is comprised of both the visual and literary arts. How did you start to migrate into book artsy books in the Twin Cities, and who were you hanging out with at that point?

GS: Well let's see, how do I start? I am doing this illustration stuff, and there is a place called COMPAS in Saint Paul: Community Opportunities and Programs in the Arts and Sciences, and they had a bunch of CETA money from the federal government that they had to spend or they were going to lose it. And word got around, and everybody is going down there and getting a CETA grant. So I went down. I knew nothing about graphic design, but they needed a graphic designer. I knew some people that were going to MCAD [Minneapolis College of Art and Design] in graphic design, and they gave me a book to read, and so I kind of figured it out. And I applied for the job and I got it.

I started doing the graphic production work for COMPAS, so we produced books for poetry in the schools, posters and different things like that, and at that point most of my illustration work was pen and ink drawings. I started getting interested in woodcuts, and I would go down to the lumber yard and get chunks of pine, and I started doing those things, and I think I was using a wooden spoon to print them. I had run into another CETA artist at COMPAS, Gary Egger, and he had just rescued a Vandercook 219 on its way to the scrapyard, and figured out how to use it basically, and moved it into this warehouse space in Saint Paul. I went over to COMPAS one day and was showing him these woodcuts I was fooling around with, and he said, yes, you should come over and try printing them on the press. So I went over to Gary's and that was my first time I had seen a letterpress. I was proofing these things, and one thing led to another, and eventually Gary and I shared that space, and then Gary moved on and I ended up with the space for five years, in the warehouse there.

BB: Where was that?

GS: The Roberts Hamilton Building, it is just over the freeway from Lowertown. We were sort of an extension from Lowertown, on the other side of the Interstate. So that is how I started printing, but of course, I am still illustrating small press books and all that. This old guy that had a letterpress shop, I think he was in a nursing home or something, and these two sisters up in Frogtown used to do all the printing for this church. Somehow we ended up over there because there was some stuff for sale, and Gary and I went over. [We] thought about buying the building; it was this little cement block building, which we didn't do, but we bought most of the printing equipment and brought it back to the Roberts Hamilton. And so, now all of a sudden I have some type, and I hadn't really thought about making a book until, we used to do these kind of collage prints, it was a method that Gary had devised. He would go down to a lumber yard and get these counter top cut-outs, from when they would make a sink, and we would get those and glue fabric to them and stuff, [to create] kind of collage prints. So, I started fooling around with them, and with linoleum a little bit, and a little bit with type, and then one day I had this print and I folded this piece of paper in half, and I realized, this is a book. And that first

folding of that sheet was a pretty pivotal point for me, because from then on everything I did involved making a book out of it, one way or another. I suppose that was true even before that though, because the illustration stuff I was doing was all book-related.

BB: But you hadn't made it, you hadn't....

GS: The physical part was realizing I could make a book.

BB: Your book, as opposed to someone else's book.

GS: Yes, Yes.

BB: Did you make some preliminary books when you were still in Saint Paul?

GS: Yes, Yes. And Midnight Paper Sales, the name, was born.

BB: Yes, what about that name? [Laughter]

GS: Yes. It is a good name. We were living in this warehouse, across the street from Anchor Paper. Anchor Paper had a loading dock, and they had these big wire bins on the dock, and when they custom-cut paper they would throw the scraps in there. And after dark, we were living in the warehouse; we would go over there and root through the bins to get our paper for printing or whatever we were doing. Actually, Gary came up with the name, Midnight Paper Sales.

BB: Like, Reuse Recycle! [Laughter] So, the community you were hanging out with at that point was Saint Paul folks primarily? Small press?

GS: It wasn't small press so much as it was young, hungry, artsy type people. I mean, Greg Kelsey the painter was there, Sally Johnson, who now runs Groveland Gallery, was there.

BB: Was she living there?

GS: Sally and Greg were living together there. I think Sally was doing some glass things. I remember seeing some artwork. Kate Holmes was there; she and Mary Gripp actually had a frame shop on the first floor. Zeitgeist, Jay Johnson and Joel Holmquist, they did a lot of John Cage-like music, xylophone-like stuff. I think Zeitgeist is still around; they were in the building. There was a guy named Archie Peltier who used to do all the signs, it was called the Carousel for the Renaissance Fair. He did all the sculptural construction and signage for the Renaissance Fairs, both here and, I remember a couple times we went to Colorado to install some things. He was my neighbor, so I would tag along with them sometimes. So it was a real variety of different musicians, painters, sculptors, all different

kinds of people, but we were all young and early on in our creative lives, or whatever you want to call it.

BB: When did you first hear of the Ampersand club?

GS: Probably right about that time, 1980 or something like that. I learned the basics of printing from Gary. And then Gerald Lange, who had been studying with Walter Hamady in Madison [Wisconsin] moved to town. Moved his presses, and I had met him at one of the Five Colleges Writers Festivals, because he had a table there. We met and we apparently liked each other, and he invited me to illustrate a book for him. And then he moved to town, and he was in the Rossmor Building, which is just over the Interstate from the Roberts Hamilton Building. I was working on a book called *Buffaloed*, and he was working on a book called—I can't remember what that one was—but the book we ended up working on was called *Somata*, which he published, at the same time he was mentoring me and teaching me a lot about the finer side of things, and about publishing and printing books. I think it was through Gerry that I was introduced to the Ampersand Club. When I finished *Buffaloed*, Gary says, you should go over to the Minnesota Historical Society. Pat Coleman will buy a copy; ask for Pat Coleman. So I went over there and, sure enough, Pat bought a copy and pretty much everything ever since, too, and of course Pat was an Ampersander too, so, it was right around that time that the Ampersand came up.

BB: Where would you guys gather, the Ampersanders?

GS: Probably Campbell-Logan, Yes, I am sure it was Campbell-Logan, which was a long way from Saint Paul. But at that time Elmer Andersen was still around, and Harold Kittleson, and Emerson Wulling, so it was a real kick for me in my early twenties, to be a member of a club that included those guys in their nineties. It was really interesting.

BB: So, you are figuring out some printing things, you are starting to identify as a maker of books you are interested in.

GS: Yes, I wasn't making books at that time, I am more of a literary small press than, that is, my printing, publishing handle would have been a literary small press.

BB: Would you sell books at a fair?

GS: Yes, the Five Colleges Literary Fair at one point evolved into something I think was called, Great Northern Book Fair, and moved to Minneapolis and there were two women that actually had jobs, was it Barry Borsch, she was a poet, I can't remember the other one. They moved their offices to Minneapolis and we were at Butler Square for a while, then Willey Hall at the University for a while. It was kind of moving around a little bit. What was the question?

BB: Oh, pretty much that, where were you selling your books?

GS: Yes, well, you are going to ask me about when I first heard about Jim [Sitter]'s idea for this Center at some point, right?

BB: [Laughter] I would love to hear that, yes.

GS: Because we are about to that time. So there was a book fair in Milwaukee, I guess, in 1982 but I am not sure about that. And so we went to Milwaukee. Jim was there. I was there.

BB: What was Jim doing there?

GS: I really don't know. He might have been Bookslinger at that point. Was he Bookslinger at that point?

BB: That would make sense.

GS: Actually, Jim from Hungry Mind kind of transitioned. He was working for David Wilke who had Truck Press and Truck Distribution Service for distributing small press books. Later [Wilke] became the Literary Head of the National Endowment for the Arts, when he left here that is the job he went for. And so Jim bought Truck Press and Truck Distribution Service from David Wilke, and Jim actually moved that business into the Roberts Hamilton Building where my studio was. So he probably was Bookslinger at that time, so he probably had a table at this book fair in Milwaukee as Bookslinger.

The post-book fair party was in this bar, and I remember that evening sitting on the curb when Jim sat down and described this idea that he had, to start this book arts center in Minneapolis—or Minnesota, he wasn't necessarily thinking Minneapolis. And I think from the very beginning when he described it, he was trying to make it as big a tent as possible, as far as, you know, he wanted, he wanted it to be a place where people worked on books, he wanted it to have a library, he wanted it to administrate all different things, he wanted it to do everything with it, with a gallery space, whatever he could think of; he wanted to incorporate this idea.

BB: What did you think about it, what kinds of things did you guys...did he just describe it to you?

GS: He described it and I just said, yes, sure, that sounds like a good idea.

BB: [Laughter] And then he just said I am going to see what happens with that? He just started talking with people?

GS: I guess so. I mean, you know, I wasn't that involved in thinking about it. I thought it was a great idea, but I had plenty of stuff I was working on. I wasn't about to try to launch it.

BB: In that intervening time, he is getting the place going. When did you first see the space at the McKesson Building? When did you hear that he had the board that had chosen that site?

GS: The McKesson Building was the original site?

BB: Right, Yes.

GS: I know he was looking around at one point at the Depot in Saint Paul; he was looking at a number of spaces. I think I saw it when it was still a rough space, before they started to do anything. And I remember being somewhat—concerned isn't even the right word for it; just, they were putting so many resources into hiring architects and doing all these, what seemed to me really expansive, unnecessary sorts of things. It was sort of disconcerting that they were putting all this money and effort into making this sort of a showcase. In some ways it seemed like it was unnecessary, the resources would be better used supporting [those of] us that were doing the work.

BB: Were you around when they were actually setting it up, once it had been renovated?

GS: Yes, I was. Were you? You were there!

BB: I was there. I don't think I was setting up the printing studio though. Were you? I am sure I was in the office doing office-y things.

GS: Yes, I am sure I remember moving things in and out of there, but of course, Allan Kornblum was the first printer-in-residence.

BB: Yes, but we had other presses, too.

GS: Oh, there were a whole bunch of presses; in fact, most of those presses are downstairs [in MCBA's studios today]. I recognized a couple of them. I printed *High Bridge* on that SP20 that is downstairs. It is a galley-high press that has one of those plates. I remember that press.

BB: I would love to hear about your printing *High Bridge*. You got the first, well, there are several production grants administered through the Jerome Foundation, and in the first round of emerging artists you were one of the winners of a Jerome grant.

GS: Yes.

BB: We will be looking at it in a few minutes. What was it like to have that experience of having somebody actually provide money and trying to figure out what you were going to do with the illustrations?

GS: The money part was great, to actually have some money to buy the paper, and I made the blocks myself, which was kind of a mistake. Because I was still at the Roberts Hamilton Building, and Archie and his crew did a lot of woodworking so they had the equipment, and with John Van Orman's help, who worked for I was able to manufacture the blocks. Really hard to do, especially for somebody who had never done anything like that before, and they weren't the greatest blocks but they worked out ok. So I got the money, which basically funded the supplies and freed me up to work on the thing. And so I started working on it at MCBA. Allan was there and I was there, and Kent Aldrich was working for Allan, and so it was pretty much just the three of us that were printing there. I think early on it was just the three of us, and Kent and I mostly, because I don't think Allan was doing that much printing, I think Kent was mostly printing. So I started working on the *High Bridge*, and when I wrote the proposal I had a pretty good idea of what it was going to be, there ten images and they were sort of this sequence, almost cinematographic in the way they tied into each other. I was thinking of the whole thing as one long composition, and so I am working on this thing and I had them all up on the wall above the press.

BB: I remember that.

GS: You remember that?

BB: Yes.

GS: And I was kind of feeling my way in the dark, because I had never really done color wood engraving before, so the whole thing was sort of evolving as I went, and every time I would print another on the image, I would put the latest version on top of the previous one, and so this thing just kept growing on the wall, and one day I came in in the morning and there was this tall person that was just kind of looking at things there, and it was John Randle [of Whittington Press in England]. One of the things that Jim made a point of early on was inviting everybody, all the big players in the book arts scene, to MCBA, because he was trying to establish the place. So he invited John and a couple of young British printers to give a workshop, and I had never met, I mean, it was amazing to meet this guy with an English accent. I had never heard one of those before in person. But he was just engrossed by the *High Bridge* project; he thought it was great. That was one of the great things about MCBA for me early on; just these people who would come through that I'd get to meet, like John. It was pretty amazing.

BB: I remember your talking about how it was a learning curve for you as far as how you were printing it. Tell me if I misremember because this has always been in my head. I

remember coming in one morning and you were printing and I walked over and said, Gaylord! Did you get here early? And you said I have been here all night.

GS: Really?

BB: Yes. And was it the printing of the white? You had to reprint? That memory has been in my mind.

GS: I kind of jump into things feet first before I know what I am doing sometimes. And with these *High Bridge* images I decided I would start with just a white rectangle for each one. I was printing on an off-white paper; it was a Basingwerk paper with an off-white background, so I thought I would start by printing white, and then I would finish by printing black, so the idea was that all these layers of color would be between the white and black. But I had heard about some stuff called Set Well Compound, and I had read something about it and it was supposed to make layers of ink lay on each other more easily. So I added it to the white and spent weeks printing all the white for all ten images, got all the white done, and then I started trying to print the next layer on the white. And it would not stick; it just like got kind of weird and molted-looking. It turns out that the Set Well compound contains wax, and it is to help layers of ink lie on existing layers of ink. So I had done that, I had introduced this layer of wax that the ink would not stick to, and that's why I was so panicked, because I was sunk, I didn't know what to do. Eventually I figured out a way, I think I added varnish to the next couple layers of ink, which gave it just enough tack to hold on, and then the next layer stuck onto that layer, so that is probably why I was a little bit panicked.

BB: You were not panicked at all; you were very calm.

GS: Yes. Well, the thing about that is that is always true. For me, especially from that book on, every book I tried to make a leap, into something I knew nothing about, and when you do that you don't know where you are going, you have no idea, and you encounter problems that take the wind out of you for awhile, but there is always a way around it, and for me that has been a really essential part of my working method, is learning how to deal with these problems that, because you are in a place where no one has ever been, or you have never been, anyway, and you don't know how to get out of it, that is the part of it that is the most exciting part for me is that unknown, and the scariness of it. And like that is the thing with what is going on downstairs right now. Every day when I get together with those guys down there, I have no idea what we're going to do. And that is the way, for me, that is the way it should be. Just not knowing and being a little bit frightened by things.

BB: Before we move on, do you have any particular memories of Allan Kornblum? Obviously we lost him last year so he can't participate here. Do you have any interactions or does anything stand out as far as what he was doing? You were around MCBA in those early years, with Coffee House.

GS: The thing about Allan that I was always really impressed by, and the thing that I don't think he ever got enough credit for, was that everything he printed—especially letterpress, once it became an offset semi-commercial press it changed, although you could still see Allan in it—everything that he printed, was so distinctly his. He had a wonderful typographical and design sense that was very simplistic but you knew it was Allan every time. He was really good at it that way. And he was a great editor and he had a lot of good material to work with. But yes, his essence was always at the heart of things. And it really is that kind of heart that makes the difference I think, in anybody's work. But I could really feel his presence in his work, particularly his printing.

BB: What was, the McKesson Building on First Avenue, what was that like to approach from the outside, and the whole neighborhood vibe around that time?

GS: Well, it was very Minneapolis, metropolitan. It was right on the edge of the Warehouse District, it had Black's Café, which, there were all these artsy, Minneapolis is so different from Saint Paul. Minneapolis is much more of an arty scene. It just has a whole different flavor to it. The New French Café was over there. And of course Phil Gallo was living Uptown at that time, but the New French was his hangout; I remember running into him a number of times when I was at MCBA. And Phil was actually the other one I should mention. There was Gerry [Lange] and Phil. I learned the rudimentary basics of printing from Gary, but the finer side of things, Gerry and Phil were the two people I could go to, always with questions, still, Gerry not so much because he has been gone [to California] for some time, but Phil, everything I do, I feel Phil looking over my shoulder: what would Phil think of this? But yes, it was a whole different kind of a scene over here.

BB: Were you around during the grand opening in 1985? Did you come by? Did you help out with that six-hour opening? I think it was six to midnight?

GS: What, do you mean, did I help out?

BB: Were you around printing that night?

GS: Oh, was I printing! I bet I was. What year was that?

BB: 1985.

GS: I was probably working on *High Bridge*. I bet I was, because I think it was 1986. Hopefully it says.

BB: I actually looked that up. Published in 1987.

GS: Oh, it is 1987, so 1985—I probably got the grant in 1985, so maybe I wasn't working then. But yes, I remember the night.

BB: You do?

GS: Yes.

BB: Any memories in particular of the night?

GS: Yes, I remember it was good food, good music, lots of people around, very lively. It was timed with the art crawl so there were a lot of people coming through, so yes, a pretty lively place.

BB: You got *High Bridge* funded through a Jerome Fellowship in 1987, and it sounds like when you were working in the studios in those days it was pretty low-key, and not a lot of activity going on, certainly not as much activity as today.

GS: No it wasn't. It was one day a week that kids came through. I think it was Tuesdays. So that was the day I would not be there if at all possible. But other than that it was very quiet. Back then, just Kent and I mostly, and I had my own press, my own bay, I had control over my space completely because there just weren't that many people around.

BB: And then you served as an artist-in-residence following that. You had *Farmers*, so [you were] one of the few people in our community who have won two fellowships. *Farmers* came out in 1989. So you were around and printing, and also setting up a home studio in Stockholm, Wisconsin.

GS: Yes, because I printed *Farmers* in Stockholm.

BB: But then you were also artist-in-residence...

GS: What happened actually was that when I finished *High Bridge* it coincided with the opening of the new High Bridge [in Saint Paul], the publication did. I managed to sell some copies and I had some money, and bought twenty-seven acres of rural Wisconsin land for \$24,000. So I moved out there, moved the press out there, and printed *Farmers* out there. *Farmers* was interviews with farmers and pictures of their farms, and pretty much the reason why I decided to do that was because I met my neighbor out there, Joe Edlund, and his property surrounded me basically, and I realized I need to get to know this guy basically, and he was one of the people I interviewed in the book, and it worked, we became good friends.

BB: And then you were artist-in-residence at MCBA.

GS: Was that after *Farmers*? I think it was.

BB: It was until 1991, with the completion of the Bridge book, and then you left for Wales.

GS: But that was the Armajani book.

BB: Right. I should say the Armijani book.

GS: Yes. Because I had done *Farmers* and I was at a book arts conference. I went to New York for a book arts conference, so that would be 1989 or so...you were there, you were giving a slide talk; in fact, you showed slides of *Farmers*.

BB: I did. I remember [it was 1990].

GS: And David Esslemont was there, from the Gregynog Press in Wales, looking for an American to illustrate the Civil War Poems, which the Gregynog Press was publishing; he was looking for an American. And then he said, then he saw those big American skies in the slides that Betty Bright was showing, and he said, who did those big American skies? That is who we need for our Whitman.

And so David and I met, and Steve Clay was there, and David suggested this when I met him, and I thought, man, I don't know. I didn't have a passport and I had never really gone anywhere. The idea of going to Wales to illustrate a book! So I said, no, I don't think I would be interested. The next day Steve Clay was there, and I told this to Steve, and Steve said, are you out of your mind, the Gregynog Press asked you to illustrate something and you said no? And I said, oh, ok, because I didn't know anything about England or the Gregynog Press or anything. So the next time I saw David I said, yes, ok, I guess I could do that. But leading up to going to Wales, I was the artist-in-residence at MCBA, and the Armajani book was the last printing I had to do before I left. And I remember that I needed the money, so I had to do the printing before I could go.

BB: In a second we will take a break and look at some of these books, and then finish up with some general questions. Why don't you share with us how that came about? Who approached you and said we want you to work with Siah Armajani? How did that whole project happen? Seems like an unusual project for MCBA.

GS: It was. And it was an unusual project for the Walker. The trick was to get the Walker on board, because one of the problems of the book arts and artists' books was trying to break into the art scene. So I think that connection with the Walker was very appealing to you guys. And Armajani was a pretty big name in the art world, and I don't know who made the connection or whatever, but the Walker and MCBA decided to co-publish this book. And since I was the printer-in-residence at the time, I was in line to print it, which was really a stroke of luck for me. It was really an interesting thing to work on.

BB: Maybe Hollis Stauber, who was the Executive Director then, hatched the plan with Liz Armstrong at the Walker.

GS: I think they were at the meetings, yes, it must have been Hollis—you weren't involved in it?

BB: No, that was Hollis' thing.

GS: Oh, it was. And it was a fabulous experience because Armajani was a real dynamic person that really took control of things, in a way that it was very interesting for me to see. I don't think it was a very successful book from a financial point of view, because I think MCBA still has a whole bunch of copies.

BB: I think we have a few. It is a gorgeous book.

GS: It is a real interesting book.

BB: Why don't we just start talking about it.

GS: Now, who did the paste paper? I think Kent had something to do with it.

BB: I don't know. We can look at the colophon.

GS: I think Kent did the paste paper. Ann Borman was at that point around, and I think she designed it.

BB: Oh, that is interesting!

GS: Yes, I am pretty sure she did. I know I didn't have anything to do with it. My whole job was to make the images. And the images were really kind of fun to print. All the blocks were composed of elements that they were using in Armajani's studio to make small-scale models of his sculptural projects. So there is balsa wood, mostly balsa wood and stuff. My idea was to take those materials and use them, to make printing blocks to print the images from. So these things were all constructed from their model-making materials, which was pretty fragile stuff. I remembered with some of these, they would be falling apart. I don't remember how many copies we made. A couple hundred, I think. So, I was constantly re-gluing, getting new pieces, and replacing pieces that were breaking up. And there is like a pound of ink in this book. There is so much ink in this book. We went through a lot of ink.

But Siah was like, like this [image] for instance, you can see the impression in that; you can't even read the words, hardly. So I was printing this and he was in the studio at MCBA when I was doing it, and I kept saying, well, you can't even read it any more. There is way too much impression. And he said, no no no no, no, that is how I want it,

just like that! Which was totally contrary to—legibility is everything as far as I was concerned, at least at that point. But yes, ok, whatever you say, Mr. Armajani. Some of the things, this was overprinting of white over it looks like, red and blue. There was a lot of really interesting things going on. The difference between this and my *High Bridge* work, you can see what a departure this was for me. And that was because of MCBA, and meeting Siah Armajani, and getting to work with him, that was really a good experience.

BB: So were you literally composing on the press, or were you fooling around making these plates, and then figuring out how to create those stippled patterns.

GS: I think he would do a drawing and then I would figure out how to turn it into a block. I think is how it worked. If I remember right, it has been awhile. This was one that really broke up a lot, I remember, rebuilding these parts, like here, that [part] is broken now. So then I would have to glue another one of those in there. Just deteriorating all over the place.

BB: Was he coming in a lot while you were printing?

GS: Once in a while, then I would go to his studio once in awhile. He had some assistants. Actually his assistants were doing a lot of the original building of these things. In fact I think they would bring the blocks in, they would do the original construction, and then I would just get a whole bunch of extra parts, and as I was printing, I would just keep repairing things. But I kind of set up the basic, not process, but the basic, how to do it, I figured out how to make type-high blocks more or less out of it. The colors were foreign to anything I had ever thought about or seen before. But he had very definite ideas.

BB: About color, too?

GS: About color. Oh, yes. I would be mixing a color. Yes, he was there quite a bit, because I remember I would be mixing a color and he would come over and say, no, no, that is it! That is it! That is it! And I would be thinking, God, really? Yes, that is the color! That is the color!

BB: So, he was definitive.

GS: Very definitive. He knew what he wanted, absolutely. Like this pink, and this green.

BB: Well, maybe he was thinking about the bridge. Did they have a sculpture garden at that point? They did, right? Maybe he was looking at different ways of what the bridge was going from Loring Park to the Sculpture Garden and taking elements.

GS: Yes. I bet you they did have that sculpture garden bridge by then. Yes, that was probably one of the bridges in this book. But he was also very connected to poetry.

BB: Are there poems? Or short phrases?

GS: There is a phrase right there, there is a poem like the one that was over in press. John Ashbery or something?

BB: Yes, because he a poem on the actual bridge.

GS: Oh, here we are. Yes, John Ashbery. This is the bridge to the Walker Art Center. And this is what we ended up using for the endsheets. I don't know how we ended up using that pattern. Probably the people in his studio, fooling around with something.

BB: What was this experience like for you with your work? How did this affect you moving forward after this?

GS: After this I got on an airplane and flew over to Wales, the Gulf War started while I was mid-air, and I was illustrating Whitman's Civil War poems while listening to the BBC accounts in the middle of dark Wales. Later, this would affect me, but immediately I was launched into a whole other project. And when I went over there, I didn't know anything about British printing or wood engraving or anything, and Gregynog of course is right at the essence of the private press movement. So, I had a huge education there waiting for me. But I think this did inform me in a lot of ways over the years. And I think it was—what was the word you just used to describe Armajani—he was very definitive, and I am not as, well I guess maybe I am, but in a whole different way.

BB: Well, and that atelier kind of production is certainly unusual for MCBA. Generally the stuff that happens is collaboration between artists.

GS: Atelier.

BB: When there is an artist that is coming in and collaborating on site.

GS: Oh, yes, and I am just his technician.

BB: That printer is considered an artist and someone with a tremendous amount of knowledge to interpret what the artist is thinking.

GS: Well, I wasn't the artist though, he was. I was the technician. I was the interpreter.

BB: Ok! Well, let's look at a few of these other ones. We have *Winter Prairie Woman*...

GS: Oh, I want to talk about *Winter Prairie Woman*, because that was one of the early Winter Books. I don't know how many I did. I think I did three or four of them. For a while there they kept on saying, do you want to do another Winter Book? And I would

say, yes, ok. But this was probably my favorite. I like them all, but when this came along...Meridel LeSueur...Back in North Dakota in my early poetry days, Tom McGrath was sort of my hero. He took Mickey Mantle's place in my world; he was bigger than life. Meridel LeSueur was another figure in the Minnesota literary world that had that kind of stature. And so, MCBA got a manuscript from her, called *Winter Prairie Woman*. It was a short story, and that was a big deal. And I remember, it came along and we were thinking about, well, who do we know for illustrations? And I had been seeing posters for the Heart of the Beast Puppet Theatre around town for years, and I thought, man, these are amazing, just beautiful. And the puppets themselves; there was something about them that was just really good. One thing led to another and we found out that Sandy Spieler was the person behind that, and I believe that she is related to Meridel LeSueur. There was some blood relation between the two of them. We got hold of Sandy Spieler and asked if she would be interested in working on it, and she agreed. And she had never done any sort of graphic work before, so it was totally new for her too, which was great, and it is one of the sweetest little books.

MCBA used to have a press that was bigger than the ones they have now, it was an automatic cylinder, it was a Vandercook, but it was a bigger bed, a great big thing. And I had this idea that we would print like thirty-two pages at a time, so it was a great big sheet, this really big sheet, and there would be like thirty-two pages on there. And then we would run these pages and come back. And then when it came time to printing the backside, registration, especially down at the bottom, was a nightmare. That part of it was just a total disaster. And if you look at the book, this was one of the deluxes, so it is a better one, but we ended up with a very uneven bottom edge because we would have to go to a light table and kind of align the text block with the next one, and then re-trim the top edge. I mean, ideally you would want to be able to see right through and have everything line up. So, that was really problematic and not a good idea. The printing is really good, though.

BB: It is many people's favorite book.

GS: You know it is Richard Arey's favorite book, which says an awful lot.

BB: Peggy Korsmo-Kennon was just in here saying it was one of her favorites.

GS: It is one of my favorites. It is one of my copies. I have got a great story about our publication party for this. So, Meridel comes, and she is in a wheelchair. And I am printing, even though it is the opening, I am printing something, and I have this paint knife, with some ink on it, and I am talking with Meridel, not realizing that this ink is dribbling down onto the floor. And we are done talking and then they push Meridel away, and her wheel hits the ink, and so every revolution of the tire is another spot of the wet ink, and so I am following around behind her with a rag. It is kind of like Rocky and Bullwinkle. But, so my copy of this book that night, was kind of like a high school yearbook. Everybody signed it, oh, Meridel, and everybody else, it was kind of like, my

big moment of a thing. But then when my archives went to the University of Minnesota, and so did my book, so I haven't had one for years and years and years. But I just found a copy so I bought it because it is a magnificent book and the images are just so amazing. And the printing is really good, I have to say, it really is.

BB: The images are two-color, right? They are really strong. And it was really smart just to do this purply color with red rather than just black and red.

GS: That was probably Sandy's idea. She is a brilliant artist. But typographically it was great. I think I was working on this when Leonard Baskin came. Because...this isn't Romulus, is it? Romulus. Yes, it was Romulus. Paulette Myers-Rich was one of my interns, as was...well, Paulette's the only name you would know. So yes, I set this in Romulus, and I am working on this, and one day this guy shows up, and he was limping, kind of an older guy. Remember, the MCBA store was just this glass-fronted case, and then there would be a little ledge there.

And it was Leonard Baskin, and I didn't know who it was. And he saw this and he said, oh, what is that typeface? And I said, Romulus, because I knew what typeface it was. And he said, well, who designed that typeface? It wasn't a trick question but he was just testing me. It was Jan van Krimpen and I knew that so I said, Yes, Jan van Krimpen. And he said, well, van Krimpen was a good friend of mine. And since I knew who it was, I was ok in his book. And then he says, let me see what you are doing, and he said, well, I am going to send you some stuff. He was going to send me some blocks and other things, which he never did, I never got the stuff from him, but anyway I got his approval.

BB: So, we are going to go in reverse order, and end with *High Bridge*. Everything is circular here.

GS: I already talked about it some.

BB: Well let's look at it some and see if there's anything else you want to say about it. The paper?

GS: The paper was done by Amanda Degener, who was the artist-in-residence in the papermaking studio. But I don't think I was the printer in residence yet, I was just working on this book. She was in residence but I wasn't living there or anything yet. She had been experimenting with marbling on this handmade paper she was making, and I thought it looked kind of like the surface of the water, see what I mean? And so I said, can you make me some of that for the deluxe? And so she did, Amanda made the paper for the covers, Greg Campbell bound them. He did all my binding early on. And this book; I got the Jerome money which made it possible, but it was still a real, I mean, I printed over 200 and some copies, a lot of paper, a lot of expense, a lot of time, and Greg, rather than taking money for the binding, he took copies, which was great for me, it made it possible for me to do what I ended up doing with it. But as luck would have it in the

end it turned out to be a really good deal for Greg too, because the book sold out; it was a big hit. I remember, a lot of people in California started calling me up and asking me if they could trade me for something. Like Peter Koch, for instance, he called me up and said would you like to trade? Of course, oh, sure, yes, so I sent him a copy and he sent me this little book he had done. Will Powers was out there then; he and Cheryl Miller remembered when they first saw this book, and I remember somebody at MCBA saying, well, this book has put us on the map. It was a huge book and not just for me, but for us.

BB: Why don't you say briefly what it was about? The book was iconic because it captured that bridge, which was such a central part to Saint Paul with the city growing up.

GS: Yes, I had just heard that they were going to demolish it. I didn't know much about it, but I went down there with my camera and took a bunch of pictures and it was February. It was really cold, and the bridge was supposed to go down at ten in the morning, and there were like 20,000 people there, 30,000 people, I can't remember how many, people all over the place because it was a 100-year old bridge and it had connected the two sides of the river for 100 years, and everybody had stories about it. You know, their grandparent had proposed there, or their cousin had jumped off, something, all these stories about the bridge. It was supposed to go down at ten in the morning, and it wasn't going down, wasn't going down, wasn't going down. People started building fires, and these ribbons of smoke began appearing all over the place, and we are all just standing around in the cold, you know. And it didn't go down until about four in the afternoon.

And then, finally, just like that it was gone. And everybody was just stunned, because, it is not there. And it was such a powerful thing that I decided to do a book about it, and so I came up with a series of compositions that basically depicted a walk around the bridge that day. You know, you start out approaching it, then you go underneath it and come out the other side, and it kind of pans away and then you see it in the distance and then it collapses, and then it is just the empty valley. And for a text, for me a text is absolutely essential, but this one, I had my brother Rob, who had just moved to the Twin Cities, go to the Historical Society and find all the newspaper accounts that he could find [written] during the construction of the bridge in the late-1800s. And then my brother Clayton edited them into ten stories. It is really interesting reading because it is that yellow journalism of the time; it is not very politically correct by today's standards at all, but really colorful language, and really interesting construction techniques. I mean, when they are working on the foundation of the bridge, they would actually sink this wooden enclosure down to the bottom with the air trapped inside, and then the workers would go down under this wooden thing and they would work on the substructure of the bridge. And this reporter—Clayton identified, there was one voice he really got to like, and three or four of the stories were obviously written by the same guy. So this reporter goes down into this chasm to write about what's going on in the bridge.

And there is another one where they are working on the upper part of the bridge, and there is a guy with a wooden keg up here, and there is a guy down here that is actually

making the wooden rivets or whatever, and they are still hot, and he throws them up into the air the and the guy with the keg catches them up there. There was stuff like that. Like, they are evicting the Polacks from Polack town, and there is this comely young Mary Narlock who was chasing away the attorney Hyne who had come to throw her and her family out into the snow, stuff like that. And my grandmother's name is Mary Narlock.

These construction stories alternate with the images. In the images you are taking this last walk around the bridge, and in the text you are reading about its construction, until towards the end when it finally weathers its first storm, and then the next page when you see the bridge go down and it is over. The whole idea was, the 100 years in between all that was left out, was not present, it was just the beginning and the end. And it dawned on me when I was thinking about all the stories that people had about the life of the bridge, that this was the beginning and the end, and I didn't have any other stories about it to put anything else into it.

BB: I think that is why the book was so popular. It takes you across that whole spectrum literally of the bridge.

GS: And it is a bridge. Bridge is such an interesting metaphor.

BB: Now we have this interesting period where you have circled back around and you are working back down in the print studio really for the first time since 1991. Just great luck for all of us. Let me ask you a few more general questions and then I want us to talk about what you are doing downstairs. You have traveled widely, you have shown at book fairs, you have won several awards. You have a certain vision of the book arts field, such as it is. Where do you think MCBA fits in that expansive community of the book arts? What does MCBA contribute to the larger community? That could be called legacy, it could be called what kind of role we are playing now.

GS: Well, I think MCBA is one of a handful of bookish institutions around the country that support this whole industry that has grown up around things. Really, the epicenter of this is the CODEX fair in Berkeley. That is the world's fair of the book arts now. So we are part of that satellite that supports this whole industry in this county. The thing about Minnesota though is, this is by far the best facility. It seems to me it is in [be in] the best financial condition of any of them. And I think it goes back, in part: Minnesotans are hard working, nice people, you know, we are who we are that way, we like things clean and bright and open, plenty of space around us, there is a lot of parks and we like to ride bikes and cross country ski and all that stuff. But I think, back in the late 1970s and early 1980s when all these presses were coming here: Coffee House, Graywolf Press, New Rivers, Milkweed.

BB: Milkweed...started here.

GS: They started here, but all these other presses were coming here for the money. The foundation money and the private money here supported the book arts. So that is why they all came. They came for the money. And MCBA is just another example of the financial community's support of the book arts, probably the arts in general, but the book arts in particular. I mean, this is a fabulous facility, and it has also been really strategic thinking by those sorts of people. Like with Jay Cowles, right, who was so instrumental in launching this whole building project here, and there were some really difficult times for this institution right about that time, but people like Jay Cowles would roll up their sleeves and really make things happen. And all of us, you, me, Jay, we are all really important parts of this, all of us are, it is not just the artists, or the booksellers, it is all of us.

BB: When you think about community, you talked about the first space, and how we are pretty much explaining ourselves to the world, the world as what the Twin Cities were then. Now you come back and you are working in this space. How has that community changed, or the vibe of it, the kind of folks who are working here. How is the experience of working here different as opposed to when you were?

GS: Twenty-five years ago?

BB: Yes.

GS: Now you have to sign up for a press. You have to sign up on a schedule because there is a...what do you call it, it is a...

BB: Oh, it is the Co-op, the Artists' Cooperative.

GS: The Co-op. There is a whole bunch of people that pay a certain amount of money a month to work in the facility.

BB: 24/7.

GS: 24/7. I remember at one point when they were still in the old space and it was kind of the dark days of MCBA, I remember they were talking about doing away with the store, and somebody asked me about that at one point and I said, Don't! Please! I mean, every now and then they would sell something of mine, and how important that was. The money was so important. And the idea that they were going to discard the store I thought was just really a bad idea. And now of course it is just right out front and it is, I think they do a lot of business in there.

BB: They do, and it has a great display area for the artists' works, which was always the idea, but you needed some space to show prints and get the books out so people could handle them easily.

GS: And when they bought this building, this was kind of a dead part of town. And since then, the Mill City Museum has shown up, and the Guthrie [Theatre] is over here, and this is a thriving part, and they are building all these condos all over the place. Now you have this street traffic going by, the store is right there. And the one sad part of that is that when they first opened this building the Hungry Mind had a bookstore right down there. And unfortunately they couldn't hold on long enough, for the people living here to show up and support a store like that, because if the Hungry Mind had survived it would be in much better, it's a pity the Hungry Mind is no longer around, that was just a great book institution, really sad to see that go.

BB: Absolutely. There were a lot of things challenging independent bookstores. The timing...

GS: But it is a much busier place than it was then. Every day I come here there are people of all sorts all over. I think that the fact that these other literary organizations are in the same building is huge, because it makes this the epicenter of the book in the city.

BB: I would love to end by talking about the work you are doing downstairs. Again, this is such a treat, because these books you have been producing, in my opinion and in that of many others, they are rich, dense, visually alluring but also full of really strong content. I would just love for you to talk about what the project is that you are working on for the Minnesota Historical Society, and I know we will want to get some visuals of that too. So, tell us about the project, Gaylord.

GS: There is this writer named John Coy. I have been living out in Stockholm for the last twenty-five years, [and] he came by one day with his wife—Jim Sitter brought him by, and [Coy] is a children's book author, and he had a book called, *Driving at Night*. My daughter was five or six at the time, and he gave us a copy, and it was really a nice book. That was the last I heard about John Coy until three or four years ago. I got an email from Shannon Pennefeather from Minnesota Historical Society, asking me if I would consider working on this children's book by John Coy about the movement of Saint Anthony Falls over 12,000 years, basically from downtown Saint Paul over to where it is today, which is right over here.

I knew I had at least two or three years left on the project I was working on so I said, you know, I can't even begin to think about it for two or three years, and both her and John said, oh, fine, we will wait. They both really wanted me to work on it. And at that point I am thinking, well, it is nice to be wanted. The book I was working on, the *Lac des Pleurs*, was a seven-year project, like, this huge book for me, and sort of like the culmination of so many things, and I knew when that was over I would like to make a change, I needed because I had taken so many things just as far as I could take them, and I needed to take a new course. This seemed like a good opportunity because I wouldn't have to publish it, I wouldn't have to print it, I would just have to come up with the images. And I think they had wood engravings in mind, because that is what they were familiar with in my work.

So, when I finally finished *Lac des Pleurs*, two or three years had gone by and I said, yes, ok. And we had our initial meeting, and it wasn't going to pay very much, which for me is an issue. I knew from the beginning, from *High Bridge*, that this stuff takes so much time. For me it is all-consuming, so for me the only way to do it would be if I could make a living at it, so I could never afford to take on projects that I couldn't make a survivable income; otherwise I couldn't do the work. They weren't going to offer a good income; it didn't offer a lot of money, but they did have tremendous resources, so that was part of the allure. I could probably figure out a way that I would not have to do this incredibly laborious, time-consuming labor on these images because I had resources. Someone else could do all the research, for example.

So at the very beginning, there was a woman named Lisa for example, I forgot her last name, but she spent quite a few months compiling all the research and going through these documents and she gave me a stack, this huge stake. So I started sifting through all of that, and John and I met once or twice, and he was really open. They just wanted me to do whatever I wanted to do! Which is really, well, ok! And this fear, it is one thing to be afraid of a project when it is just you on the line, and you are the only one who is going to go down with it. But they were saying, ok, we want you to do whatever you want to do, and we are willing to take the risk on this.

So, alright, and so, I get the research and I am beginning to see, this is the story about this waterfall, and it is pretty much from the European point-of-view, I mean, three-fourths of it is probably from Hennepin on, and all the documentation is from the European point of view, and so there isn't a lot of Native American point of view, and so I am thinking, maybe we should think about that. And as the thought process has gone along, we have come up with [it]. They kind of wanted wood engravings all the way through, and it was formed, I really can't start working that way until Hennepin shows up, because for me, my kind of manipulative kind of work doesn't make any sense at all. [In] a lot of my other work, I did this study of trees. And part of that was harvesting, figuring out how to make printable, type-high blocks out of them, and printing them. So I really started getting into this organic kind of work where I was printing bark and knots and the whole organic side of the printing process. And that was the direction I wanted to go in. So, rather than going with engraving throughout the whole thing, I wanted to see these organic things flow through the book, like water and land and sky, printed from the actual organic material that might be collected on the river. They said ok. And I said, how about a couple of interns, and we can maybe collect this stuff, and spend the summer printing from it, and see where that might go. So Dan over at Minnesota Historical Society got a hold of...our fearless leader here now.

BB: Jeff Rathermel.

GS: Dan got a hold of Jeff, and he thought it was a great idea. He said, you can do it at MCBA. He found an intern, so I have Emily Pressprich through Minnesota Historical Society; she is an architecture student at the [University of Minnesota], and Paul

Nylander, who has a PhD in Physics, a very bright guy, and he is a professional photographer who decided he wanted to try something new, and he started taking classes at MCAD [Minneapolis College of Art and Design] and [that] brought him here. So, I have Emily and Paul, and we have been collecting these materials. Some of it is rotten wood—we are getting some of the most interesting things out of rotten wood. Some we are printing from various kinds of clay blocks, we are cutting them up and I am sanding them down to type high.

We have this dead dogfish that we haven't quite figured out what we're going to do with it yet. But at one point we thought ok let's soak it for a while. We had it in this papermaking tub, down in the basement so nobody could see it or smell it; it sat in there for a week or so in the salty water. That wasn't really helping us much so let's dry it out. Emily takes it up on the roof, and then she couldn't get back into the roof, she didn't have a key to get it down. It sat out there for a few days and this big storm went through and when we finally got back up on the roof the fish was all over the place, so we gathered up all the parts and we still have them, and I still don't know what we will do with it, but it will be in there somewhere.

BB: The flying dogfish.

GS: The flying dogfish in pieces. And so now we have got this big storyboard, and we are formulating all these organic shapes and how they are going to fit into civilization—I guess you will call it civilization. But basically what is happening: the waterfall is moving forward, the sandstone is eroding under the limestone, the limestone is crashing into the river. The foundations of the two cities are being built from this limestone as it is moving up. And then you have the cultural shifts of the Dakota people who are moving up and into this concentration camp at the foot of Fort Snelling, and actually at this most sacred place, at the confluence of the Minnesota and the Mississippi, right at the base of Fort Snelling, and that's where the concentration camp was.

And then, when they dredged the channel, the navigation channel of the Minnesota that changed the course of the Minnesota River, now the part of the Minnesota that goes into the confluence has dribbled down into this little thing, so their most sacred place on earth is where they were in this concentration camp. I mean there are so many side stories to this. That's a big one though, the native people's part of all this. And the story side, we really want to encompass as much as we can of the human history. Paleolithic times; we met with an archeologist the other day, we are going to go visit a woman at Fort Snelling. That is where the Historical Society has their arrowhead collection including some pieces from Paleolithic times, and we are hoping to do some rubbings of these things. Because we would love to print everything, but some things like, I can't remember what they call those early coins, no way can we print from that, but we think we can take a rubbing from it and make a polymer plate from that rubbing somehow. Or, at the Science Museum, they actually have teeth from the giant beaver that they found, these giant beaver teeth.

We are hoping to get some rubbings from the giant beaver teeth and working those into one of the images from the earlier part of the story.

BB: I think that would be evocative.

GS: Yes, I think so. And now they are going to put some back matter in the book that hopefully will describe some of the process we are going through.

BB: It sounds like a book that will appeal to all ages; it will be very direct and also have a lot of content. Was it meant to be a young person's book?

GS: A children's book.

BB: They may find it is going to have a wide appeal.

GS: I know. That is the thing. I don't know, they don't know, none of us know. And that is the beauty of it. We will just have to wait and see what comes out.

BB: Absolutely. Well, Gaylord, this has just been tremendous. I want to thank you on behalf of all the folks who've done different things throughout thirty years at MCBA, and beforehand, I really appreciate your thoughts, and, thank you.

GS: Thank you, Betty. Thank you for what you do, and are doing.