

**James P. (Jim) Lenfestey**  
**Narrator**

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**Minnesota Center for Book Arts**  
**Interviewer**

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**At the Lenfestey Home**  
**Minneapolis, Minnesota**

BB: My name is Betty Bright, and today, September 28, 2015, I am interviewing Jim Lenfestey at his home in Minneapolis. This interview is being conducted on behalf of Minnesota Center for Book Arts' 30<sup>th</sup> 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.

BB: Jim, welcome.

JL: It is a joy to have you here.

BB: Yes, at your home! You are a poet and journalist who served on MCBA's board of directors from fall 1986 through 1992, and in addition you were MCBA's Board Chair from 1989 to 1991. Thank you again for sharing your reflections today.

JL: I am happy to do so. It is a great love, actually.

BB: So, to begin, to introduce our listeners to you, what background or early interests may have positioned you to respond to the idea of a book arts center?

JL: Well, I will tell you by working backward from my retirement event on the board. Because I talked about love, and it is funny that it just came up now. But I didn't know anything about book arts, nor did most people. Jim Sitter and Joanne Von Blon introduced me to it, and the fact that my office was down the street from the first Minnesota Center for Book Arts location. I visited and was entranced, [and] I didn't know anything about it, but I responded immediately and in a visceral way, that this was important and absolutely charming and wonderful—charming in kind of a literal or metaphysical sense that a charm [had] occurred. I will give you four lines; I just thought of this now. In my newest book, it just came out this year, *Pilgrimage to Cold Mountain: Seeking the Cave*, the last thing that I put in this book that took me seven years to write, which is the poem at the beginning, is called, This boy needs a book in his hands. The first four lines are [Reading]: when the portrait painter sat down to capture me at three,

she said, This boy needs a book in his hands. She painted my eyes big, a lie, as you will see, but my hands did not lie.

It was true. I loved books and I mean it. So what happened, even though I am a writer, I love writing, I love the sound of words, I love the way they look on the page, but in addition, there is something more than that, there is something about the physical book which had a visceral relationship with me from a small boy and it astonishes me to this day that the artist saw that in me as a three year old boy; I still can't believe it but it is true. My mother reported that to me decades later. So, that is what it was. I am not a book artist, although I love setting lead type now, it is really my version of meditation. I do it rarely but when I do it, it is like a meditative practice: upside down and backwards, which seems to suit my understanding of the world.

BB: So, bring me into that first encounter with MCBA. Was it with the building, if you were in the neighborhood, or was it with Jim Sitter? How did you first come upon it?

JL: I am sure upon reflection it was with the building and having gone inside, which is probably where I met Jim Sitter, just walking through. To be honest I really don't recall any specific event, rather than the sense of it. The specific event I remember was Jim Sitter calling me and saying, I would like to take you to lunch at our office, which was the New French Café, with Joanne Von Blon, whom I knew and admired. And I said yes, and they sat me down and before we had even hit the wine course, not to mention the soup, they began to lay out the story of why they needed three thousand dollars, one thousand dollars a year commitment I think for some people. And before they got the story out I said yes. And I didn't say this often and for anybody. This was not common for me, but I said yes before they got the story out, because I was already in love. Now, [as to] why, we have already touched upon. But that led to my formal involvement with MCBA. I was asked not long after that to be on the board and then to chair it. Who was the first chair, I can't remember. It wasn't Elmer, was it?

BB: James Alcott.

JL: Yes, the great James Alcott chaired it first. I was the second or third board chair, I don't remember, and that was frankly a terrific learning experience for me. First, I was allowed to be in the presence of Elmer L. Andersen, who I think is one of the greatest citizens of Minnesota, and as you well know he was a behind-the-scenes force in starting Minnesota Center for Book Arts with Jim [Sitter], and to be in the room with a man of that quality certainly made me step up, shall we say. In fact, one detail I remember, it was an early meeting, and, I am not so much time impaired as I am forgiving about time. If people are a little late or whatever, we just get it together. Elmer, at the moment our board meeting was supposed to start, Elmer did this—he raised an eyebrow—and that is all he needed to let me know we start on time. This was one of the many, many gifts that he gave me.

BB: Do you have other memories of those early board meetings when there was so much going on?

JL: I will tell you, another person on the board was Paul Parker. Now Paul Parker had been CFO of General Mills; he was a political conservative and an aficionado of book collecting; he collected Sherlock Holmes and baseball books. And Jim Sitter and I always used to delight in the idea that Paul and I would have a debate, because I am politically liberal and I collector of football books—all two of them, because football has not inspired great literature. I grew up in Green Bay, Wisconsin and so it was a very funny idea, a debate that never formally occurred, but occurred on the sides, around the edges of the board meetings. But Joanne [Von Blon] was there. I will give you a detail because this may not have been remembered by others. An important detail of Minnesota Center for Book Arts was Eric Madsen. Eric was on the board. I knew him because he had designed an extraordinary book by called *White Wolf* by Jim Brandenburg, and Jim is a good friend of mine. I don't know how he was recruited to the board but he was a fantastic find because he is one of the finest graphic designers afoot in the world, and we all learned a lot from him. We asked him to design the MCBA chop, the logo which became also that chop. And the cool thing was to see how he did it. He would bring into a board meeting a whole series of sketches and drawings he had been working on, and we would go, wow, these are fantastic, they are perfect, they are right, and he would say, I will bring you some more next month. And he worked it through until perfection was achieved, just how those letters related to each other. It was extraordinary to watch a great graphic artist at work. And he was revered around the country for those skills, but we were very fortunate to have him. So that is a good MCBA story.

BB: Let's step outside the building for a minute. You know that neighborhood very well since you worked there, where MCBA's original site was in the Warehouse District and in the McKesson Building. Do you have any memories of the building itself, and as you walked into that first site?

JL: Oh, I do. It was extremely well done, in fact, I am now remembering [that] probably the reason I first walked in was the wonderfully-etched piece of marble outside the wall, which I think we have preserved, somewhere in the new building.

BB: We did, in the new building.

JL: It said, Minnesota Center for Book Arts. Well, you know what I knew about a book arts center, which was the same as 99.97 of the people on the planet knew about a book arts center, which was nothing. But it attracted me in like a magnet: what is this? So I walked in. Among the things I saw there were exhibit spaces, I remember, where there were glass cases for extraordinary books, but there were also letterpresses. Now, I have to say, I had a little experiences with letterpresses in the past. I am reminded of this only right now, but I had an extraordinarily wacky, one of those, Harvard-graduate LSD-drop out friends when we lived in Massachusetts, who had organized this huge anti-nuclear

thing, and the anti-nuclear battles began in my neighborhood in western Massachusetts. This guy had a hand-cranked letterpress where he turned out all these flyers, and I loved that, and that was my first experience maybe turning the crank, I don't think I set any type back then, but I recognized them, and I recognized the power that they had, the wonderful power they had to make type present.

Let me tell you a detail from the first exhibit that I attended that amazed me to this day, and if I talk about book arts today this example is always there. So, the first exhibit I attended, included a wide variety of book art, and one of them in the center of the room, was a large book in a circle, and the leaves were opened like a flower, around, and I remember being, oh, this is a book? And it is a book! And I actually remember a second one, which is a marvelous book artist from New York, which I can't remember, [who] would take existing books. This book, the flower book is typeset. Was completely created by the artist, who I can't remember...

BB: Kevin Osborn.

JL: Kevin Osborn, very good. The second was where the artist took existing books and he would rebind them reflecting the content of them. And there was a book about the Holocaust that he had bound it in barbed wire, and I will tell you, these were illuminations about what book art could be as opposed to what books were. That was an explosive experience to me, to see the creativity, which had been taken from this traditional form and turned into this incredibly vibrant art form. I will give you one more detail. I always now when I talk about the book arts, I always quote the great book artist from Massachusetts [who] taught at Smith. I remember everything about him except his name. He always said book artists are the tiniest lunatic fringe in the art world.

BB: Leonard Baskin?

JL: Leonard Baskin, of whom I might add, I knew his work and knew of him, because my Dartmouth roommate, dated a professor of art and was an artist himself, and turned me on to Baskin. I am still a huge fan of Baskin [although] among the books here I am sad to say I don't have a Baskin. He is extraordinary, and interestingly, Baskin, who, when I knew him in the 1960s he was already a famous artist for his astonishing woodcuts, but he then devoted himself to book art. And Baskin moved to England—I don't know if you knew this, but I discovered this looking into the work of Ted Hughes. Baskin moved to England in about 1970 to work with Ted Hughes making books together, and among those was the incredible poetry book called *Crow*, which was illustrated by Leonard Baskin. So, that crossover, the poetry and the literature crossover certainly happened there.

BB: As far as the neighborhood itself, and your office in that neighborhood, what was the vibe like there, at that time?

JL: Oh, the vibe. This was the center of the arts universe. In those days the biggest thing going was the art crawls. They were not called that then, however. Frankly the name is escaping me but there were many, many galleries in those old warehouses, and of course the center of the universe was the New French Café, which also had Bastille Day which was creating this marvelous vibe, so there would be these tremendous evenings, and [wife] Susan and I would come out at night and come down the street and go to gallery after gallery after gallery. So the fact that MCBA was located there was extremely, I almost said fortuitous, wise to be there. Because all those galleries came down First Avenue, they turned at that corner, went around, to Bob Thompson Gallery, which was behind the New French Café, and this was a vibrant center. All that was killed with the advent of the Target Center. The Target Center turned it into a sports bar place, which is what it is today. And all those artists and most of the galleries, there might be one or two still there, moved over to Nord-East. Nord-East is now doing that and it is very exciting. That is where that kind of arts excitement is. But MCBA wisely located itself right in the epicenter of that, and I think it helped it.

BB: To look at that trajectory of the organization, you joined the board really early on, in the fall of 1986, which was really just about a year since MCBA had opened formally, in October—we had opened the doors in January 1985, but in October 1985 we had our grand opening. So your board service not only marks that early period but it also marks a critical transition when Jim Sitter, the founding Executive Director left the organization in 1989, and Hollis Stauber was selected as the second Executive Director.

JL: Let me say a couple other details and then I will get to that. Jim was an amazing sales person for the book arts. He understood that we were on to something new, and he helped me immensely understand what that was. One of the insights he gave me was if you go to any city—this is part of my story now when I talk about the book arts. If you go to any city, we have come to expect a resident theatre company, but when the Guthrie was founded, that was a first. And we have come to expect an opera company, a great public library, you expect an orchestra hall, if you are in a great city, but nobody expects a book arts center, because nobody knew what it was. We had to plow that ground and establish the center as a public institution. There were little bits of private things, hidden away throughout the country, but this [was] public institution, and the only real way to do that was to get people in the door.

One of the things that Jim established right away was an event called the Wayzgoose, which you may remember, a way to invite people in on a Saturday. Now, I was a parent with three and then four children, so going to many events at MCBA was just not in the cards for me, and taking classes, which I would have loved to do, was never really in the cards for me given my family circumstances. But I could go on Saturday, and I did go with my kids and I just loved it, I would take my little daughter and we would learn typesetting, and we are all entranced by the marbling of paper still, and I am hoping they are still doing that, because to see the marbling of paper is to watch magic occur before

you. That is just a particular example of how the book arts appears magical to me, and not just to me but to children and to others.

So, the transition. So, Sitter, that rat [Laughter] decided, and actually bless him, he went on to do amazing, important work. But he was the founder, and his idea [was] with Elmer, and with Paul Parker, and Jim Alcott, and the original board, who were collectors of fine press books and rare books and understood this, and then they brought in neophytes like me, so I had just agreed to be chair of the board and assumed that role, and Jim announced his resignation! Thank you, Jim! And he did it because he understood, correctly, that it was important to move on, and he had an amazing opportunity to take over CLMP [Council for Literary Magazines and Presses, now, the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses], and to broaden the whole national understanding of the book arts just as he had done so in the Twin Cities. It was a phenomenal opportunity, he did a great job and an extremely important job back then, in New York and Washington, D.C. and elsewhere. But having said that, [Laughter] so, we organized the search committee, [and] it was not what anyone expected and certainly not what I expected. But we stepped up and had a very good search committee; it included me, and Joanne Von Blon, and if there were others, I am sure there were, I apologize, but I don't remember. We announced this nationally, and we had some extremely good applicants, and it was a hard decision, but unquestionably we made the right one when we hired Hollis Stauber. Hollis was a book artist who was smart as a whip with everything but what she didn't know about, which was the Macintosh computer. That was the one thing that I knew about, so I trained her in on the Macintosh. She was and remains, I am sure, superbly organized, and really took us through this remarkable transition to allow us to stay on our feet with fundraising. We were always in the black, as I remember. We never dealt with significant financial challenges. And we were able to continue the growth of Minnesota Center for Book Arts. She did a fabulous job.

BB: Looking back to Jim and the way that he would manage and run [the organization], and then looking at Hollis' style, I don't want to leave memories of Jim too soon, I just realized, but would you have any memories in particular of working with Hollis as opposed to Jim, and how MCBA might have shifted course or somehow altered? Each Executive Director brings his or her own style.

JL: I would say, yes and no. Really, I would say actually, no. Jim set the groundwork for MCBA that I think still is the groundwork for MCBA. And it is because it was and is at the time a pioneering and is still now, as you know, the leading book arts organization in the United States, and the basic framework hasn't changed. For example, I don't know when the schools program started but it might have been Hollis that ramped that up. That is an exciting feature. Again, when I talk about Minnesota Center for Book Arts, one of the joys, I always say is, go there on certain days and there is a line up of yellow buses outside, and kids come in, and they delight in, as I have been, marbling paper, binding books, setting type, seeing how paper is made, and then walking out with their own little book. In a way one of the geniuses of that program, and one of the joys of it is, it closes

the loop of literacy. A child can see how a book is made, how a story [or] imagination becomes a physical thing and then some of the teachers I know, you can take those books back and shelve them in the library and you see what a powerful impact that can have on a child; it is a beautiful, beautiful program, and I would guess that Hollis is one of the people who really helped ramp that up. But it began in Jim's mind, and in yours, and probably one of the reasons we are here. People still don't know what a book arts center is. It is nothing that we did wrong; it is that this is a pioneering idea. You have to find ways to tell that story and really show people the story, which will at some point segue into why we needed to move, why we needed to create Open Book.

BB: So, [let's] talk a little bit more about early board members if anything comes to mind.

JL: Oh, yes. Well, one, and I have this book here, one who was recruited to the board, not by me, a fellow named Ted Hall, who might have not been a key person maybe for others, but for me, it was profound to get to know him. I started something called the Neighborhood Press Association way back in the 1970s, I started a neighborhood newspaper and then this association, and our first speaker for our first convention was Ted Hall, and I didn't know about him at the time. One of our other people, Margo Ashmore, had known him and invited him. His speech was quite wonderful and he was quite wonderful, and his story is: he grew up in Red Wing—I think his parents were involved; he grew up in Frontenac, actually. I think his parents were involved in the Red Wing newspaper although I am not certain about that. But he became a very effective journalist, worked for *Time* magazine, and he was living out in New Jersey or out east, and he completely bailed on it and moved to Rainy Lake, Minnesota and took over that little, old town of about four hundred to five hundred people in Rainier, Minnesota, the Rainy Lake Chronicle. It became this rarity of a joyful publication, which he would set on an old linotype machine, and people would read it around the country; he had a subscription list all over the United States because it was so much fun to read. That is the kind of journalism I didn't know, but I aspired to, in our little neighborhood newspaper that we started; you could have more fun than you can have in the Daily. I ended up working for the Star Tribune, and I don't want to say it wasn't fun; it was a different kind of fun, you could be much more open.

[Ted] was famous, for example, for covering the town council, so if the town council would meet and one of the guys was falling asleep like this, he would say, so and so fell asleep like this, he would put it all in, which made it just a delight—anyway, he was wonderful. I will just show you one book that I have here because this is important to me. This is called, *A Rainy Lake Chronicle: Warm Tales from a Cold Northland Village that Time Has Not Forgotten*, by Ted Hall. It is inscribed to me, it is set on a linotype, that he set up there, and among the other books which are mostly set in cold type, this was set in hot type, on that kind of machine, and he is still revered up in the Rainy Lake area for his involvement in the Oberholtzer Foundation and other things, which he helped to

establish, but this is an example of Ted's warm heart and his wit and his extraordinary dedication. But anyway, he came on the board and we became good friends.

BB: Well, other board members back then were....

JL: There was Lydie Hudson who was a wonderful contributor, and she was tied in particularly to the philanthropic community. Of course, Jay Cowles came on, who became pivotal, and I got to know Jay. I think I got to know him before but I got really to know him as we crossed over; he took over from me as I recall as Board Chair, and Jay was pivotal of course in the growth of MCBA and was crucial at the time.

BB: Vic Stein...

JL: I loved Vic Stein. Vic Stein was a printer, and a very successful printer, but one of my regrets was that I always said, Vic, you have got to give me a tour of your printing facilities, because I love print and the smell of ink, and he said yes, and we never were able to do that, but Vic was terrific. Maybe you can prompt me on others.

BB: John Taylor.

JL: Oh yes, John, whom I just saw recently, as you may know, he is involved up at Saint John's College now, of which he is an alumnus, in the development business up there, and his wife Leah, I think might be in the dance world up there. But John was, and is—I am going to describe him as he should be described—so smart. And John saw, like Jim—they saw the future, they saw that we were building the future, so they understood that we had to be very proactive in this, and that we had to think farther ahead because this was going to require that. John was amazing, at the time he was at the Northwest Area Foundation, and was given us money, to make this happen. He clearly got it from day one, before I was there, with Jim [Sitter]. He got Jim, he got the vision, he got the whole thing, and he wanted it to happen.

BB: Did you happen to have conversations or hang out with the early artists-in-residence, Allan Kornblum or Amanda Degener?

JL: Both became very close friends. Amanda of course, still with us, and I see her regularly, or irregularly, with Cave Paper; she introduced me to hand papermaking. Two other artists who were there at the beginning, the other, Gaylord Schanilec. I was so interested—let me grab this book; I just grabbed a few—unlike the smarter people who collected all the Winter Books I am in and out and down the line, but this is an earlier one that I revere. Written by the extraordinary woman of our era, of our world, Meridel LeSueur, who affected so many people, with wood engravings by Sandy Spieler, who of course founded the Heart of the Beast Puppet Theatre, possibly later, and I was amazed when I got it home off the shelf that it was put together by Gaylord Schanilec, who was artist-in-residence. Jim loved Gaylord and always talked about him, but I got to know

him back in that day, and I just went to two gallery shows that he had here, including the premier of his latest book, for which I had to mortgage the house, I couldn't stand it. This is not routine for me, this guy is a consummate talent, globally [known] now, but look at this, this is an early example, and again, I didn't remember at all that Gaylord was involved in this. You mentioned somebody else.

BB: Allan Kornblum and Kent Aldrich.

JL: Oh my goodness, Allan Kornblum and Kent. Well, let's just work backwards from Kent. Kent apprenticed with Allan. I attended both services for Allan Kornblum who died earlier this year, just heartbreaking. Allan became a very close friend. In fact, he is cited in my new book as I talked about having lunch with him and he helped me make the connection with the man who took me to China. Allan became a great friend out of that as I admired his skill and his dedication, the beautiful books he made which I have. I have a marvelous book, Jane Smiley, [and] in my bathroom I have a print from that by Susan.

BB: Susan Nees.

JL: Nees, and beautiful book art, which he started at Toothpaste Press in Iowa, then he moved it up here as Coffee House Press. It is now one of the top five or ten non-profit publishers in the United States, and I was a great friend of his, and he was a great friend of me. So that was terrific, and then he mentored Kent Aldrich, and if I had my business card with me now I would get it out, it is by Kent Aldrich, and his very neat studio over in St. Paul. His glorious studio. If I had another life to start over as a printer I would love that to be my studio.

BB: We are going to eventually move forward into the Open Book era, but still back with that first site, if you had some comment to make early on as far as MCBA's impact on the cultural life of Minnesota, what was it bringing to the table? We knew it was a new idea, but what do you think it added that may have helped it to establish itself early on in Minnesota's cultural scene?

JL: I don't know if I can answer that question, because I tend to be, as you may have even noticed now, my sort of orientation is as an enthusiast. Really it is, and I became an enthusiast immediately, and do I know that that happened to others? We always seemed to have membership that seemed to grow, our fundraising seemed to be successful, to meet the needs of our organization. I could talk more about impact when we get to Open Book, because then it became clear, but I don't know that I have much more to add to that.

BB: Well, let's do that. Let's move forward, because you have always been a presence at MCBA through the years, at openings, and you're a familiar, welcomed face whenever you come and visit and talk with people there. But you did get back into a more

established and involved role with the move to Open Book. Why don't you share with us how that came about?

JL: I did something that I have never did before, and motivated by that emotional connection that we talked about, which is only described as love. I have also been involved with the Loft, although I have never chaired the board there, and I have also been involved with Milkweed Editions, and I was always a great admirer of Emily [Buchwald] and the work that she and Randy [Scholes] did. I consulted with them ad hoc on marketing stuff back in the day, particularly as it related to their environmental book publishing initiative, which they kept on [and] which is beautiful. So I knew those players.

I had this Loft experience in my beginning. I had too damn many kids, all of them fantastic, but [it affected] being able to participate heavily in the Loft or at Minnesota Center for Book Arts, like I have never taken a class at the Loft either by the way. But I did organize one class at the Loft, based on the film called *Il Postino*. I don't know if you remember that. *Il Postino* means *The Postman*, and it is a fantastically beautiful story of an ordinary guy who rides his bicycle through the rural area of Italy, and he comes upon and begins to peek into and be inspired by the life of the poet Pablo Neruda, who was in exile and living with his wife in Italy. Well, I thought, what a marvelous story that is, about a literary artist who inspires an ordinary person. I organized a course at the Loft, it should have been called *Il Postino* but they named it *Literary Mentors* or something, and it was to have authors talk, not about their own work but about [those] who inspired them.

The first event was Robert Bly talking about Pablo Neruda. You may not know about the Loft then, it was in an old school building, and I sat in that old school gymnasium on these little old school chairs watching Robert Bly talk about Pablo Neruda, and I said, never again. This is an insult to literature. Then I knew that this consortium had come together, a consortium of these three boards, and they each had their own needs: Linda [Myers, Executive Director of the Loft Literary Center] was keeping me apprised of this, Jay [Cowles, Former MCBA Board Chair and Co-Chair of the funding campaign for Open Book] very much keeping me apprised of this, more than Milkweed, but I knew that Milkweed was involved. And when this began to move forward, I actually consulted behind the scenes with Jay, and consulted behind the scenes with Linda. I consulted behind the scenes with all three of them, and I said this was it, go for it.

And so when they finally pulled the trigger—and it was very difficult, by the way, at MCBA. I will tell you one MCBA story and a consultation with Jay, because at the time [MCBA's] board was a little more—how can I put this—more cautious than the boards that I had been involved with, because many of them were at this point academics, book artists, people not used to taking financial risks, and this was a leap, a huge leap of faith to move to a new place. And Jay was very worried about that. How could they take this new step, and how could they get the board to come forward to this degree, because for

all three organizations it was a leap. Well, he came to my office and we talked about it. And one of the things we came up with was, [which] I put in his mind to think about, because one of the great worries of the board was, how do we cover the cost of this, the cost of moving—not the cost of being there, but the cost of moving would be substantial. And I said why don't you roll that cost into the capital campaign [so] that it would be part of the deal? I think that was very helpful, frankly, for him to go back and sell it to the board that this is all going to be part of the whole capital campaign. Which raised the number to \$7.5 million bucks, if I recall.

And so then the capital campaign committee was put together, and it consisted of people from MCBA's board, the Loft's board, and Milkweed's board. And I crashed the first meeting, or it might have been the second meeting. And I did it because they didn't put me on it, and I understand because I wasn't on any of the boards, but I wanted to be on it, and it was purely a crash, and I have never done that before or since. I felt that I had the vision that they had, [that] the literary arts deserved a better home, and now that is really speaking for the Loft, which was in a home that did not honor the task that it was performing. MCBA had a beautiful home and it was very well done, you guys, I mean the board had done a tasteful, marvelous job about that facility. About that facility, there was nothing in my view, not only nothing was wrong but everything was right with that facility, except for parking and access. And Jim Sitter had convinced me, and I was fully convinced, that the only way that you could really tell the story of Minnesota Center for Book Arts is to get people to come through the door, because nobody had an image in their mind of what a book arts center was, so the only way to get that image in their mind was to have them see it. So I knew honestly that MCBA would be the biggest winner of Open Book. I knew the Loft would win, I knew Milkweed would win, the way it was architected, but I knew that MCBA would be far the biggest winner, because in that kind of setting people would walk in and discover MCBA. That is one of the reasons that I did that, and I think I played a good role on that committee, and I helped them on the marketing side, too. I came up—I think I mentioned it to you before—the last detail.

Because, now let us talk about the capital campaign. I was in the hands of brilliance. This was way above my pay grade, I mean, these people knew how to do this. They hired a great consultant, Andy Curry, Andy Curry, they did the whole...I now know how this works, but this was my maiden voyage in a capital campaign. How you structure gifts and all that, and that was a revelation to me, and they all knew how to do that. We had a brilliant lawyer who helped figure out how, very complex actually, how to buy a building with three non-profits? And he deserves the credit, I will think of his name in a minute; I don't know which board he was on: John Scholl. He brilliantly came up with and crafted the legal framework, which is the fourth board, which is Open Book.

I want to give myself credit for this: when we went to look for a new facility, who do you get? I said, hire Chuck Leer. Chuck Leer was my very good friend, a real estate genius, but his particular genius was a kind of radar vision to see through old buildings and old neighborhoods, places that nobody wanted, that could become magic. I had seen him do

it twice already, and he and his wife had founded Ruby's Cabaret, in old funeral homes and things, and again, turned old buildings into magic, so I knew he had the radar vision. I will tell you a detail of the MCBA story. When I was Chair of the board and we first thought of looking for a new home because of the access problem, which was really the only problem, I proffered Chuck as the person to hire, but because I was Chair of the board and he was a friend, I felt like that was all I could do was to put his name on the list, and we on the board picked somebody else. Somebody else spun the wheels a lot and nothing happened. Chuck is a get-it-done guy, and Chuck was actually—I am glad I get a chance to talk about this, and others may say this, but—he was pivotal in this whole process, because he found that building, he negotiated something that I thought was impossible, not only the building itself but the Tankinoffs, [the owners that] very generously gave us an extremely good deal on the building—but remember this was a dead neighborhood over there, completely dead. Nothing was happening in that part of town, that is the great thing: that is why we got the deal of the century. He found the building, with our people, they all decided, Jay and the people on the board all decided this was the right place, but Chuck found it.

But then we realized we did not have that parking lot on the side. That was owned by Valspar, and they wanted it for parking for their people. I still to this day do not know how Chuck did the deal. And other members of the committee were involved with that, [and] I am sure they deserve credit, but somehow they pulled off the impossible. Because I said and we all said, we need that building, we have to have [the parking]. It is not that it is enough parking, but we need that parking! And somehow we got the parking! So, Chuck Leer deserves great credit for his involvement, and I feel proud because I did bring him in to that process and he proved to be exactly as I thought he was, and a fearless negotiator.

BB: What were those meetings like, with the three boards of the three organizations trying to plan and pull this together?

JL: Well, you know, I don't know that I can remember any meetings, but I can tell you this: again, I talked about how brilliantly the whole thing was [architecturally designed] but I didn't know how to do it. The whole plan was with the people who understood how to do this. But I do remember this from my own experience: When I say I crashed that first meeting, I walked in, and here is what I remember. I am not even sure that it was at that point, but at some point as I looked around the room and I saw the three boards all there, I said to myself: there is enough horsepower in this room to do this. Right away, I remember that recognition. Any individual board: the Loft didn't have it, MCBA didn't have it, Milkweed didn't have it, but together there was enough financial horsepower, the connectivity horsepower, to make this happen. Phenomenal opportunity, we can look at that, that was an amazing group of people, but all three boards combined, and that synergy was essential to making, to allowing this to happen.

BB: Do you remember visiting the rough space? And do you remember were there any other spaces that everyone looked at?

JL: Well, there was a subcommittee involved with that, I think Jay was deeply involved in that, but I was not. I just knew once Chuck was on board they would find [it], and they did look in a variety of places, and you would have to ask the particular members of the committee who were on that, Jay probably, when they looked around and they found this. I do remember the raw space completely. It was, of course you know where it is now, on Washington [Avenue]. Its latest iteration had been a computer parts warehouse, and it was filled with shelves and, it had been just that, just the last use of these wonderful nineteenth century buildings, when Washington Avenue was the front of the city, but now it was very much the back of the city, the slums, in fact, and there was a dive bar around there. The scene we know now didn't exist at all.

I will take a little side trip to tell you this. David Unowsky was and is a good friend of mine. I met him through Jim Sitter, of course, although I went to many events at his store. But David who owned, as you know, what became Ruminator Books, and was the revered bookstore throughout the United States for how to run a bookstore, and he decided to put that in there, in our deal initially, and he jumped in right away, and that was unfortunate for David but good for us. And David would say this. Because now the critical mass is probably there, but none of those apartments and condos and all that was there. I mean, we were the arts pioneers on Washington Avenue, just as galleries had been the arts pioneers over in the Warehouse District, and now it is all mostly in Nord East, but we pioneered the arts there, and in fact I believe Joel Dowling told me this, but don't quote me in public, but I have a memory of this, that it helped when the Guthrie was looking for places, the fact that we were there, [it] showed them that this could be done in that part of town.

BB: So, if we fast forward through the renovation of the space, were you around when they were working on that?

JL: No, I really think, the brilliance of this committee, there is a lot I didn't do on the committee. I had nothing to do with any of that. The hiring of Meyer Scherer and Rockcastle was genius; I had nothing to do with that. So whoever did, bless them. And the farsightedness, to bring the remarkable book artist who did the stairway...

BB: Karen Wirth.

JL: Karen Wirth, whom I love, I loved her work, she is now a Dean over at Minneapolis College of Art and Design, but she was one of my windows as a book artist and what the book arts could be. I will never forget some of the early works that she did. So, she was phenomenal and whoever had that idea to make that book, spiral staircase design by a book artist, people were really willing to go the next step. I am arguably way more conservative than that. The genius of the other members of the committee deserve all the

credit for that. Once I got Chuck in there, I felt my day was done, that was the best thing I could do. And the next thing I did was help them raise money. And I did that, I contributed, I was very active on that part of the committee, so I really can't tell you about the building and the renovation except to be amazed when it was done, and the beautiful job that was done, and how perfect it was.

I will add one detail, because my skill is a little bit in fundraising and in marketing. So, the fundraising program was tiered from the large donors, and then the last piece was everybody, how can you get everybody in there. I created this idea of the community of the book, and we used that. I wrote the materials and we had people do the design. The idea was, join the community of the book. The idea was, and we said, your name will be written in the community of the book. We hired a wonderful book artist, I did not do this, and that book is still there, sitting in the lobby of MCBA with people's names, and it was five dollars, ten dollars, one hundred dollars, [the amount] didn't make any difference, and your name would go into the community of the book. And the response on that end was marvelous, a great response. I did contribute at that level, at how to take it to the last level.

BB: Absolutely. Ownership.

JL: Yes, and so that was cool. Most artists in the world are scraping to get by, but everybody can figure out how to get involved.

BB: Do you have any memories of the opening night in the year 2000? Were you there?

JL: Well, I suspect, I have got to tell you, I live in the moment and my memory is.

BB: You have great memories.

JL: I am happy to share the memories that I have. I have been there many, many times. Yes, now I remember, I was there, now it is filtering back to me. I am sure I was there. Gail See was there.

BB: It was a good time of year, I remember I had on something summery. [Laughter]

JL: We took photographs; it was a marvel. But here is what I remember later, although I didn't see this, I heard about it. After it was over, I heard that among the people who came to visit Open Book when the word got out around the country, around the world, were people from the French Cultural Ministry. Did you hear about that?

BB: No.

JL: No, they came to see this, what is this? Because we created something that is in fact the leading edge of a new arts movement that is worth seeing. If you were still to say,

what is a book arts center—it is Open Book. I am going to give you one other example. In the strange turn of events, I happened to get to know very well, John and Penny Barr. He is a very successful M and A [mergers and acquisitions] guy on Wall Street, and also a teacher of poetry at Swarthmore, this is an unusual concatenation of talents. When the Poetry Foundation was given two hundred million bucks by Ruth Lilly, they looked around: who understands poetry and money? Well, that was not a large pool. And they hired John Barr. I bring it up because they became my neighbors in Michigan and I got to know them. And so, low and behold, one day I was at MCBA walking around, and who is walking around MCBA with a delegation of people from Chicago but Penny Barr. Penny! What are you doing here? Well, we are going to build a building in Chicago, and we want to see what the models are. I don't know if you knew that.

BB: Really! No, I didn't.

JL: So, they did build a building, they built a sublime new building in Chicago for the Poetry Foundation, but one of the places they came to see as a model was Open Book.

BB: Thinking about how MCBA now resides in Open Book, which is a shared space of the three organizations, and you knew MCBA quite well in its original space, do you feel that MCBA has changed in this new space in any way? Either in its mission or just in the reality on the ground of what is happening there?

JL: Actually, I am going to drop back, because I have one more memory from the early times.

BB: Oh please! Oh good, I am so glad.

JL: This is a role I played that it was a fun little detail. My mother's family comes from the paper industry. This is relevant only in that [MCBA was] looking for a beater, a Valley Beater. I said, oh, I will tell you what. I will call my cousin, who is an executive with Albany International, which is the felt and Fourdrinier wire business, and knows everybody in the paper industry. Well, low and behold, and the word was, according to Jim [Sitter] and many others that Valley had never donated a beater to anybody. Well, guess what, I think they donated, or at an extremely reduced price, because of my cousin Charlie who is a great guy. And I will give you one more detail which I do know, is that they donated felts, all those felts for the papermaking studio came from Albany, which makes felts as big as this house, as big as MCBA—they make them for the large paper machines.

BB: If we think about Open Book now, and think about those three organizations, do you have any sense of how MCBA might have changed, or has it changed, if you spend time at MCBA now?

JL: There has been a big change with the new design, and I think I told you yesterday for me, I was in awe of, a. the building, again I take no credit for the design, again, the people who were on the committee deserve all the credit for that, and I think they did a phenomenal job and the big rotating door and all that into MCBA. And I would say this, from my point of view, I knew MCBA would be the big winner, and it was true. My recollection, and never quote me on the facts on this, was that the Loft membership went up two to four times, and I think MCBA's went up seven or more times more, the first year. And that is because of, guess what, access, as people discovered the magic of MCBA, you can send them a brochure but that is not the same as walking in the door. And of course, the brilliance of the building too, is the coffee shop, the welcoming foyer, how the stairway is going up and how that really works on the first floor. I think it works brilliantly. So, I defer to the wise people behind the change and how that design went, to be able [recently] to move the bookstore so that people could see it on the street, probably very smart, but I had no complaint with how it looked before; I thought it was marvelous. And I am sure that it is better now, but I have no real opinion aside from the history.

BB: Well, I just have a handful of questions left that come from a broader perspective, but I was hoping that we could take a few minutes and look at some of these wonderful books that you have here, and then we can wrap things up. So, Jim, tell us about this gorgeous book.

JL: As we have talked about, Gaylord Schanilec was artist-in-residence at MCBA when I was involved, so I got to know him, but as I have followed his career since, he has been revered in England and he has won all the awards for his quality book work. I have been amazed at his work; I have the *High Bridge* book and the majority of his books. He is the master of six-color wood engraving. This is a book I thought I could never afford or never get, but I sold some things, in fact, to acquire this book. And you will see why. It is nothing short of an amazing piece. *Lac des Pleurs*, Lake of the Tears, is of course the ancient name for Lake Pepin today. Remember I talked about the magic of marbling. Well, look, suddenly the magic of marbling is right here on the cover of this book: isn't that just glorious? It is paste paper over boards. And then I will show you that among the illustrations that are amazing, there is one that is, all over the place that speaks particularly to me, there he is, out on his boat, in the lake, fishing away, and the text, by the way, is brilliant, and I won't show you this map, which is unbelievable in wood engraving, it is huge.

But then I will keep going, to show you a masterpiece of six-color wood engraving, here. These are the white pelicans at Lake Pepin. Now, this speaks to me as an environmentalist too because this is a great story of the return of the white pelicans to Lake Pepin, which had been basically exterminated by DDT. So, this is an extraordinary illustration, the book continues with extraordinary illustrations of fish, where the scales seem to be absolutely real, each of these is a wood engraving, there are more of these. It just shows you that we are in the hands of an incomprehensible mastery, I have no idea how this can be done in wood engraving except to see it before me and say, well, he took

a fish and laid it on a plate! It is beyond me, so this is the ultimate mastery, this is the finest example of book art in its somewhat traditional form, no flowers, no barbed wire, but rather I think this is as far along as one can ever see a book like this. This book just came out this year, and I am very proud to have it as part of my life.

BB: So, here is another book. Tell us about this one, Jim.

JL: Well, I wish I remembered who the binder is. The author is David Haynes, an African American writer from Saint Paul who is really good, and this is a very good story. But look at what the binder did. It is uncanny. The title of this story is *The Everyday Magic of Walter Lee Higgins*, and it is about a house, a doorway, so why not create a physical doorway with a book inside? This is one where the binder went wild, in a most creative way, so the book is in here, but I think in this case, aside from the writing, the story of the book is, look at this, the book is really remarkable all the way through, but I have to say, look how this is beautifully set all the way through. This was a Winter Book, and one of the most inventive of the Winter Books. And each page is a work of art as is the whole book, but the binding is in fact an over-the-top and remarkable achievement, so I am happy to have this.

BB: So, tell us about this book, Jim.

JL: I have other examples of book art around. One stands up like a column; the paper stands up like a column with poetry coming down the side. As you know, I am a poet and so, I love the connection between poetry and book art, and it is not always easy to figure out a form, but I was immediately attracted to this book. The artist's name is Sue Bjerke, and it was hanging on the wall at MCBA, and I bought it right off the wall, because what she has done is invent, if you will, a new way to present a poem. Isn't that beautiful? For some book artists, the text becomes an art form, and that is fine, but with this you can actually read the poem, and look how she made this book. She obviously had wonderful poets, my friend Jim Moore is in here, Karen Hering, whom I know, and she made these gorgeous illustrations that allow the poem to find a context too; the poem is not lost. And so, this is a whole new way, at least for me—I have never seen a binding like this before, and a way to present this. And I think it is a marvel, a marvel of clarity in a new way, to allow poetry to have its story.

BB: It is kind of theatrical.

JL: It is not as theatrical as some, as you know, with what some book artists can do. It is almost a conservative version, but it is extremely inventive at the same time, a beautiful, beautiful book, with these deckled edges.

BB: Well, that is great. Thanks so much for sharing these fabulous books, Jim, and I just have a few more questions as we finish this up. So again, we are talking perspective, and this comes up at a thirty-year mark. Do you have any thoughts that you want to share on

MCBA's position in the larger world nationally or internationally? Where have we come to in thirty years?

JL: Well, beginning arguably, we could say, with Leonard Baskin, talking about the tiniest lunatic fringe in the world, a quote I still love, and we are that, but we are a bigger lunatic fringe by a significant margin. You know the New York Center for [Book Arts] did exist and does exist, I have been to Chicago and visited the Columbia College [Center for Book and Paper Arts] there, they have a marvelous center, and where it is as far as I know a popular program for the college, and of course I know of Mills College and other programs around the country that have this.

But I know there is no question that we are viewed as the model for this business, if you want to call it, the model for this kind of art center. I have mentioned the French Cultural Ministry and my friend from Chicago coming to see how you do this. I have a strong sense of that, but you are the historian, you have a much better sense of that because you deal with the book arts community on a regular basis; I do not. I mean this is not part of my life to interface with the book arts community, although if I go to a city where there might be one, I try to track it down. So, I really am not the right person to ask that question and offer that insight, into that question of where we stand. I would just say that Open Book itself is extraordinary, it required the three organizations, none of us could have done it alone, it has been a tremendous boom for all three, you know, Milkweed just had a capital campaign that was oversubscribed, I don't want to credit it entirely to the building that is a factor, but anyway Milkweed is well established. The Loft, [Former Executive Director] Jocey Hale is retired, and a new [Director, Britt Udesen, is there], and forty years of tremendous growth and success in that building—the building was a tremendous help to them, is very helpful to them, it is always mobbed, as you know, trying to get event space in there is difficult.

MCBA, I go to as many openings as I can, as many events as I can, and discover more magic. I mean, book artists are, to play with paper, think of it, we may have talked about this in the past. My mother's family comes from the paper industry. But beautiful paper was, paperback books we got, the Lawrence Ferlinghetti paperback book revolution was crappy paper, but the fine beautiful paper is itself a tactile experience, just a glorious thing. But to see where that has gone, as technology moves and it moves rapidly, we have moved out of the book as today, as people do a great deal of reading on devices now. The book is not obsolete, but certainly, the physical book is arguably heading in that direction. But it is not uncommon for that, all those presses, which you know, at MCBA, were once commercial presses. That is how commercial printed speech was enacted, through that tremendous old original cranked press that founded the first newspapers here, all those beautiful, marvelous Vandercook presses, all of those were commercial, for commercial printers back in the day. Now, it is an art form. That is sort of normal and beautiful.

Case in point as we think of Gaylord Schanilec. He is arguably the world's greatest color wood engraver. Now, those were, I don't want to say not uncommon, but you can see old maps, for example, with wood engravings. That is how things were done in many ways back in the day. But now that kind of patience and skill is so rare as to be a phenomenon that we have Gaylord in our community. So that is a normal process of how art goes. And so it is no surprise that with the transition into the world of electronics, the old equipment would be colonized, just like old buildings are colonized by artists, and they find wholly new ways to play with them and make them new and make them utterly amazing and fascinating. And that is what the book arts is.

My middle name is Pond. And my namesake, James Pond, he won a Congressional Medal of Honor in the Civil War, but his background, he was a barefoot boy living on a pioneer farm in central Wisconsin, and I might have imagined this story, but he became a journalist—it may have happened this way or I may have made it up—his dad accused him of lying, he said I didn't lie, so he ran away from home at fourteen. And he is walking by in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin on the wooden sidewalks of eighteenth century Wisconsin, and there is a crashing noise, and it is a tray of type that has fallen on the ground, and the newspaper guy fires the incompetent kid, and he walks in and picks up the type and becomes a typesetter. That is how he began, setting lead type, he began by picking up stuff and setting it in the California [Job] Case [a compartmentalized box for storing type]. Well, I was so amazed when I learned about the California Case and how that works, there might even have been this odd, psychic, genetic thing going on, that is a little woo woo. But, who knows? That case was the commercial case, in fact, the invention of the California Case, as you know, was a huge step forward. Oh boy, we know where things are now, the wizards of typesetting could do this, which is all cold type, and then slowly, I have worked with Red Dragonfly Press, which is down in Red Wing. Red Dragonfly has a monotype machine, and he is one of like five people left who can run a monotype machine, you know, how do you cast cold type, because nobody remembers, it is an ancient art now, it went from a common technology to an ancient art. Well, that is what happened here. Not all these books could have been produced in the old days, they are so inventive, but some of them could have.

BB: That is very interesting, thinking about walking through time, walking through technology, and this one piece of it that MCBA has had. Do you think that there are any particular traits that come to mind when you are talking about longevity, because [that is] one thing we talk about when people are celebrating an organization after thirty years? Besides luck and hard work, [are] there any ingredients that come to mind when you are thinking about why did MCBA last when perhaps others struggled more?

JL: Well, MCBA had an incredible advantage at the beginning. One was Jim Sitter, who was indeed a true visionary. But second were the people that Jim Sitter knew who were prime movers and shakers in the Upper Midwest and in the national community. I will only focus on one, Elmer Andersen. You know, Elmer was a member of the Grolier Club. Elmer was a very serious, absolutely delighted book collector. Elmer used to say, he was

in the Governor's office, and if he had a few minutes, he would get out a [book] catalogue and make a call. He would be collecting books, it was just a delight for him, and you know he left behind an incredible legacy at the Arboretum, with those incredible botanical books, and elsewhere. So Elmer, and also, he was arguably one of the most revered, I would say the most revered people in our state. If Elmer thought something was worthy, people picked up the phone, and I had that happen. I called Murray Harpole. I can't even remember why I called him, now, he was the head of Pentair, which was a booming conglomerate, and because Elmer gave me his name, Murray picked up the phone. I don't even remember why I was calling him, to be honest. But that is who Elmer was, so that was an advantage. And Jim got to know them because he was collecting these kinds of books. So, Jim Alcott, who was a Vice President of Cowles Media and totally tied into all of that. And Paul Parker, who had been the CFO of General Mills and totally tied in. So, it wasn't political, obviously, because we went the political gambit, but it was this love of books, collecting books, rare books, and what could happen in new books. There were skeptics, in the day, at the beginning, I might have mentioned earlier, I am meeting tonight with my book club. We have been meeting twenty-eight years. Rob Rulon-Miller is one of my great friends, was and is one of the great book dealers in the country, has been president of the Antiquarian Booksellers Association, etcetera. Rob fully admits he was a skeptic of this at the beginning, and he fully admits that he was wrong, he was totally wrong. He thought, what, you are going to put all this money into bricks and mortar? He just didn't see it. And I completely get that, and he wasn't alone, there were others. No need to name names, who thought this was a crazy idea.

And so, but Jim with the absolutely necessary assistance of those [I mentioned], Parker, and Elmer, and the others who gathered around that first group, and I was not in that, they made it happen from day one, because they had the large vision, the thing that Elmer had. You know, Elmer said, I did one of the last interviews of him, maybe the last, he would always say, I think I mentioned it to you prior, Elmer was a glue salesman. He grew up a boxcar child; did you know that? His father died, I think alcoholic, on the streets of Chicago, his mother died, and he and his brother were living in the house, fourteen and eleven, I think, taking care of themselves, and he is writing for a newspaper, he is a stringer for a newspaper and lots of things, as a kid, so he had that entrepreneurial goal. But he was living in a hotel, in a room in the Leamington, while he went for an M.B.A. at the University of Minnesota; he said, he never remembered how much it cost; it was so inexpensive. But Elmer was always a man of vision, and he always said: think of the pioneers in this state. There was nothing here, nothing. And yet, they hired the best architect in the United States, Cass Gilbert, and they built that amazing capital building. And he was in awe of them, and that is kind of how he saw, you think fifty, a hundred years ahead, two hundred years ahead. And he thought the pioneers of this state did that and he was in their thrall, and we, MCBA was extremely lucky to be in his thrall. He was willing and able to see into the distance, so Elmer's contribution cannot be in any way understated, and he influenced me personally, immensely, in the way to see this. And then, Jim. Jim was the crucial guide for all of us to see that this was something new, and so we had to tell people about it in a new way.

BB: Yes, absolutely. Well, then thinking about former Governor Andersen and some of those players, and just the circumstances of MCBA in the McKesson Building, and then in Open Book, do you think that there is something characteristically Minnesotan about the fact of MCBA's birthing and growth here in this particular place.

JL: Well, it is widely known—Jim said this, everybody he ever talked to in the United States told him this, only in Minnesota. And what he means by that, when I go out in the world, I am an immigrant to Minnesota, a Wisconsin boy, been here for over forty years, but still view myself as an immigrant, and am kind of a salesman when I go out in the world, because the place is amazing. Right up through and including the Legacy Fund, which was passed in a down year by over sixty percent of Minnesotans, money voted to the arts and the environment and the outdoors. I mean, no state is doing that, but Minnesota steps up again and again. Here is what I always say about Minnesota, you know it is true. You move to Minnesota, you have a half decent idea that somebody will say, how can I help you?

Martin Friedman who was—Mickey Friedman was on the board, and Mickey, she was a hero too, she was one of the great leaders of the arts in the United States and so was her husband. When I first took the job at the Star Tribune, Bob White was the Editorial Page editor then, and he had just hosted, prior to my arrival, the national conference of editorial writers, which was a big deal back then. And so he had one of the Dayton's speak to them on this Minnesota idea. And that speech should be pulled out and enshrined in the constitution of our state, or enshrined in the halls of our state. And I don't know that it is, and we should really track it down, because he gave me later a paper copy of this. And I don't remember which Dayton it was, possibly Ken—one of the Dayton brothers. Not Wally who was more quiet, but these were the people who were doing the arts, Wally was doing the environmental stuff.

But he said, board members of arts organizations misunderstand, corporate people who end up on boards misunderstand their job. He said the job of a board member of an arts organization is to hire the very best Executive Director that you can, and then do what they say. [Laughter] But he said it is so common that people with business skills and others think we know how to do this; he said, no. But that embodies I think, this incredible Minnesota idea. You know, the Daytons then went on, along with other corporate leaders to establish the corporate giving programs and the kinds of things that have returned immense amounts of resources into the arts, the environment and all the other social services organizations that make Minnesota truly exceptional. There is a lot of talk these days, and we should rightly roll our eyes, with [the idea of] American exceptionalism. I am from Wisconsin; Wisconsin is a basket case because they have completely forgotten who they are, it is a calamity for the state. Minnesota has not done that, and even in difficult and recessionary times the Minnesota people keep stepping up, and the arts scene here is robust as it is in no other community, and everybody says that. How do you do it? Let's review what happened.

Coffee House Press moved here, we know that, to be part of MCBA, but also to be part of the ecosystem of finance, of non-profit finance, but the other one is Graywolf. [Scott Walker, Graywolf's founding Executive Director] definitely, he chose the Twin Cities out of Port Angeles, Washington, because of the same thing. And I don't know how he knew.

BB: Jim....

JL: Was it Sitter?

BB: Yes. Jim Sitter was a friend of his.

JL: Oh, not a shock, ok, that is an important historical detail, too, because Graywolf is now widely recognized as one of the very best literary publishers on the planet. So all those things. Well, I mentioned the Il Postino course. There was a novelist there, and I can't remember her name, she was quite well regarded nationally, and grew up in South Carolina. So she talked about her novels and she admired Edna O'Brien. But when she talked about it, and, what are you doing here? Well, I moved here because of the literary eco systems.

BB: Speaking more broadly then, talking about the people and the factors that contributed to where we are today, is there something characteristically Minnesotan that is a piece of MCBA's history happening in Minnesota?

JL: Yes, very definitely, and in two ways, as I reflect on it. One is in Minnesota we are willing to pioneer something new, a new idea. I have been around, I am seventy-one, I have been involved in a bunch of organizations and I have tried to fundraise in a variety of different ways, and I have learned that there are two categories of people: people who say yes to a new idea and people who say no. And there are a lot more people who say yes in Minnesota; people who are willing to step forward for a new idea and make it happen, then I know of anywhere else. So there is that.

Then there is the basic Minnesota idea itself, which is that people move to this state, artists move to this state, because they know, that this state will be receptive to them, and the example of the Legacy Amendment is an extraordinary case, because in a down election, I didn't think it would pass, didn't think it had a hobo's sense, and it passed with well over sixty percent of Minnesotans supported it. Minnesotans believe in the arts but Minnesotans are really, I don't want to use the term progressive because that has political content, but they are pioneers, they are willing to make something new happen.

BB: If there is one more question to ask, it has to do, again, with our thirtieth anniversary. How would you describe MCBA's legacy at this point in time to the larger community or to the arts community. What has MCBA brought to Minnesota and the arts?

JL: Well, the first thing is that it exists. I mean that. That is not a throwaway statement. Because, before MCBA there was no book arts center, it is not as though we replaced the last book arts center or we upgraded. We invented the book arts center [for Minnesota] and then invested in it and made it the most beautiful and most accessible and most effective book arts center in the country. So the legacy is that it is here, and we are and should be very proud of.

I will tell you one of the things I do. When I have a visitor who comes from elsewhere to visit the Twin Cities, there are two things that I show them. I show them the Guthrie Theatre which is an iconic building, really quite remarkable, and the fact that it is there, near us, may well have to do with the fact that we had built this arts center before that. But then I take them to MCBA, and I usually show them that second, because they will be dazzled by the first but they will be amazed by the second because they have never really seen anything like it. And no matter where they live, they are completely entranced, as I was, as you are, as all people are as they walk in and recognize, oh, there is this vibrant art form that now has a home here in the Twin Cities. So, I think it is a literal tourist attraction that helps the Twin Cities tell its story which you have already described, which is that we are willing to step forward and support not only the existing arts, the Walker Art Center is famous, as is the Institute of Art for its classical work, the Walker for its modern art, but then this tiny lunatic fringe of the book arts, it too has a home here, and the home is spectacular, thanks to the people who worked on it.

BB: That is a great place to end, I want to thank you with a full heart, Jim, you have given so much to art and literature in the Twin Cities, and thank you on behalf of MCBA's board, staff, faculty and all those kids who come in those school buses, thank you so much.

JL: Well, thank you.