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Narrator

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Interviewer

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BB: My name is Betty Bright, and today, September 30, 2015, I am interviewing Jim Sitter 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.

Jim, Welcome. I am very pleased to interview you today, because you are the guy that made it all happen. You conceived of MCBA and brought it to life, working with a key group of Minnesotans to pull together a founding board of directors, involve local artists and invite participation by Amanda Degener and Allan Kornblum, those two among others, as our founding Artists-in-Residence, and then, you weren't done, you undertook extensive planning and fundraising to oversee the design and build-out of an 8600 square foot space in the Warehouse District—and we will talk more about all that stuff. You left MCBA in 1989 for new challenges in running what is now called the recently renamed Community of Literary Magazines and Presses. So, there is really no question here that MCBA exists because of your vision, and I very much appreciate your sharing your reflections today.

So, let's see. I don't really know where to begin, but I guess the best place to begin is before MCBA came to life. I would love to hear anything about your background or interests that may have positioned you to conceive of this very unusual idea of a book arts center. Where did it all begin for you?

JS: Well, in some ways, books saved my life, growing up in North Dakota. I will move on from that, although there are some teachers I should acknowledge at some point. And I was lucky enough when I went to Macalester College in Saint Paul, to get a job at the Hungry Mind Bookstore. I was only the seventh Hungry, Hungry Jim, and so there weren't that many positions at that time. Later, sadly it is gone now, but later it got very, very big. But that also made me a year-round person in Saint Paul, and I also learned a lot from David Unowsky at the bookstore. And at a certain point in time, David Wilke moved here from Connecticut, to be with his partner, Jonis Agee, who was a Creative

Writing Professor at [the College of] Saint Catherine's. And David [Wilke] had Truck Magazine, and Truck Press, and Truck Distribution Service, and David Unowsky and David Wilke decided to share me. And so I started working for both. And that led to my meeting people like Gail See, because I would take the car out to deliver books and magazines to all the stores. So I got to know stores other than just Hungry Mind quite well. David wanted to move and I purchased for four hundred dollars—he made me pay fifteen dollars extra for a chair—but I bought Truck Distribution Service for four hundred dollars and renamed it Bookslinger after Ed Dorn's long poem, Gunslinger.

BB: When did that happen? When did you buy it?

JS: January 23, 1979, in a Mexican fast food place.

BB: I see, was that [at] La Cucaracha, by chance?

JS: No, it wasn't, this wasn't as good a place. It was Zantigo's on Snelling Avenue just north of University. So, David [Wilke] had been trying to sell to libraries, individual and bookstores, and he was trying to sell magazines and books. And at the time, the government in 1978 changed periodical mailing rates, so the magazine side of the business was starting to go down, and because of the advances in technology in typesetting for offset printing, more and more literary people were starting presses, whereas if you go back to the 1950s and 1960s it is heavily magazines and very few independent presses, literary independent presses. So I knew that Truck Distribution Service wasn't working well; so, with Bookslinger I deemphasized magazines, I stopped approaching the library market and individual market for the most part, and I focused on selling books to bookstores.

At one point in time, and this is a few months later, it is either May or June, I was down in West Branch, Iowa, which is just east of Iowa City, on my first sales trip, to sell books to Iowa Book and Supply, Prairie Lights. Prairie Lights was like Hungry Mind, wonderful store. I got in late, and it was around 10:30 at night. Cinda, a new mom, was upstairs asleep. I am in the print shop, which is sort of an addition to the house, and Allan's got the radio just blaring, and he is listening to the Chicago Cubs, and he has got his C&P platen press going, and he is printing. Now, this is the first; I had seen in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, artists using Vandercooks, but to print images. I had never seen someone using lead type, so, I was watching it and I just couldn't believe it.

BB: Had you been to Kornblum's before this?

JS: Oh no. But when they would come up, in 1976, 1977 and 1978 to go to the book fair, to exhibit at the book fair, the small press book fair, which is an area that should be researched some, because those book fairs into the early 1980s affected a lot of people, connected a lot of people. So, they would stay at my place.

BB: And that was with Toothpaste Press?

JS: Yes, Toothpaste. So, they would stay at my place. And when for the first time ever I came down to West Branch, with Bookslinger, they said, we will put you up. So, I am watching him print, and, you know me, I start asking questions. And Allan starts answering them, very loudly, you know Allan. So, the radio is going, the press is going, Allan is yelling, and the important point, the infant Annabel Kornblum is in a crib right next to the press, asleep. It was a very memorable moment for me. I couldn't understand—I am not a father—how the infant could be sleeping, and I didn't understand why Allan didn't just take a pause to answer my questions.

But, that was the first step toward Minnesota Center for Book Arts, and that is because I thought, given my background from North Dakota and Macalester and Hungry Mind Bookstore, I thought I was a booklover, and I am watching this, and I am falling in love all over again. I couldn't believe how much I didn't know. And I couldn't believe how more interested I got, the more Allan would answer questions and point things out. So, by the time I am driving back to Saint Paul, this is two days later because I didn't get dinner and the Kornblums always feed you, so I stayed over another night, and asked more questions. And Allan knew a lot about the history of the book, and had reference books on it. And so I was driving back and I was thinking to myself, you know, there are a lot of booklovers but I bet there could be more if they could see what I just saw. And that is the first inkling, it is not the full-blown, but it is the first inkling. On that, if you want me to continue in that direction, the next step is April—and this I can pin down—April, because there was a famous transit strike in Manhattan, it started on April Fool's Day 1980. I had flown in the day before to see my aunt. We went to see a play on Broadway, and it snowed, which was odd, but it was the best trip I have ever had to Manhattan because everyone was friendly, everyone was waving. You know I had sixty-five pounds of book samples to pull around—I had so many customers in Manhattan. Brooklyn wasn't what it is now, so I showed in Manhattan, and everyone was so friendly!

So, it was a very vivid trip, and one evening, Annabel Levitt of Vehicle Editions, Annabel Levitt—by that time I had 220, to 230 presses that I was distributing, and Vehicle Editions was one of them. One evening [Levitt] took me to CBGB's, the nightclub, the legendary punk rock place. We are walking down Bleecker—Bleecker is not a straight-line street—I think it t-bones right in front of CBGBs, it is the Bowery. We are walking on the left hand sidewalk, and she stops and says, this is Center for Book Arts, 15 Bleecker Street, the original location. The first thought I had, I am looking thought the window [and] there are no lights and no people there. I look through the window and the first thought was, this place needs a broom. There were a couple of presses, some type, and some modest binding equipment. But I am like, hmm, and that stuck with me for a long time.

Now, Manhattan is a one-of in this country, for books. At the time there was Center for Book Arts, there was Dieu Donné, for papermaking, separate, Franklin Furnace and

Printed Matter for making artists' books available in a retail environment, which eventually I wanted to do, and things like the Typefounders Club, you could join it for twenty-five bucks—I became a member when I moved there—and the Grolier Club. This type of book arts center, Minnesota Center for Book Arts, wouldn't really fit in there, because so many things are fragmented and covered already. So that started me thinking, how would you start a book arts center in Minnesota, and how would it be different, because I knew it would have to be different.

For more than a year I have been doing quite a bit of thinking about the past for various reasons. And, creating MCBA, there are three layers or threads or rivers to how that happened. One river is just conceiving of MCBA: what should be in it, how it should operate, how it should look, and that strand starts with Kornblum and the accidental window gazing with Annabel Levitt. A different stream is my relationship with, I will describe him the way I generally don't—former Governor Elmer L. Andersen, and how that developed. But a third stream or river is the historical relationship between philanthropy in Minnesota to book arts and literary arts. I will tell you a little story, and in fact I brought a couple little books that will somewhat substantiate my point. One of my buddies at Macalester College was a guy named Jack Reuler. The founder of Mixed Blood Theatre Company, which is still so important and still going. I was in the office at Bookslinger's warehouse, and I am reading, I will call it the Strib [Star Tribune] but maybe it wasn't the Strib then, and I am reading a little squib in there, I think this is 1979 it could be 1980, and it says, the Mixed Blood Theatre Company has received grants from—now this is a foggy memory but I think it was—\$15,000 from Dayton Hudson Foundation, and \$10,000 from General Mills Foundation—to put on a play called, *For colored girls who get the blues and have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*, by Ntozake Shange. Who I later actually got to know, because I published two things by her. And I got up off my chair and went down to the warehouse and picked up, I was the distributor, of that—they called it at the time a Coreo Poem but they put it on Broadway as a play. And the press that published it from California was Shameless Hussy Press. You gotta love it, Shameless Hussy Press. And the publisher's name was Alta, A-l-t-a. Not American Literary Translators' Association, but Alta. And I don't think Alta cared much for me but I was sending her relatively big checks because I was selling amazing numbers of her books to Chicago and to the East Coast, and she was in California. And I looked at the books—no grant support—and, Shameless Hussy wasn't getting grant support, and then I started thinking, Minnesota is so generous philanthropically in a lot of different areas, not just in the arts, and I started thinking, now I don't know if Milkweed was around in the early to mid 1980s.

BB: I think so. With Randy Scholes as well as Emily Buchwald—they had the Chronicle, Milkweed Chronicle existed, I don't know if the press existed.

JS: New Rivers Press existed, Holy Cow Press in Duluth, the Loft, and these organizations were doing fine work, and they had in some respects a national audience, and they were getting very little financial support. And I am looking at these Shameless

Hussy books, and I am looking at these Shameless Hussy books, and thinking about my friend Jack Reuler getting money to put on a play, when the publisher of it doesn't get support, and the writer didn't get support, and I am thinking, something is wrong with this picture. Because at the time, there were all these theatre companies—there are more now, and they even had multiple dance companies back then. I don't understand. Why isn't this important aspect of culture supported the way other segments are? So, there is the conceiving of and figuring out the pieces of Minnesota Center for Book Arts, which would include, like, location, etcetera, there is the relationship with Mr. Andersen, which I will get to, and there is also, and these are going to weave together.

I eventually realized that the relationship between philanthropy in Minnesota and books, book arts and literary arts needed to change. And so then the question became how, how could you change that? And I thought, I was already publishing as a side business to Bookslinger; I could start a press. But, New Rivers, Milkweed, Holy Cow, just because they were doing good work, they weren't getting big checks. So that wouldn't make a difference. In Manhattan there is the Academy of American Poets, Poetry Society of America, Poet's House, all a little bit different, but so I could have started like a poet's group, but the Loft was already doing that, and more, and they weren't getting much support compared to a small dance company. So I really tried to think about how did philanthropy work and how would you go about changing that. So the creation of MCBA, the relationship with Mr. Andersen, and the changing philanthropy in Minnesota are—I decided in a way when I got enough of the idea of MCBA in my head, that the way to change philanthropy in Minnesota in part, was not starting another press, but starting something that didn't exist here, and that would bring in the design and visual arts community. Which received some support, and by putting together a different kind of board of directors than literary book organizations usually have—I am not talking about big libraries, though. So, which of these three rivers you want me to go down farther?

BB: You just paddle down whichever one you want to, Jim, because I think they're all going to eventually merge here. This is interesting.

JS: One of the dullest things I could talk about, which was something that interested me, which was how do you know what cultural policy is? There is a group that, I am not sure that it still exists, called United Arts Fund, which raised money for numerous membership organizations, sort of like a United Way. At the time it was housed in Landmark Center, and COMPAS [Community Programs in the Arts] was an organization that I knew and it was in Landmark Center. And Jim Dusso, who I think was the number two guy at COMPAS, he told me about this thing. Maybe Dusso knew me better than I knew myself. United Arts had a three-ring binder thicker than those, with light blue cloth binding. There was a room it was sitting in with some other things and they didn't let you take it [out of the room]. So sometimes I would be in Saint Paul and could leave the car, it was easier to park then, and I would go sit in that room, and, now, this is my arrogance coming out, I had a really good memory then.

I started memorizing what was in that binder. What was in that binder? They had a two-page description of every arts non-profit in the Metro. With things like, revenue sources, amounts, budget sizes, earned income ratio, board of directors, and I started seeing patterns. After a few visits with the binder I figured out there were six primary sources of support for the arts, from corporations, foundations and the State. I think the State Arts Board was the sixth. As I began to compare these organizations' finances, I could see that the organizations that received support from all six and received support from individual and family foundations were doing the best, and had an interesting commonality in terms of boards of directors. Then I would look at organizations that had maybe three of the six and almost very little individual support, and they weren't doing so well. Then there were the ones that had one [main foundation] donor, and that is where New Rivers and the Loft would show up.

So, I am looking at these patterns and I am thinking to myself, well, we have got to change each one of those six to be more open to literary and book projects, and we also have to change, we have to get a different set of people on the board. And I also, and this was eventually the other have of creating MCBA, one of the early, large problems besides having no donors, was that there was no program at any of these foundations or corporations to support a space and equipment, a capital-intensive start-up arts organization.

I was looking at the numbers and seeing how things fit together in the cultural community from that perspective. Also, Minnesota was so generous. I didn't understand things, and one of the foundations that kept showing up was Jerome, and there support mainly of artists, or close to one hundred percent. And, I just called them up! [Laughter] And the recently retired first Executive Director of the foundation was Cindy Gehrig. And it was strange. I called her up and started asking questions, and she said, let me come visit. And, you have no idea how ugly my [warehouse] rental space was.

And I would just start asking her questions, like, why do you support that, that way? And, what's, why are literature and visual artists who work with books not included in the history of Jerome, which wasn't that long by the way. She got the job in 1975. And this is 1979 or 1980. And so, I was able to just ask her questions and call her up, and she helped me think about philanthropy in Minnesota in different ways than just looking at the numbers.

The other person that helped me in this strand early on, was Margaret Wurtele. I had a girlfriend who was working at the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Carol Yaple, like Maple with a Y, and she wanted to go to this fundraiser at someone's house for this non-profit, for what was then called, I think it is different now, Battered Woman's Shelter, I think it is now domestic abuse, more prominent. So, I wrote a one hundred dollar check, small businessman with a checkbook, and we went. And somehow Carol already knew Margaret and Margaret was there, and Carol introduced us, and I didn't have a grant proposal, and I didn't have a non-profit, so I started asking questions, and Margaret just

stood there. And she actually listened to me. Long hair—I had more hair—and both Cindy Gehrig and Margaret Wurtele got me thinking in more sophisticated ways about it, and also, they were approachable, there was an openness. And I don't know if it is that open here now. There are more sources of support but I don't know if, I am not elegant now, I sure wasn't elegant then! So, I was fast-talking; I criticized some of their answers! So, it wasn't just that binder. Let me move to the middle river, my relationship with Mr. Andersen.

Again the book fairs come up. March, I think late March 1979. There is a book fair that year. It was at Augsburg College rather than Saint Kate's or Macalester. It was at Augsburg. And we got the biggest table because we were a wholesaler. We had 200—no, at that point I didn't have 200, I had fewer than 200 presses, but still, mostly it was Toothpaste Press had a table, New Rivers, and Holy Cow. And again, I am blanking out as to if Milkweed had a table at that point. During the afternoon a guy comes by in a trench coat that is still buttoned, and a small hat. Absolutely it would be a very trendy hat right now. Hats that are accessories and not real hats like mine. He spent \$68.69, and he wrote a check out for it. My staff was elated because it was the biggest sale of the fair, hands down, anywhere. I will show you some books, Shameless Hussy books, ninety-five cents. Prices have changed. So, I don't care about the \$68.69. The check had his address, two phone numbers, his name. I said I don't care about the \$68.69. He has done business with me, and I can call him up. And the reason I knew about him in terms of books, goes to the late Larry Dingman, a rare bookseller in Dinkytown, Dinkytown Antiquarian, and Jim Laurie, who had James and Mary Laurie Booksellers at that time on South Snelling very close to Macalester, same half-block as the Saint Claire Broiler, which is still there. Now, probably late 1977, 1978, because I met Jim even earlier because it was so close to Macalester, and both of them referred to him as The Big E. I don't know if you are a college basketball fan, but there was a player named Elvin Hayes, who ended Lew Alcindor's winning streak, UCLA's winning streak; he was called The Big E [and] that is where they got the Big E. This is an impression; this is not a fact, that he was the biggest private book collector in the state of Minnesota. Now, he certainly would have been the top five, maybe the biggest.

So, I need to jump to something, but it comes right back to Mr. Andersen. David Wilke while running Truck, I don't know how he did this, somehow got some books from a press in England called The Whittington Press. And he didn't sell a single one, or thereabouts. At the end of May 1979, I am at what was then called the American Booksellers Association convention; now it is called BEA. Book Expo. And John Randle, the proprietor of Whittington Press, had a booth there, and I had a booth. He didn't know many people, I knew a lot of people in the business, so when John would need to go to the restroom or buy a sandwich, I would cover John's table and one of my friends from Book People—they had a ton of people—would cover my table, booth. And that gave me an opportunity because it was a full three-day fair, to really look at the books. And I was just stunned. We don't have to get into history of the English fine press book, but I knew Mr. Andersen was a big collector of Kelmscott, Doves, Ashendene I think, and I was

looking at this and I think, whoa, if he likes those books... So, John was irritated with Truck Distribution, and by sequence, Bookslinger, me. Because where are my books, and why aren't you sending me money. And I said, listen, John, let me have these books, and they were expensive. if I can't sell them by the end of the summer, I will cover your shipping costs and I will send them all back to you.

BB: So those are different books from what David Wilke had had.

JS: Essentially the problem was that David had picked out the cheapest books, that's a little....

BB: The least expensive titles.

JS: Well, yes...

BB: I mean, I am sure the craft was good, but not the most handcrafted look, or something most involved.

JS: Just sort of chapbooks. Now, there has been some research done now, and there is going to be shipped to the University of Minnesota Archive, so, believe it or not, the invoices for those books, and the correspondence between John and David and John and me; it is all there, so this can all be substantiated. So John is not entirely happy but he says, ok. Now I am thinking, if I can't sell it to Mr. Andersen, I don't have a customer for those right now. That would have been different less than two years later. I get back to Saint Paul and I call Mr. Andersen's office. Well, they don't know who I am, so they put me right through to Mr. Andersen! And I start to describe the books to him. And he says, well, I have never heard of the Whittington Press, but you are right, those do sound like books that I would be interested in, some of your description is very similar to some books that I carry very much about. But I am very, very busy, so could you call back in ten days. Well, now they know who I was, so I swear, one of the times I had to go through three secretaries. He is a very busy man. And this is going on and on, and finally and I am going to say July, it is past six o'clock, and I am saying to myself, I bet he is the kind of guy who works late sometimes. So I call [and] he answers the phone. I said, hello Mr. Andersen, this is Jim Sitter calling. And here is what he said, Oh, I have been bad to you! I said no, no, I know you are a busy guy. And he says well, could you come up right now? And I said, well, you don't understand, Mr. Andersen. My primary business is wholesale distribution including lots of offset-produced books, and so I am just in jeans and a t-shirt. And he says that doesn't matter. And can you be up right now? And I said, I can be there in less than twenty minutes. Well, I had cased out where his office was; I had driven by twice, and traffic was much better then. Do you want to know where the office was?

BB: Yes.

JS: Roseville Towers, the Southwest quadrant of the intersection of Highway 36 and Snelling. He had the penthouse. Lots of books. Lots of books.

BB: Not so far from where you were.

JS: Yes, that supposed office. So he hangs up and I hang up. The most expensive fine press material and some less expensive book art-y stuff (I brought some) was upstairs in a special wall, which was dedicated to them. And I walk over to that wall, and I am trying to make a decision: what do I take? Because I, although I was going to make an appointment and now I am going right now. And I look and I make a key decision: I take half of the Whittington Books, not all of them.

So I drive up there. This is the eighth floor, I am in a t-shirt and jeans. He stands up, apologizes again. No one else is in the office. And then we sit down on one of two long red couches, sofas, whatever it is called, and we start to look at the books. And the first one I hand to him he says, oh, J.B. Priestley, and he starts to tell me about J.B. Priestley. And he said, I have to have that! And then I hand him what was probably the most expensive book—I am eighty percent certain it was the most expensive book I brought with me that day.

BB: Which one was that, do you remember?

JS: It was by Paul Scott, the author of the Raj Quartet. [*After the Funeral*, Whittington Press, 1979] It is full leather Nigerian Goatskin, and he is just very impressed. He says, this is very fine work. And he is looking at it in detail. He has looked at the text and then he is looking at the back cover, and there are two digs in the leather. I just—well, you worked with me for a long time—you know how stupid I am.

BB: Oh yes! [Laughter]

JS: So I said, don't worry, Mr. Andersen, this is my sample copy, we will get you a better one. And he cuts me off. He says, no, this is the copy I want. I was just very surprised. And he turns a little on the sofa—I am to his right—and he says, Jim—and this is something Greg Campbell would know the answer to this, because I have forgotten which way this goes. If the goatskin is exported to England from Nigeria and then tanned, it is better—or it is the opposite! [Laughter] If the goatskin is tanned in Nigeria and then exported, it is better. But whatever, those digs are an indication to Mr. Andersen that Whittington people are picking out the highest quality materials and it made him want the book more, and made him more interested in Whittington. Now, I don't know if your project about MCBA includes swear words or not, but I am sitting on the couch and thinking to myself, WTF. This guy knows more than I do and I am the salesman. So I immediately do a 180, and start asking him questions, and he just starts going. He bought every book, but then he asked a question: he said: do you have any more? He was eager, and I said, yes I do, and he said, let's make an appointment. And we did that on average

about every six weeks for the next two and a half years, and I always made sure not to bring everything!

BB: So, was it primarily Whittington?

JS: No, then he started buying Toothpaste, letterpress, all sorts of letterpress stuff. I don't think he bought any Phil Gallo—well, there would have been some Phil Gallo that he purchased. But he started buying other mostly Midwestern, and then as I started to add other British presses, he would buy that. But Whittington, I don't know if he rejected more than one or two. Because every once in awhile Whittington did something that was a little, fringy. But got more and more and I kept learning more and more as he got tied up with Whittington.

So, this went on. Then it led to, ok, now, over in this other river, the one about, thinking about how are you going to start a book arts center and where should it be, I had been getting farther along. But there was a moment, and again, these records will be at the University of Minnesota, John Randle is coming over in March so there should be an event. But I believe this was the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, 1981. I had called him up earlier, and said that John and Rose Randle had let me know that they had put together a list of their archive, and they wanted to sell it to get capital for the press, and they were ignored in England at the time; they are not now, and only a Japanese University had expressed interest, and they were hoping that it would be a little closer, and did I want to offer it to Mr. Andersen? When I called up Mr. Andersen he said well, we wouldn't be interested in such a thing, it would be so expensive, but there is no harm taking a look at the list, is there? I mean, wouldn't that be fun, to just see what they have? And I said, yes, there is no harm in that. So, as a first time I would ever dealt with something like DHL.

BB: What's that?

JS: Oh, I think it is like UPS or Fed Ex, it originated in New York.

BB: Oh yes, the shipping, I thought you meant some condition or something.

JS: So this quarter leather, very large format book comes over, the first thing on the list is the first thing that John and Rose ever printed, they were working at Hyman Publishers in London, and on weekends they began. It was the letters R and N; I don't know why, R and N. But that is the first thing ever.

So this is the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, this is why it is so vivid in my mind. I would hate to find out from the records that it is some other date. I had gone out, and I had done what any business owner would do, I bought burritos for my staff on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, and I am sitting at my desk, which is an unfinished door on top of two file cabinets, my feet are up...

BB: Not uncommon.

JS: Got a burrito in one hand. And in the extended lap I have got this huge book and I am going page by page, and wow, I they kept that, they have got this, and I was just very impressed, so I put down the burrito, picked up the phone, and called Mr. Andersen. And they put me through because he had told them something, and he said can you come up right now? Those are the only two times he ever said that to me. And I drive up there, and we sit on the sofa and we start going through the book, two kids in a candy store, and we are just, pointing, look at this, and we are having a wonderful time. And more than thirty minutes into it, he slaps the book shut and then he starts tapping it on his thighs, then the fore edge, then the spine, and he is just, and I just shut my mouth because I knew he knew how to buy something like that and I didn't know how to sell something like that, and then he said this to me. And he was looking off in the distance, he wasn't looking at me, he said, Jim, if there is one thing that I have learned, is that opportunities like this do not come one's way very often in life.

And I sort of nodded. And he said, would you go back to your office and call the Randles (he knew that we had been doing so much business that I actually would call them sometimes. And it was expensive to do that kind of thing.) And he knew the time zones. And he said, would you go back to your office and call the Randles and tell them to consider the collection sold, and the details would be worked out later—you know, like terms, price, and so I am smiling, and I could tell the story about the phone conversation—it was fun, it sort of made their day, but it was an interesting conversation, because at first they were resistant to the idea that their collection sold, and when the money would come, well, we will figure that out later, but they came around in the course of the conversation.

But the thing is, this is about MCBA, and I am driving back to my office, and I wonder if I can remember all four things that came to my mind. One thing, Mr. Andersen and I didn't even talk about this. I knew the University of Minnesota was going to be very happy, because I knew it wasn't going to go to him, it was going to go straight to the University of Minnesota. Another was that there was going to be better wine on the Thanksgiving table tomorrow than I had originally planned.

The third thing was that I had just seen someone spend a whole lot of money on something that he couldn't actually see. And that got me thinking about fundraising and that maybe I could get sums of money like that. To start a capital- and space-intensive brand new arts organization called Minnesota Center for Book Arts. So I told people I was thinking about starting a center for book arts before, but that was the first moment, I hope to God it was the Wednesday before Thanksgiving in 1981 when I was driving that car, where I thought, I am going to start a book arts center.

For a moment to continue down the Mr. Andersen river, June 1982—oh, the archive was shipped over in the fall during the Falklands crisis, and we had to insure it for acts of war. And *Matrix* appeared, their magazine—if you want to call it a magazine; it was a

monster. So I am up to his office selling him some books in June 1982, and I did something I had never done before. After I had sold him all the books, I said, Mr. Andersen can I have an hour of your time? And he said, yes. And I said there are so many theatre companies. There are even multiple dance companies in Minnesota. And there are all these arts and cultural institutions, and it is just a wonderful place. And we have got some great libraries, but we don't really have something for the book. I would like to talk to you about starting a center for book arts. And I described, at least as far as I had in my head, what I meant by that, and in the first twenty-five minutes to half hour, I mentioned Center for Book Arts three times. And then at the twenty-five minute mark, I said, Center for Book Arts, and he said, no, Jim, Minnesota Center for Book Arts. And I said, yes, Mr. Andersen. It was funny to me. We talked for a little bit for about five minutes more, and he said, go talk to people about it. That is all he said. And for some reason, that was enough for me. Ok, so that is June 1982, and that is when I decide to sell Bookslinger, I spin off Granary books, the fine press part of Bookslinger, and take that to start a second business, but my energies, in particular my mental energies, were really toward MCBA. And I was trying to begin to connect these three rivers: creating a book arts center, relationship with Mr. Andersen, which made a lot of things possible, and how do you change philanthropy in Minnesota to support literary and book arts.

So fall and into the winter, fall of 1982, I am still running Bookslinger to a certain extent, although the person who is going to buy it from me is there, and I am starting Granary Books and I am starting Minnesota Center for Book Arts. For tax reasons I didn't sell Bookslinger until January 1, 1983, at noon at brunch at Café Kardamena, which is Brenda [Langton]'s first restaurant, later Café Brenda, now Spoonriver. And the guy didn't pay me the \$2,700 he said he was going to pay me. So I actually took a break in January, but then I started moving down to Granary some, but MCBA.

And Margaret Wurtele, I do not know why she did this; maybe you should ask her. She calls me up one day—she knows what I am going to try to do. She calls me up one day, and says, [there is] someone I would like you to have lunch with. I said, who? She said, Paul Parker. He might be important, either on your board, or...he is COO [Chief Operating Officer] of General Mills. I said, ok, and that was February 1983. I tell Mr. Andersen that, and he says, oh! What day? I tell him and he says, well, I will happen to be at the Minneapolis Club also that day for lunch. Why don't we meet at 11:30 at the third floor smoker? You know, people smoked then. We sit down and talk a little bit, about Whittington and MCBA, but fifteen minutes before noon he stops and looks at me and goes: Paul Parker is one of the two hundred most important people in Minnesota. Mr. Andersen, he was chancellor of the University of Minnesota, he was governor, he was in the state legislature. I guess he thought about something like that. He didn't say one of the one hundred; he said, two hundred. And I said, hmm. And then he starts to describe Mr. Parker's role with the Republican party, General Mills, General Mills Foundation, and then he ends with, gets this smile, and ends with—he was so great to work with—he gets this smile and says, Paul collects baseball books and Sherlock Holmes. And then I smile and, oh!

And, what a lunch! Margaret did a lot of other things. She told me I should call up Joanne Von Blon and have lunch with her to talk about MCBA, and see if she would be interested in joining the board. I said, ok, she is the book reviewer for the Minneapolis paper, and then Margaret said, she is also my mom. Oh, I didn't know that. So I am given this phone number. I call Joanne Von Blon up, she answers the phone, we chat for a little bit, she says that Margaret told her that I would be calling. Then she said how about next Tuesday at one. I said that would be fine. She said, great, see you at NFC, and hangs up. I am like, why does she want to eat at the National Football Conference? So, things were easier then. So I called Margaret's landline at her office at Dayton Hudson Foundation, and Margaret answers the phone. I said, Margaret I just had a good chat with your mother, and we are going to have lunch at the national football conference! How many times in those early years did Margaret Wurtele or Cindy Gehrig think I was stupid. And Margaret just says, New French Café. I had never been there!

BB: Wow. There is a historic moment!

JS: We had a great lunch, and she couldn't believe that Mr. Andersen was going to join the board, but she said, sure, I am in. and I was alone with her. It wasn't Mr. Andersen at the table, or Margaret at the table, or Paul Parker at the table. So, things started moving. And there were other people who were really helpful, who don't get mentioned. The number two guy at the Minnesota State Arts Board, oh I haven't talked about the Arts Board, that's a whole other story, maybe we'll get to that. Because they wouldn't even let us apply initially. The number two guy was a friend of mine, a buddy. There was a secret, all-female arts organization that started—secret, called Sub Rosa. About eleven people like Pat Davis (I will get to Pat) and accidentally one of them had left a memo about their next meeting on her office, and one of her employees, Phil Platt, came by, and said, well, if they can start Sub Rosa, we can start Pro Bono. It is the Reagan era—we can be reactionary. So this thing was started, younger people in the arts, and that is how I met John Firman [Minnesota State Arts Board Assistant Director] at O'Gara's, when it was a real bar, not whatever it is now. And so John started, as he learned more about MCBA, [saying] you should really get this thing incorporated. I said why. He said, some funders, many funders, have copied the National Endowment [for the Arts'] rules that your organization has to be two years old before you allowed to apply. Surdna Foundation, which has Minnesota ties but is in New York—had four years. Now some it was documented the date you were incorporated, some it was your first documented program occurred.

And so he also told me, when you get further along, do some lectures or something so you can get—because he understood that we were going to have to build out a space. So John was very helpful. Phil [Platt] and Jim Dusso—Dusso was the guy who told me about the three-ring binder—they actually were the incorporators. And the board of directors, this is really early stuff—it was initially Mr. Andersen, Paul Parker, and Kay Sexton, then of B. Dalton. And I knew Kay; to get her on the board I just went to talk

with her. Although, you know there was such hostility at the time between my world, [independent bookstore owner] David Unowsky and others, and B. Dalton at that time, but I was always trying to meet lots of different people. It started at Truck Distribution, when I was not just a Hungry Mind person but went to all the stores in the area. So the actual incorporators, I don't think anyone knows of anymore: Jim Dusso has passed away, brain cancer.

There were other people who were very helpful, like Pat Davis. Now, the thing about Pat was, we already were friends, before she got the job as Cindy Gehrig's number two at the Jerome Foundation. So there was a level of trust, and one of the things she did when I was still running Bookslinger, was, in the summer of 1982, we had three long, long sessions, the whole afternoon, in the W.A. Frost Beer Garden. We weren't drinking beer; she was trying to teach me how to talk, which is obvious [that] she only succeeded so far. No, Jim, not profit margin. Try to teach me how to talk non-profit and how to talk about philanthropy. So, Pat was really helpful in putting that time in, and Pat introduced me to some other consultants. One of the those consultants actually lived just a block away from W.A. in an all-brick house, and one of the things she told me was that all small arts organizations need a strong board of directors, and no small arts organization has one. Well, pigheaded me, well, I am going to have a great board of directors. That is partly arrogance, but that is partly, I am still not finding any place I could see where I would get money for renovating a building. We aren't copying a dance company or a theatre company. I am going to need a different kind of board. It is not that there weren't nice people on the boards of New Rivers and Holy Cow.

So, to build up, and I did more of this work in 1983 than I did in 1982, although I started in 1982. I started collecting names, partly the three-ring binder had listed names, and I would go to performances and I would get the program, because things change over time. And there was a person, just like Pat Davis, or John Firman, or this woman consultant whose name I have forgotten. I am not paying any of these people. I may have bought a cup of coffee sometimes—there was another man—and, I either met him in Hungry Mind Bookstore, or David Unowsky, the owner of the Hungry Mind introduced us once, or Chuck Green, a political science professor at Macalester—David or Chuck. His name is Jim Toscano; I think he is still around. And although he I think his portfolio is more in health care, he knew a lot of the people I was going to be going after for the board. And so he would meet me for coffee in the morning and I would throw out names that I was looking at. And the majority of these were people that I had never met. But I was like doing my research. And it was really interesting—to me, anyway—one morning I threw out a name—and I am not going to name this person—he said, no, he is good and important, but he would be too much trouble on the board, bull in a china shop. I stopped him: you understand that Mr. Andersen is going to be on the board? And Mr. Toscano looks at me and he says, really? Yes, really. And he says, oh, well, put him on the board, then. He will behave if Mr. Andersen is at the table. So, Jim Toscano was a lot of help.

Finally I get this list together, and this is summer 1983, and I am not going to be able to give you the month. There is a meeting at Mr. Andersen's office, and I am not selling him books. Paul Parker, Kay Sexton is sitting there, straight. I can tell Kay Sexton stories. One of the little human, wonderful things in doing this for me was in introducing Mr. Andersen and Kay. They just got along, books, books, books. So, Paul Parker is actually slouched in a chair. Mr. Andersen is, here, and you would be, Mr. Andersen would be sitting there. And Paul Parker is slouched, I was sort of surprised, that is not at all how he carried himself—and his glasses have slid down his nose. And then I was surprised to find out that none of them brought any names. And I had a list of seventeen more names to consider, to invite these people to join a brand new board of a non-existent organization. And that surprised me and made the months I put into research of these people...oh, that is good. And so Mr. Andersen said, what is the first name on your list. And so I mentioned a name. And you know, all this time I was being taught. I would mention a name, and immediately Mr. Andersen tells a story about something good that person did for Minnesota. And then Kay would say, yes, no, or I don't know that person, and Parker wouldn't say much either. And I keep going, and let's say, that person is, yes, keep going, yes, try to invite that person. And I am going to have to do this on my own. But if they said yes to that person, if all three said to invite that person, then Mr. Andersen would tell another story about something wonderful that person had done.

The pattern changed in this way. I would throw out a name and Mr. Andersen tells a story about something wonderful they had done, and Kay says she doesn't know enough about that person, and Mr. Parker's like, he's a flake! And I am startled, and Mr. Andersen—what does Mr. Andersen do? He tells two stories about wonderful things that guy had done in the community! So, that guy was off the list. And I am left with a list of people and Mr. Andersen says, go talk to them. I wonder if I should even say this on tape. One of the people on the list was Nina Archibald, and Mr. Andersen called her the best nuts-and-bolts non-profit people he had ever met. But she'd just taken over the Minnesota Historical society due to some trouble that the previous COO, who was a dear friend of Mr. Andersen's, Russ Fridley, had had with the taxman. And she said, no, and within the last two years, the last time I ran into her, she still just cringes that she turned down Mr. Andersen; it just hurts her. But a number of people said yes. And I think you have the dates, by early October 1983—the fifth?

BB: I think so, yes, October 5, 1983, first board meeting.

JS: First board meeting, October 5, 1983. It was at Cowles Media. Mr. Alcott was Vice President there. And since I know you are going to interview Gail See, Gail has a story about my behavior just before the meeting started, and it would be better to have Gail say it, she will remember this story.

BB: How did Mr. Alcott get involved? That is a central role right?

JS: Oh boy. I don't get a chance to talk about this stuff very often. Over the last year and a quarter as I have been thinking about it more, partly due to with Allan Kornblum passing and other factors. Pat Coleman from [Minnesota] Historical Society asked me some questions about the book fairs, and he had information that was false, information that was blank, and information that, well, was probably right. And he looked at me and said, Jim, people are dead, memories are fading, we need to write all this down. Well, and I bring that up in part because Mr. Alcott, when I was doing all this thinking, he was the most important person, that I couldn't remember how I met him.

BB: I don't think he recalls either!

JS: At the Gala this summer, I asked him and his response was this: we met on a Saturday afternoon at the Bookslinger warehouse. And that made me remember, that there was a stretch of time—and I was always working on Saturdays—there was a stretch of time that I would open up the warehouse to the public. And even Hungry Mind couldn't carry everything that I had. So people would come in. and I don't know how he could have found out about that, but he says that is where we met.

And I do know that I already met him before MCBA, because—it was part of my thinking about MCBA—one of the things was, I did some projects and I hired three local presses: Bieler, Hermetic and Midnight Paper Sales. Gerry Lange, Phil Gallo and Gaylord Schanilec—to print two broadsides each of poetry, letterpress. And Phil works a lot for me. So I was trying to promote it, [to those] who come to an event like this. And I was trying standing in a Barnes and Noble—no, B. Dalton at that time, it later became a Barnes and Noble—and I was sort of looking over, and there is Mr. Alcott! And I blurted out, what are you doing here? And he said I am interested in that project. So I already knew him and this was well before, I am going to guess, 1981 or 1982. So, I asked Mr. Alcott to join the board.

BB: Was his name your list?

JS: On my list of seventeen. I asked Mr. Alcott to join the board while he and I shared a burger at Annie's Parlor. Just like Joanne Von Blon, he couldn't believe Mr. Andersen was on the board. But Mr. Andersen also let me know didn't want to be the chair. And so who was willing to take on that responsibility? And I think, Mr. Alcott may think highly of Minnesota Center for Book Arts, but he didn't know how tough it was going to be. Last October, and you were there, I told a story, and I couldn't believe that Gail See didn't know this—she was there also—that for a stretch of almost a year, in the early days, the board is meeting and there are executive committee meetings eventually, and we are moving toward major decisions, like the site search. Mr. Alcott would have me come to his home every Sunday evening. We would go into the kitchen and Marilyn Alcott would give me a Pilsner Urquell, which was the fanciest beer in town at the time—a Czech beer—or a Washington State Chardonnay. And then Mr. Alcott and I

would go sit on the sofa in the living room. And he would pretty much be on the edge of it

I knew how to start things, and I knew how to run a small business, but I did not know how to run every aspect of an arts non-profit. When we would be going towards the sofa, Marilynn would start from the kitchen to go upstairs, and look back, and shake her head. Nearly every time! Because this was taking up a lot of Mr. Alcott's time. Basically he was trying to get me to slow down, wise up, you know, I push. I will give you an example of something. Frequently I would want to do something at the next board meeting, and Mr. Alcott would tell me, that will be a nine to three vote. And I would say, then we can move on. And he would say, no why don't we at the next board meeting, tell them about this issue, this decision, and that we are going to discuss it in full at the next board meeting, and at the board meeting after that, we are going to vote. And I said, that is a little bit more than two months from now, and, I make decisions... That is an example of how we make decisions.

BB: So that people fully accept it and move forward.

JS: Yes. Particularly as a group, because what he was driving for is consensus. Unanimous votes were what he wanted. And so Mr. Andersen taught me a lot of things that, maybe the whole story of MCBA is the education of Jim Sitter. Well, that is a stupid thing to say. But Mr. Alcott put in a lot of time and he didn't always enjoy it, because of my pushing. Now, where are we? So, we have gotten into 1983 already.

BB: You have your board. You are probably into your second board meeting where you have this board of directors, in November 1983.

JS: No, these people are at October 5.

BB: All of these people? Well, someone didn't put that in the notebook of the board minutes. [Laughter] Good to know. So that is November. So, what about site search? Site search has been going on since when?

JS: I started looking at buildings in different ways. Because of Bookslinger, I would be lucky to, I was flying around the country, I drove to twenty-three different states selling books, and after that experience with Allan Kornblum in 1979 and Annabel Levitt in 1980, I started making a habit of, like Arion Press, Andrew Hoyem in San Francisco. He is such a nice guy; he treated me so well. He paid for the lunch, and I was picking his brain about equipment, about how you organize the facilities, but I was doing that with all sorts of people around the country.

BB: And in England. You talk about St. Bride's Library as well, right? You mentioned that as being a source.

JS: That was September 1983.

BB: Oh, I am sorry, not there.

JS: Yes. I spent twenty-three days in England, twenty-four days in England in September 1983. One small part of it was Mr. Andersen wanted me to look for some books for him. But a larger part was, I wanted to connect with more presses there, binders, papermakers, because I could tell that what I was getting from John and Rose Randle was going to be really valuable. So part of that trip in September 1983 was St. Brides Printing Library, that was one part. For MCBA there was one thing that was really important. One thing about that trip I just loved. John took off from the press and drove me all around England, but he was on a mission also.

And he liked me and he knew all these people and he was introducing me, he was very gracious. And, know what was in my lap? Forty-three letters written by T.E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia. I want to say it was Oxford or Cambridge, whichever university he went to. They had a system to pair up their archeology students. One would stay at the college, one would go in the field, the one in the field would write back. T.E. Lawrence's partner was E.T. Leeds. T.E. Lawrence's responses had already been published, when E.T. Leeds' grandson, I believe, found these forty-three letters in the attic, and they weren't published in the letters. John wanted to do the book, and T.E. Lawrence's literary estate exists, and the membership is secret. And John had written [the literary estate], and the response had come with no [signature], saying, of course you can, in an edition of twenty-five copies. That [edition size] is not Whittington for that sort of material. So I am reading T.E. Lawrence's letters.

But the thing for MCBA about that trip was, I met them for the first time. I had dealt with them through the mail: Rampant Lions Press [with] Will Carter and his son, Sebastian Carter. Sebastian and his wife—I have forgotten her name; she has come to Minnesota once—and they are putting us up for two nights in Cambridge, and John and I have people we are meeting, but finally the second morning, Sebastian takes us to the print shop, which obviously John had been to before, and Will Carter is there printing. And I should remember the name of the kind of motorized press he is using, but I don't. Look in a colophon of a Rampant Lions book. And he gives me the look over the shoulder a couple of times. And Sebastian and John are looking a little surprised, but he is just doing what he is supposed to do. Sebastian showing me things, and John is hovering. And finally Will Carter turns around, and he says, what is it with these American printers and their Vandercook proof presses, and their poetry chapbooks? And then his left hand points to his press and he says, why don't they get a real press and get on with it? [Laughter]

I am laughing, and I started having a conversation with him about what was going on with equipment at the time, and that changed. And we started talking more, and I see some things and John Randle on the trip had introduced me to an important stone cutter

in the Cotswolds, and then I find out that Will Carter is one of the most important stone cutters: the MCBA sign!

BB: That is where that started?

JS: Yes. Right there. The site search; since you can't move a paper making facility in your pickup truck. We knew we were going have to lease a fixed space for a stretch of time, and that we were going to alter the space. Again, just like with Jim Toscano and people like Pat Davis, I was getting different points of view. Mr. Andersen set me up with the real estate guy from Lutheran Brotherhood—I can't remember his name. And Mr. Parker set me up with the General Mills real estate guy, Dave Latvaaho, great guy.

And so I have run different buildings by each of them to get their reactions and sometimes they were just like, or they didn't, and it was interesting for me. The search was in both cities, and one of the odd parts of the search was that death had been moving to the suburbs and there were all these funeral homes on Park in Minneapolis, Park Avenue. And you know, they had a freight elevator, they had alcoves—a Vandercook here, a C&P here, and it was like, boy, this is strange, but most of them wanted to sell, they didn't want to lease. And the biggest tension point that I recall was some board members [said], do we really need a papermaking facility, we could start off smaller, and you could move a Vandercook a lot easier. And I was really fighting that. I said no. I wanted—the word that MCBA uses now is comprehensive. I wanted the whole thing. I didn't know how it was all going to work, and I wanted to throw as much spaghetti on the wall as I could. I thought there was going to be a lot of exchange between the people with the printing equipment, the binding equipment, the type, papermakers, I thought that was part of what this was about. Obviously this was the whole community. So I didn't want to give up that. And that made our space requirements a lot harder, larger, more expensive, so harder. And Meyer Scherer and Rockcastle had gotten involved, the architecture firm.

BB: How did you connect with them? Was that through Joanne Von Blon?

JS: Yes, Tom Meyer is married to one of her daughters. I worked with Jeff Scherer, of Meyer Scherer and Rockcastle, and in the number two role, Lynn Barnhouse who was more of an interiors person, but they helped me figure out how much space we really needed. So this wasn't all rose petals and glory. That was a crucial decision and it was difficult. But boy, the first time I stepped in to Mr. Lerner's building, the old McKesson Building....When I walked into that building, I realized, well, there were a lot of columns, but still I could tell from talking with Jeff that this would work, and it would work on one level, in a big, high ceilinged space. And I actually thought to myself, this is it. And it is not that we weren't going to look at other buildings, but. The reason was not only because of the space but also it was the neighborhood. The library, Minneapolis Central Library, was little more than a block away. They had a lecture hall and a lot of books. But also in the neighborhood there were all these art galleries that had an art crawl that I had been to. You know, then I moved to Manhattan and I gather they put in a

basketball stadium and kind of pushed them away and sports bars went into that neighborhood. That is an oversimplification. There was also WARM [Women's Art Registry of Minnesota], and Catherine Jordan ran that and I knew Catherine. So I could talk with her about the neighborhood from the point of view of a small, non-profit arts organization. They are primarily, although that is not the whole story about WARM, a gallery.

And I think, although this is one of those things, I think Forecast, the public art organization, either started in one of the neighborhood buildings. Jack Becker is still alive; he survived a heart transplant. Forecast is no longer. But Forecast was in that neighborhood—maybe that was a temporary thing. But then there were all the galleries. Now, there was a particular block, kitty corner, that I would eventually learn, there was this place, New French Café, was on, and New French Bar, which is where Lynn and I would hang out arguing over how the space should look, and later Café Brenda opened, and Black's Café, and all these places played a role in bringing people together—yes, the fancy New French Café was primarily fundraising, but the others also played roles. Black's Café just down the block...when I first looking at the neighborhood, Black's Café didn't exist: B.J. Carpenter and Melissa Sorman, Steve Sorman's wife, the artist, started that later, and I was so happy they did. The area was the Fur and Textile part of the Warehouse District, and there was a place called the Furtex Grill or Café, and that is where Black's eventually started, and there was an old menu in the window, and had something called the Fur Burger, doesn't that make you not want to eat there!

So anyhow, I was going around, not on a granular level, but I was going around neighborhoods all over the two Cities, and later that art crawl I mentioned, I knew what we were going to do. I asked BJ Carpenter—now this was when there is an art crawl; will you cater? I will pick the wine but you pick the food, and it was better than—little plastic cups of wine—at the galleries, and lots of people came through. So there were different ties into the neighborhood. Mr. Lerner was very patient with us. I can't tell you that we paid our rent on time every month, so Mr. Lerner was very patient; we will just leave it at that. But I think it worked out as a space, because we didn't know what we were doing, and the space changed and the way the equipment was arranged changed, almost continuously.

Let me start with the façade for a second. I had written Will Carter and asked if he would cut a sign for us by hand, Minnesota Center for Book Arts, and 24 North Third Street, and he agreed, and he was a pleasure to deal with, only one disagreement: he wanted to do the usual thing, and that is, to line it with gold. And I said, wrong message right now! We are not there yet. So, he was a little disappointed in that, because that is what he was accustomed to doing. But it was Welsh slate and he cut it beautifully, and I had the plans, and Jeff Scherer of MSR, took me to the [Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission] and submit the plans. We are at this public meeting, and nothing is happening, and I am like, what? And Jeff leans over, and says in a whisper, although I am not going to whisper because you are recording these things, you have made them

nervous. I said, what? I haven't said a word. I am sitting in the back row of the audience. He said, No, you don't understand. They can't find anything wrong with this. He said, normally these people criticize things. And they can't find anything wrong with it. And then one of them said, well, this is very nice, and another said, it is Welsh slate, it is not from Minnesota, and other people said, well, it is actually a very good kind of slate, and it is like, oh, go ahead, do it. So that was just a strange experience for me. It was wonderful that Sebastian Carter, [Will Carter's] son, by coincidence, was over from England—Sebastian's only request was that he wanted to see *Prairie Home Companion*, so I got tickets—but Sebastian was teaching a master class which a lot of interesting people took, but the wonderful coincidence, I am going to say October; it is Fall 1985, on a Friday during rush hour this truck with a crane on it drives up onto the sidewalk. And they have already drilled holes, and they put on the signs, Sebastian was there to take pictures for his father.

BB: Just grand.

JS: Love that. The interior space MSR [Meyer Scherer and Rockcastle] ended coming up with eleven floor plans, but there were derivatives also, like, number seven and I think, number nine had an A and a B version.

BB: It looked so simple when it was done.

JS: Yes, actually it wasn't a complicated thing, although they did a beautiful job of hiding columns, although they did it in different ways. Because it was a forest when you first walked in. And they did such good design work, like, you wouldn't need a security guard because they put those exhibition cases away from the door, and anyone entering would have to go to the center of the facility and know they were visible from the glass walled office. So we didn't have to staff the entryway. So they were thinking about all sorts of things that I would never think of. And also—I am two-dimensional—they were doing all these things in their head with the space. And I remember at the board meeting, I am showing these different models and I am pointing out the one that I thought is the best, and I say, because of the way how the offices were situated, dropped in...

BB: Dropped in. Cubes

JS: Less wall work. Not only do I think this is probably the best; it is the cheapest. And someone on the board—I don't even remember who because I am leaning over and pointing at things on this model—said, inexpensive, Jim.

BB: There is that language again!

JS: Yes! When I run into them they still correct my English. And the stories. Back then the Vandercook proof presses were being abandoned by all sorts of people, all sorts of newspapers, and I don't think we paid for one. The price for a Vandercook back then

was, you can have it if you move it. And so we got good, and there is a side of me that feels like—we could go a lot longer if we talked about my mistakes—because there is a story behind every one of those presses, and I wish we had those stories.

BB: We can get those stories. We can do that.

JS: And now I am told by Kent Aldrich that those things are in demand and sell for thousands.

BB: Tens of thousands.

JS: He said \$7,000.

BB: Ok, well, he would know better than I would, but I have heard stories of tens of thousands.

JS: Yes, and we got them for scraped knuckles.

BB: Lot of people printing nowadays. More demand.

JS: Vic Stein, was I think a friend of Greg Campbell's, I think it was through Greg, a guy named Vic Stein has two Vandercooks in his building, which is now condos on Washington Avenue. And he says you can have them if you go in there on a Sunday and move them yourself. And it was the coldest day I think I have ever—and I am from North Dakota—but two Vandercooks. We will get them.

I tried to get money out of West Publishing. I don't know if everyone is familiar with that name now, because Thompson Reuters owns them and they moved to Eagan. So, [I am meeting at West Publishing in their location along the] river bluff in Saint Paul. I am meeting with Vice President Craig Jilks and I am getting nowhere on the money end. Then I mention, you have some old equipment in a little display, and he says, yes. And I said, we could really use some of that, in particular the board shear, which is [now] downstairs [in MCBA's studios]. And he said, well, I would love to give that to you, but there is another vice president who likes to keep those things here. I don't know how many months later, I get a phone call. And he says, this is Craig Jilks. And I said, oh, hi. And he said do you have a loading dock? Of course Mr. Lerner had a loading dock. I said yes. He said do you have a pallet jack? Mr. Lerner had a pallet jack. I said yes, and he said, do you have a Johnson Bar? Well, actually out of pity somebody gave us a Johnson Bar—j bar—which is really handy, and so, yes to all three questions. Then he said, well, that board shear is going to be on a truck at your loading dock in less than an hour. And I said, that is great, and I said, what happened to the other vice president? And he said, he's on vacation. [Laughter] People were giving us things, so many different people helped.

BB: How about type?

JS: That came from all different sorts of places. It still does, I hear, but I am sure it came from everywhere. And the other piece of equipment that has been on my mind for years, just because, this was before we really opened, but the space is being built out with the exception of the papermaking facility. And it is the argument; it is like civil war over the bindery tables. No, that is two inches too high. No, it shouldn't be that wide, and there shouldn't be a shelf underneath. And everybody had a different opinion, and I am the last person to say, do you want a Universal 4, or a 219 Vandercook, but finally I just told Lynn Barnhouse's boyfriend [who was building them]—do it this way! Just spending too much time on this. And they are still here! They have lasted that whole time.

BB: It is just what people were physically used to using, as the only design it could be?

JS: Yes, people are different heights, but, it just went on for too long. I guess passionate intensity means you care, but at a certain point, make a decision.

BB: You know, Amanda [Degener] talks about how she came just by serendipity, she wanted to move here because she was in love with her future husband, and this person...

JS: He went to Macalester.

BB: Oh did he? Bob? [The Yale contact] gives her a piece of paper, with Minnesota Center for Book Arts written on it; she couldn't remember who did it, it was someone who worked in conservation, and she found the piece of paper and she ends up coming here. Do you remember that first meeting or that conversation with Amanda, because it was so amazing—we got a paper studio, or in the sense of Amanda agreeing to be the artist-in-residence. That seemed to be almost a miracle at that point. Do you remember that connection with her at all?

JS: I don't know how I first met her. But the conversations occurred mostly in bars and restaurants in downtown Minneapolis. Amanda worked with and for the famous artist, Ellsworth Kelly, or Kelly who has pieces at the Walker. Now the conservation connection. I nearly bought a rare bookstore in New Haven. And so I had been there quite often, so it is either a New York City connection or that book dealer who would have connected to a conservation person.

BB: But it is an amazing thing early on that somebody had the name, and her equipment was good quality, right?

JS: And then Allan Kornblum, you mentioned the other day that he was already living in the Cities. I sort of forgot that. I thought he literally moved up here. There are people—Stu Abraham was one, who think that the Kornblums moved here because of MCBA.

BB: I thought that, Jim.

JS: I have gotten three reasons: one, they wanted a better school system for Annabel, although they could have moved fifteen miles to Iowa City. Two, Cinda told me this one after the memorial for Allan that they had really enjoyed the people they'd met at the book fairs. They knew there was a community of people that interested them and vice versa. But the other notion and I am not sure if this is correct, is that the Kornblums moved up here in 1984 anticipating MCBA. What Stu has said to me is that Allan thought that the fundraising community was going to change up here, and he would start the non-profit Coffee House Press. It is kind of sad that we don't have that pinned down, but they did move up to little house on Macalester Street across from campus, around the corner from Hungry Mind Bookstore, and it was too small for them—the printing equipment and type, and Annabel and so they were very happy when the press moved.

BB: So how did that come about? Did you say, Allan, you want to come and help out, because he helped in so many ways.

JS: It goes back to him being patient enough to answer all my questions that time in 1979. I knew that he was a bit of a showman.

BB: Oh, the best kind. He was an educator.

JS: Yes, for Bookslinger he would come to the big ABA [American Booksellers Association] convention and bring a table top platen press, and print small broadsides to give away, and he would tell people about type and about paper, and so I thought that it would be good for Toothpaste/Coffee House, and he would be a good first printer-in-residence. You know, Mickey Friedman who was on the board when we were finally up and operating, she said, Jim, Martin and I only have about five great friends who are artists, because they are just so many agendas, they want something from Walker Art Center. But, you are living with them! Be careful!

BB: Them! She doesn't know book artists. I want to ask you another question, since we are talking about the build-out and then I am sure we will end up talking more about fundraising, since that was the bus you kept driving for a long time, but we were reminiscing a bit the other day and a comment came up about how this was a new idea in the Twin Cities, in Minnesota. And there was some commentary or concern among some artists in the community, that there was all this money being raised for a build-out for at his organization that, we used to say, doesn't exist yet—that was our understated motto, between us—and I just wanted [you to] talk a bit more, about why this was important to you. Why was the full build-out the vision? What, and it ended up being the right way to go, right? It was a success. But what was so important to you rather than just, starting it in a garage, getting in a couple of presses, and then slowly kind of eke out a ...

JS: Yes, but people were already doing that, and it wasn't resulting in much change.

BB: You wanted impact.

JS: Yes, I wanted—I will use the current word that they use now at MCBA—I wanted a comprehensive facility that would be from the artists' point of view, where they could come and see different people doing different techniques, different equipment, collaborate sometimes, but also the community could come in and watch. I mean, I learned all sorts of things about, what is the Minneapolis Fire Department's rule for a building, bringing in grade school children on tours, right? It is something like forty-four inches. I am probably wrong. But I was learning all this stuff, like, how could kids. And I knew—you might think this was presumptuous, but because of Pat Davis and Cindy Gehrig at Jerome, that we were going to have a fellowship program, so it is not just about beginners we are talking about here. We are talking about emerging artists, we are talking about people like Claire Van Vliet, Sebastian Carter, John Randle came over the first couple of years. Top flight, I mean, Claire has won a MacArthur.

BB: But the other thing is, you said the other day about I was, you hired me as Program Director, which meant, I did everything you didn't do! [Laughter] And that the promise was, when you interviewed me, I said, I really want to curate exhibitions, and this is my memory; you said, course you can do that, Betty, you just have to do all this other stuff too! [Laughter] You kept your word! But the fact of it is, I have been thinking back, and the programs were really your idea. You are the one who said: workshops, Dirty Works, school tours, exhibitions, ok, you were thinking back then.

JS: And the book shop, to sell paper.

BB: Bookshop. And we are going to talk about the library, too. Library / archive. Now they just call it a library because the archive is a part of it. But yes, I just want to be clear here, Jim, that you had the idea here, to bring every possible individual in, and give them this experience, and that is really powerful stuff. We had to figure out how to do it. But I just want to say, you know, it was your idea. And you know, I was surprised when you talked about school tours, it was like, really? Around those presses? And it ended up being brilliant, and it is a fantastic program today, fantastic, but it started like that.

JS: You know I really love books, but then, Kornblum.

BB: It was because of the baby? [Laughter]

JS: Yes, the baby on the floor sleeping somehow through that racket. He didn't turn the radio off. But I was like, what was that? People could get to know books in a more kinetic fashion.

BB: Yes, exactly.

JS: Not just books. We were selling paper. We sold, I mean like when B. Dalton was purchased by Barnes and Noble, they had a wake, because a lot of Minnesota people, including Kay Sexton, turned down jobs in New York, which Lenny [Leonard] Riggio offered them, he personally talked to Kay Sexton and she turned him down. And she didn't have anything against Lenny. They had a wake, well, where did they hold it? MCBA. All sorts of different people, from the B. Dalton staff had already taken classes, or go on tours, or Dirty Works, though of course a lot of people hate that name.

BB: Well, we brought it back. It is different now, but they brought it back.

JS: So, I felt like if we left out—because of money—left out the papermaking facility, we really wouldn't know what we could do. We had to take the whole thing.

BB: Library—so that was absolutely important from the beginning as well. It was always kind of tough to keep supporting it when there were so many other needs, but we kept it going, you kept it going, people would donate books, etc,

JS: All right now, wait a minute. You basically did all the programming. Frankly, I was dealing with construction people, and suppliers, and fundraising.

BB: Absolutely, Yes.

JS: And the board, so, you did all that.

BB: True, but, what I was going to say is, and now, MCBA has greatly enlarged it, and rightly so, it carries the name of James and Marilynn Alcott, and so I thought I would also ask you if you could share, why the library piece? I know Elmer Andersen was a huge booklover as everyone was who was involved with it, but that was not a kinetic piece to it and yet it would seem so integral in its own way.

JS: Right. And Mr. Andersen is part of this, because one of the things he taught me, and I don't want to say that he fought with the University about this, but the University wasn't entirely congruent with his view of the issue, was that, book collections are vital but archival collections are vital for research and learning. And he and I talked about that over the years. That is one of the reasons why in the end it didn't surprise me that he would buy Whittington Press archive for the University. And also, his remarks. It was either before or after the first board meeting when he gave me this big bound book. He said, most new efforts keep horrible records. Sometimes he could be very direct with me. You are not going to keep horrible records. And there you are. And I didn't learn this just from Mr. Andersen. I would have been selling to rare book libraries all across the country. That is another connection to Yale. So I got to know them, and early on I was thinking this is all going to be forgotten, if we don't keep some of the paper. And I would almost keep trying to throw things into boxes and it wasn't very fancy at the outset. Allan

printed Garrison Keillor's wedding invitation in a special type that he had to get, and I forget the country she came from.

BB: Denmark, I think.

JS: Yes, and there is some special things that, Allan had to get some special type. But later, MCBA as a thank you, we had a convention, sixty, seventy book artists around the country who normally gathered in Michigan, but because of MCBA they gathered in [Minnesota].

BB: Oxbow?

JS: Book Lab?

BB: No, not Book Lab. PBI [Paper and Book Intensive] is what it is called now.

JS: Garrison gave us a short story about going to summer camp, and MCBA printed that. I never sold a copy and it was never been on the market, and I don't know if MCBA could find it, but I threw like five or six in the drawer.

BB: I am sure they could.

JS: So all different people connected in different ways.

BB: I have another question for you. There is so much territory that I want to cover, but I do want to ask you about the Grand Opening. It was a pretty amazing night, October 26, 1985, I found somewhere that we anticipated five hundred people would come and over a thousand showed up, and we were open from 6 pm to midnight. Do you want to share any memories about that?

JS: Well, we were really lucky that it was a gallery crawl night, so you had all these people coming downtown to see these different art galleries open up a new show, and it was the Friday before Halloween, so Catherine Jordan, the Executive Director of WARM, two and a half blocks up the street, First Avenue, came dressed as a witch! Pointy hat, gloves, whole nine yards. Other people were in costume. BJ Carpenter and Melissa Sorman, big spread of food, it was wonderful, and I had one of those little clickers. And I would stand, sometimes on the steps—you know, there were steps after the doors, or just inside that first area, and I kept track, and after we went over a thousand people, I just stopped, so I could mingle more.

So also, that night but other nights, one of the amazing things was, I would met so many people and like I said, I introduced Mr. Andersen and Kay Sexton, because I had been selling books to B, Dalton's and that is another story as to how that started. So once I stopped clicking, I started greeting people—I certainly wasn't eating—and so I pivot and

I start saying, now you tell me you don't know, and this was like, I was just going around, introducing people that I had met in the course of thinking about the Center for Book Arts, thinking about philanthropy in Minnesota, and the different artists, donors and people who had helped me with just like, wall covering, and so I just started introducing people for the whole rest of the night for me.

BB: Wonderful.

JS: It was just great and John Taylor brought George Latimer, the Mayor of Saint Paul at the time. He was sort of happy but, why isn't this in Saint Paul?

BB: That is what they always said. There is a photo of you with John Y. Cole from the Library of Congress.

JS: He was the head of the Center for the Book.

BB: Center for the Book, and that is really something that MCBA got in on, early on, and eventually it transferred onward, and I believe it was, Hennepin County Library, and now I believe it is [the Minnesota Center for the Book, administered by the] Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. So that was another interesting thing.

JS: That was because of Gail See. There was an ABA, American Booksellers Association convention in Washington, D.C., and we could look this up, but it is either 1983 or 1984.

BB: I can ask her.

JS: This takes me away from [MCBA, but during ABA] Gail takes me to Library of Congress to meet John, who's a sweet guy. I don't know if he is still there, but the last time I check he was. He and I ended up, when the Berlin wall fell, they had this conference in Prague about how to shift the state-run publishing world into a more market-oriented world and John and I were brought over to talk about how even when it was going that way there could still be a non-profit segment. So I had the opportunity to spend an entire week with him in Prague. There are other stories there.

BB: He had this idea for centers for the book around the country. It is kind of pre-Internet a real desire to network; it is so fluid now to network, but that was the idea, you could share programs [in] different cities.

JS: Although one of the things that pretty much out of the box happened was that each one was different. You know, so the idea of sharing programs, or a touring exhibition, it didn't always work that way. But some states had real success with the project.

BB: Yes. But there weren't a lot of funds for if you were touring something, you had to kind of solve those issues yourself, if I remember. Ok, I know we were going to talk

about a few more of the founding directors, but I also want us to be sure to touch on two of the presses that really became symbols of MCBA. One was the acorn press [called the Goodhue Press] that people would see when they would walk up to the front door and see it against the freestanding red wall. Could you tell us how that came about? How did that come to MCBA?

JS: [Laughter] Do you remember that the red wall was curved but then it went back, but that's Jeff Scherer wanting the spine of the book as part of the design.

BB: Oh, I didn't get that. [Laughter] Sorry, Jeff! It was a projector wall in the back.

JS: Jeff, she was too busy doing all of the work.

BB: We could project on the back of it. That is what I remember.

JS: Yes, he was thinking about multi-use spaces, I mean, Jeff... except when they would tell me about cost overruns. Because the money was just, it was like an elephant on your chest, the money. The acorn press, and the shape is why it is called that, is the first printing press in Minnesota, and it actually got to Minnesota via a raft on the Mississippi to Saint Paul before Minnesota was a state. And the first newspaper was printed on that, in Minnesota Territory. And I think the guy who brought it—I don't know if he was murdered—I think he was shot by a politician. The Historical Society would know that. And, why that press was there, may be one of the easier [explanations]. Mr. Andersen calls Nina; I didn't have to do a thing. We just thought it was a great idea, and actually the first time Martin Friedman, Mickey's husband—the guy who was head of Walker Art Center, came into the space, he just almost ran—he had a lot of energy—I mean, really. I met him once at a dance performance at the Ordway, and I said, hello Martin, how are you doing? And he said, crackling! Crackling! And so he just ran, and we had a little rope thing around it, you are not supposed to touch it, and he is a guy who would know that, but he is like, what a shape! And he started describing the shape to me.

BB: And the Alexandra Hand Press. I want you to tell that story, because that was huge.

JS: I didn't want to just have platen presses and Vandercooks, I wanted to have a working, more traditional...I talked with John Randle about this, and he had more than one—you know, he had the famous Columbian [printing press] with the eagle on it that would go into the ceiling because the ceiling was too low [Laughter] in the original shop at Whittington, so he said, I will sell you the Alexandra. And when I got that news I was having lunch with Joanne Von Blon, and I am describing it to her, and she says, I will buy it. And that was it! And I said, ok! But it is going to cost a lot of money, and it is going to cost a lot of money to ship it.

BB: And then it got set up. I seem to recall Fred Brian spending....

JS: A lot of time

BB: Well, I remember it came beautifully packed, with little photographs of this going into this. I remember Fred just marveling over the care they put into basically instructing whoever was going to put it together, how to do it.

JS: Randles are good people. But I am so happy it was there. The second time the Randles came to Minnesota, after the purchase of the archive by Mr. Andersen, there was a—I don't want to call it a workshop—but, something happened, [with] Gaylord Schanilec, four printers from England—John and three who were somewhat younger than John, and all of these Americans came in: Yellow Barn Press from Iowa, and Amanda out in the paper mill. And they printed a book in under forty-eight hours. And they put my name in the colophon, which was ridiculous. Just hanging around keeping the lights on. That was around 1987, and that is another thing about James and Marilyn Alcott. The first time they came, MCBA is not even open yet, to do the lecture at the University of Minnesota and acknowledge Mr. Andersen's gift to the [UM] archive. The Alcotts put the Randles up.

The second time, this is 1987 now, the second time the Randles come and the Alcotts put them up, and the Alcotts were out of town. They gave four British printers and their wife the run of their house. Ok, a lot of people helped in a lot of different ways.

BB: Wonderful. Well, I do want to get back to this, so do you want to scan down and tell whatever you want to tell....

JS: I am going to do this in a strange way, because I am going to mention someone who was not one of the original twelve, who joined two years later, John Taylor, JT, who has just moved back to Saint Paul. John, again, like Mr. Andersen, Mr. Alcott. So many people were teaching me so much. And John was just a pleasure about it. I had known him—and there are stories about that—but to get involved with him professionally took our relationship to a different level, and one of the things I was really impressed with was, once we stopped breathing like we were running a marathon, sometime in 1986, some board member said, we should have a long-range planning committee. [Laughter] And I was, like, well, ok, hope so! Should we get a one-year plan, because we don't have any money...But it was looking at what was going to be in the next year, but what were the issues that we were going to have to address in years two and three. And we had these different committees of the board, and when this came up, John joined in late September or late 1985. And the idea of a long-range planning meeting comes up in 1986, and we are at this board meeting and they are discussing it, and someone turns to John and says, John, will you take that? And he says, yes, I would be delighted to. And then we move on, and I say, wait a minute, aren't there supposed to be more than one? No. John will be the whole committee. And that just impressed me. Other people had such respect, and that I had been learning about him. And then someone on the board said, well, you have to have more than one person on a committee; it can't be called a committee. So then

someone else on the board said, well, why don't we call it John's portfolio rather than a committee.

BB: That is such a board level thing!

JS: I am like, ok, fine, anticipating that I would be getting more of Leigh Dillard's cooking, John's wife. We mostly met at their condo in Saint Paul—I don't know if the Farmers' Market had opened yet, but Heartland is in that building now. So, I just learned so much from him. I remember one meeting we were talking about an issue, and he looked at me and said, well, I wonder what Jim Sitter would do about that? Think like Jim Sitter. I was like, and it took me about six to seven minutes, and I said, how about this? And he said let's start talking about that. So many good people, JT was wonderful.

Boy, this original board, so many wonderful things. It wasn't just about changing the Minnesota State Arts board to allow us to apply and convincing certain foundations and corporations to give to literary and book arts. But a big part of changing the relationship between literary arts and book arts in Minnesota were these people. This may sound weird but I had done so much research. The average age was sixty-one; I was twenty-eight. With the possible exception of Kay and Mr. Andersen, these weren't my friends, and you look at the start-up boards of most nonprofits, and it is not just literary and book, it is not like that.

BB: Let me just read through the list quickly since people can't see the names: James Alcott, Elmer Andersen, Greg Campbell, Mickey Friedman, Irv Kriedberg, Lawrence Mitchell, Jack Parker, Paul Parker, Gail See, Kay Sexton, David Speer, and Joanne Von Blon. That is the full, the founding board.

JS: Yes, I could do about four hours on this list, easy.

BB: [Laughter]. You will just have to select a few stories, for this round, anyway.

JS: Maybe I shouldn't say anything more about Mr. Alcott or Mr. Andersen since we have touched on them a little bit. Let me make sure we get some of this. Joanne Von Blon. Most people—and this is interesting, I discussed this with Nina Archibald the one time she met my father and my two brothers—most people don't understand that the person who raised the most money was Joanne Von Blon. A lot of people assumed that was Mr. Andersen, and Mr. Andersen raised some money and gave some money, but there was a lot more. Joanne taught me so much, and especially how to do lunches. She said, you do the technical and you be accurate, and I will gush. And it was just so much fun with her, and her husband.

BB: Well, she is passionate in her own way, right? She really believed in this idea.

JS: I don't know if I should start telling individual [stories]. Joanne doesn't get the credit she deserves, and this is a side thing, her husband was a lot of fun, Phil Von Blon—he has passed away. And this is how different it was. He has me—and he is not on the board—he has me set up brokerage accounts (there is no Internet) at five different brokers in town. And he has me set this up, and this is at the request of the board, and the board told me to follow what Phil wanted to do. So then Phil tells me to hang around the office between Christmas and New Years, just stay there. My girlfriend Kelly had, and I think it may be the one time you weren't there all the time, either. And a phone call would come—see, it doesn't work this way any more, and how many small arts organizations, start up arts organizations, two months from their grand opening, has five brokers accounts.

BB: That is crazy. I am waiting to understand why!

JS: I get a call from a Piper Jaffray saying, someone has just donated three hundred shares of IBM. And then, this is so, people are going to find this kind of ridiculous in a way, but the board had told me, when you get one of those calls you call Phil, and you ask him what to do. [Von Blon worked with Donaldson, Lufkin and Jenrette, Inc., which became Alliance Management and then Alliance Bernstein] And so I would call Phil, and he would say, Oh, Piper Jaffray three hundred shares of IBM. He would say: sell, sell, sell! And then he would give me this mini-lecture about how an arts organization of our tiny size and youth should not be involved with anything in the market at this point. But then I would get a call from another broker and I would call Phil: two hundred shares of Golden Nugget, I remember the donor of that. A mining company. And he had said: sell, sell, sell! And then he gives me the lecture again. I sat there for four days.

BB: But why five brokers?

JS: Because people had individual accounts. It wasn't like the Internet. You don't consolidate. So you know, the Parkers had one broker.

B Oh, so he knew the brokers that people would generally would use.

JS: Yes.

BB: He wanted it all set up so you could do it immediately.

JS: Correct. That would get on our books [by the end of the year]. The Von Blons were so much fun to work with. Kay Sexton, I wish I could just tell the whole story. I had gone through seven layers of bureaucracy to try to get B. Dalton to carry small press books. Poetry and fiction, those are all the books I dealt. And finally I am told I am supposed to come out to the headquarters, and actually go to, at the time it was called Le Sofitel, a French hotel, and there are three different restaurants, and I am at the middle one. And I am sitting, and Kay is sitting here to my left, I am sitting here, two other B. Daltoners are

there who I know, and she ordered the salmon so I ordered the salmon. And she turned to me—now, she would be turning this way—but she turned to me and she said: what do you have for the middlebrow? And I said, not much. And then we started talking. And you know, I was a great salesman? No. B. Dalton had decided to open a store in [Greenwich] Village [in New York City]. And they wanted it to have sort of a representation of what other bookstores were like in the Village, and by chance they were headquartered in Minnesota, Bookslinger is in Minnesota, and by then I could give them two hundred thirty-five small presses.

BB: So that is how you got to know her.

That's the first time I met her. But then, she kept wanting to get together, I don't know why. We'd talk about different things, and that's how Allan Kornblum, I got Allan Kornblum to come to the opening of that bookstore, and he used the table top platen press. But then for some reason she would have me up to her house to talk books. It was wonderful. I will give you an example of something she did. Kay started in the book section of a Saint Paul department store [Emporium], and she was a key early executive of B. Dalton [she was Manager of the first B. Dalton store in Southdale], and knew the Dayton Brothers very well. It is done in different ways. She said, I have set up a meeting for you with Ken—she might have said Kenny. She told me some things about him, but the key thing she said was, you are going to sit down at a table and he is going to be across from you [at] quite a distance. And he is going to take his wristwatch off and he is going to lay it in front of him. And at that point in time you have thirty minutes. Not thirty minutes and one second. Well, I can talk about Minnesota Center for Book Arts for more than thirty minutes. But I lucked out. There is a big clock above his head on the wall. So I am watching this, and a poet/novelist Gerald Vizenor taught me this once about Native Americans, about walking backwards. So I hit twenty-nine minutes, and I slowly start to stand up. And then I start walking backwards out of the room while still talking. He said what are you doing? And I said, Kay Sexton told me I had thirty minutes and that would be it. He starts smiling and laughing and I keep walking out of the room backwards and shut the door. We got a \$10,000 check from him and his wife, and I want to say, less than ten days.

BB: We will go back to this too, but let's talk about some of the artists who were hanging around. Do you have any particular stories of Gaylord Schanilec, Kent Aldrich became, he was there pretty much all the time, and you were there a lot after hours as well. What was it like in the space when the artists were there working away and it was at night?

JS: Yes, sometimes you were working at nights too; we had so much to do.

BB: Yes.

JS: Chip Schilling was a photographer living above Nate's Clothing, less than two full blocks away, and I don't know how or when he first wandered in, but he took to it somehow, and now book art is a huge...

BB: An established book artist, yes.

JS: And one of the moments with Chip was in the evening, and he had some kind of an apron on for some reason. And Martin and Mickey Friedman had walked in to see the current exhibition before heading over probably to New French Café, probably to meet with wealthy people. And they chatted a little bit, and Chip stuck his head in when they left, and he said this to both of us. And you nearly started crying; your tears welled up. He said there aren't many arts organizations in Minnesota that I am comfortable in, and that Martin and Mickey Friedman are comfortable in. You two have built a really welcoming place. You know, I remember when Gaylord first moved to Minnesota from North Dakota and got a job as a guard and Martin fired him for reading a book.

BB: Oh, did he? Gaylord didn't share that with us!

JS: Not supposed to read books when you are guarding.

BB: Guard the art!

JS: Frankly I had other friends who had artists and not everyone is happy with every organization, and Chip was very new; I barely knew him, so he was one of those people who kind of [noticed]: the Friedmans? They like this place? And I like it? I think that was a really good thing.

BB: Yes, thank you. I had forgotten that.

JS: Yes. That was one of the best compliments we got.

BB: Yes, well, that was the intent, so that was a good compliment. Well, one of the major stories too, is how you and Gaylord knew each other way back in North Dakota, and then through a variety of circumstances you are linking up here, and now Gaylord is internationally established and the Randles stepped up and brought word of his work into *Matrix* [journal].

JS: Several times.

BB: Yes. That is another fascinating side story of an artist who's made his own way but clearly has someone in this community we're really thrilled to have around.

JS: It is very strange, to think, in a Catholic high school in Fargo North Dakota that there were three people at the same time at that school: my older brother Joe who has turned

into a significant donor to MCBA. He just recently gave a complete run of *Matrix*, which is just perfect. And Gaylord's locker was next to my locker, because it is alphabetical order and the boys were on a different floor from the girls.

BB: Schanilec and Sitter.

JS: He was more interested in fishing than school, and boy we were an odd couple. You know, I would take a math test and I would get an A+ on the first one and then get bored and the score would go down, and why are they testing, and Gaylord would be getting in trouble, and making these drawings in his chemistry book. And we were just so different. Actually it was fishing and Brother Don Byrne who brought us together. And at the end of the sophomore year—Gaylord started at Shanley High School in sophomore year, Brother Don called us into a classroom. And he put down two piles of five books: four books and a poetry magazine, *Dakota Territory*—I still have it. And he said, ok, I want you each to read all five and then trade, and then read all five and be talking about these all summer. Gaylord and I are like: he is giving us an assignment for the summertime? I mean, we were thinking, we are going fishing, literally. And that is where it really starts. That is completely where it starts. Gaylord started as a poet, not a visual artist, or—he gets prickly about being called an artist. But that is where it starts. John Randle has remarked to my brother Joe who has visited in England that it is puzzling that the three of you were in that tiny place at the same time.

BB: Did you just run into each other here, or were you hanging out before, when you were at Hungry Mind—no, Gaylord was in college over there. So, he came to the Cities. When did you guys see each other again?

JS: Well, we never lost contact. He was at University of North Dakota-Grand Forks and they had an endowment for a poetry reading series. And they would bring in amazing lists: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsburg, Michael McClure, Gregory Corso, so I would drive up. So we never lost touch. And I think he moved here initially in 1977, Minneapolis, and then eventually, we moved in together on Grotto in Saint Paul, a little dilapidated [building], and I had already started accumulating unusual books, and he had started moving more and more toward the visual arts—he will kick me. But he didn't start messing around with type until either 1980 or 1981.

[Gaylord moved into a warehouse space], the Roberts Hamilton building in Saint Paul, as the interstate takes the big curve, it sits up there, heading northeast. And eventually I moved Bookslinger to the first floor of Roberts Hamilton. But he wasn't, he was doing images with a Vandercook, he didn't own the Vandercook at that time. It was quite a while. And Rob Rulon-Miller has now done a bibliography if you wanted to pin down exactly when Gaylord started working with type. When he started doing multi-colored wood engravings, or that was *High Bridge*.

BB: I think that was *High Bridge*. I think that is what he said when we visited.

JS: And he was around when Sebastian Carter gave the master class. And Sebastian had several conversations with him. Gaylord was not that far along yet. Gaylord did a lot of things, but *High Bridge* was the turning point, which he started working on in late 1985 but didn't publish until 1987.

BB: Yes. Thank you to the Jerome Foundation.

JS: And Kent Aldrich. You interviewed him, but he was so much fun to have around. He was just great. Did he tell the story about how he found MCBA?

BB: Yes, but you tell it!

JS: He was on a bicycle on his way to apply for a job as a sign painter, and he sees Will Carter's letterforms! You know, one of the single questions I got the most, for the most part of a decade in my life, was, what is a book arts center, and he didn't know what it was. He brings his bicycle in, and he starts talking to me. I am listening, asking questions, and I hand him over to Allan Kornblum, and the rest is history.

BB: Exactly. What a great guy and talented artist. Well, I know that we have some things we are going to look at that you have brought, Jim, and I have a few more questions. How about if we take a couple minutes and we will reset things up and look at these books, and then we will return and finish up.

JS: All right. And if we have time there are still some people who just helped so much that I would still like to tell stories about.

BB: So Jim, show us what you have got there, I can't wait to see it, and actually we are filming this down in MCBA in the studios.

JS: Ok. Earlier I made reference to, I think, it is 1979, when my friend Jack Reuler founded Mixed Blood Theatre Company, received at least two large grants from Dayton Hudson and General Mills, to put on this play, or choreopoem, as it sometimes is described. I was the distributor, and I went down to the warehouse; my office is above the warehouse. Went down and looked at the books. There is no evidence [that] Shameless Hussy Press had ever received a grant. They are out in California. And I didn't know if Ntozake Shange (I later published two poems of hers) had received support like Jack was. And it is one of those, something-is-wrong-with-this-picture moments for me. I started thinking about, what is the relationship between philanthropy and book and literary arts? And this is the first edition; I brought the second edition because it is easier to see the title. See the big price increase from ninety-five cents to one dollar, ninety-five. This got extraordinarily good reviews on Broadway when it finally opened there. But it was a pivotal moment for me. I earlier talked about three rivers and philanthropic money. That

was when I first started saying that I just don't understand why literature and book art aren't included.

This is Patricia Hampl's long poem. [*Resort*, Bookslinger Editions, 1982. Printed by Toothpaste Press] This is the first edition; later on Houghton Mifflin did it. Allan Kornblum printed it, and Gaylord Schanilec did the illustrations. But the reason I brought it (I was the publisher) was that Gail See set up a meeting for me with former Bishop, Mr. James Shannon, who at that time was Vice President [and Executive Director] of the General Mills Foundation. Mr. Shannon's wife worked for Gail at the Bookcase in Wayzata; she was a former nun. Life is complicated, as Newt Gingrich once said. My first meeting, he gets up from behind his desk, shakes my hand, and says, well, Elmer Andersen and Irving Kreidberg (who was an original board member also) would jump off a bridge for books; and I am not sure I am going to follow. He was skeptical, it was a difficult meeting, and he also thought my estimates of the numbers would be all wrong. This [image] is fairly early Gaylord. [Sitter reads the book's epigraph by Theodore Roethke] The rose exceeds, the rose exceeds us all.

So as I was driving away, in my un-air-conditioned Datsun, I was thinking about the next meeting, as I was going to go back at him. What I did was, I had seen how he got up from behind his desk to shake my hand, and so as I was walking in I had this book—not hidden, but down by my thigh—and he reaches for my hand, and I shoved this book into his hand. He starts moving his fingers and thumbs, and his brow was furrowed. This is Sierra, a handmade paper that Allan used. Allan originally wanted a paper called Tutti Frutti from the same wholesaler, and Patricia objected [Laughter]. So, it has a really nice texture, and more texture, it is aged now. And, he was just, he was ignoring me, and this is different, and he opens to the text of the poem and began reading it to me in Latin on the spot. And then we stood there for five, six, seven minutes, as he is reading this to me in Latin. And I am thinking, maybe we will have a different kind of meeting this time. This is why I brought it; it did its job.

The meeting went much better, he became a supporter, but he still was hard on me. Nowadays for spreadsheets you have Excel and all that. How I had worked out revenue and expense, he thought I was, on the expense side...you know, I had been running small businesses and I could just cut the expenses as I wanted. And he thought I was leaving out all sorts of expenses. So the meetings with him ended up being fun but he would put in the time to be technical.

And then, Paul Parker, we would have meetings where he also helped with fundraising ideas: who to ask, how to pitch them, all that. So it just was a moment where handmade paper helped me turn someone who had been skeptical.

I personally think that Phil Gallo is under-recognized here as a poet, under-recognized here as a printer, and under-recognized here as a book artist. So, rather than bringing all things that are codex, I wanted to bring some things that I carried in Bookslinger—well,

not this one. There is a different story about this. I will show these other things after this one. I was walking down the sidewalk near MCBA, before [the grand opening]—so [it is] probably the summer of 1985. I run into Phil Gallo, who I had known since the 1970s. And Phil says to me, Jim, I would like to print the invitation for the opening celebration of Minnesota Center for Book Arts. Now, I knew exactly what kind of equipment Phil had at the time. And I said, well, Phil, how many copies were you thinking about doing? He said, well, forty or fifty. And I said, well, Phil, sorry to say that I have already hired Allan Kornblum (who has the C&P flat bed press) to do two thousand invitations to that. And Phil was looking at me like I must be crazy. To Phil, it was like you would be lucky to get fifty people. But we had a mailing list of two thousand at that point in time; it got bigger later. When I left town for Manhattan in 1989, it was around four thousand four hundred, or four thousand five hundred. But then I say to Phil standing on the sidewalk, listen, why don't you do me a favor and let me pay you to print an invitation privately to pay out of my pocket, and give me fifty copies that I can give away to special people? And he says, I will do that. And he says, any comments? And I said, no, and you know, Betty, I get all the credit. Why don't you read the poem? Read the lines here that go around, so the camera can pick up this. Read what is going on here. It is difficult to print type that way. I can't explain it to you. Phil explained it to me and other people have commented on that to me. It starts here.

BB: [Reading] He had told me earlier that he was a printer. This inspired me. I said that, kissing, was like, printing. You printed your lips on the girl's lips, not too hard. They laughed and said, yes, that's what they thought it was like. By Paul Theroux, *Sailing Through China*. And, that is the invitation to MCBA's opening! [Laughing]

JS: Well, the Allan Kornblum one was smaller, folded, and two thousand went out, but I just love it. And it is just so nice to be able to give to some people. Last summer, I found a copy, and I brought it to Jeff [Rathermel, current MCBA Executive Director] and MCBA. I didn't know if they had a copy. So now they do.

Instead of bringing a Whittington Press book, with quarter leather, etcetera, I wanted to show you something of, Phil Gallo, was one of the people making me think. I love fine press books, but his things are just amazing. I was trying to sell them through Bookslinger but they didn't do very well. But it made me start thinking about books differently. I think MCBA in terms of the printing area mixes fine press, very traditional, and obviously very non-traditional things. And the first things like that that I saw, were Phil Gallo's.

This is, *Poem on Hosho*, Phil Gallo, Hermetic Press, Minneapolis, 1979, edition of one hundred. Hosho is a kind of handmade Japanese paper. This is an acrylic top on a plastic box. What is inside is a crumpled-up piece of Hosho with letterpress printing on it by Phil Gallo. This is not what growing up in Fargo I thought a book was, or a poem. This is published. Whatever. Ok, Betty's going to read this.

[Struggling to smooth out the paper] I have obviously shown this to a lot of people over the decades. It is an easy thing [to introduce people to book art] if people don't know what book art is. But this is a mint one. [Gestures to an unopened copy] Never been opened. It will probably be opened by, oh, I don't know who I will leave it to.

BB: It is called, The Ice Today, April 5th. [Reading] On lake of the Isles / like Styrofoam / like you'd like Styrofoam / to be like / if what you really liked / was acrylic.

JS: Now you smash it up. Stick it in the box, and put the acrylic lid on it.

BB: Now I put it back. Until next winter? Until next April, yikes! That's great!
[Laughter]

JS: Fiona McCrae had me over to the Graywolf office to talk with some of her staff. Her new person from Chicago said, why is this here? And he meant Open Book, MCBA, with the size of the Loft. He said, I am from Chicago, and [it has] nothing like [this]. And she said, let's get Sitter to come over. I could tell that most of Graywolf's staff were like, their eyes just got big. This is, *3 poems that fold*, by Phil Gallo. So he is both a poet and printer, and conceptualist, or whatever you want to call it. On Strathmore, one hundred copies. Hermetic Press, 1978. All right, Betty, you can start with this one.

BB: I am sure everyone can read that it says, She bites them / them meaning / her fingernails meaning / she bites / them. [Laughing] That is great. And we go from there. Ok.

JS: Try this one.

BB: [Reading] See what I mean / take the word 'strange' / say it to yourself 9 or 10 times / say it aloud once or twice / see what I mean?

JS: See, I grew up in North Dakota. This is not in the Fargo Public Library! [Looking at the third work] I am not sure this is going to be visible because there is no ink involved. And it is STUCCO, smaller type, stucco. [Laughter] And that is, *Three poems that fold*.

BB: [Laughter] That is brilliant. And that is 1978.

JS: Yes. I met Phil around that time. And then [with] Bookslinger I started buying things from him, and selling things, not too well. People probably would think I am more of a traditionalist like Mr. Andersen in terms of my taste in books, but even in the early days, because of Phil, I was thinking of books and type and paper differently. So, that is why I brought Phil Gallo.

BB: Jim, I wanted to just pull you over here. We are down in what we call the flexi space of MCBA, and I wanted to ask you a few more questions before we go upstairs and finish

our conversation. I know that you had some thoughts that you wanted to share about a couple of the founding board members.

JS: Yes, there are two that haven't come up much that I wanted to mention. I will start with Mickey Friedman, who was the Design Curator at the Walker Art Center. I would slip sometimes and say the Walker Art Center but there is no, 'the'. She would correct me if I failed. I will circle back to how I met her. And when we were talking about what her role would be on the board, because obviously she couldn't fundraise because of her role at Walker Art Center. I said, Well, I have people like the COO [Chief Operating Officer] of General Mills, Paul Parker. I need someone who knows how an arts organization runs, and doesn't have sixty thousand employees. Mr. Andersen's company, he had moved on to it to twenty-nine countries? So I said, you are an important part of the design community, with the international *Design Quarterly*. So, your role would be to help me deal with the other board members, and give them confidence that we were making the appropriate, non-profit decisions. And she agreed to go on the board.

Jack Parker, who was Curator and Executive Director of the James Ford Bell Library, I had known for many years, a sweet guy, and Mr. Andersen really wanted to have him on and I really wanted to have him on the board. He said, Jim, I don't understand why you are asking me to join this board. They are wonderful people, but I only have one employee, and I have to fundraise for the library. I said, I am not asking you to fundraise for MCBA. He said what would my role be on the board? I said, we have people who really are, like Paul Parker, or used to be, like Mr. Andersen, with experience running huge worldwide operations with thousands of employees, and Mickey Friedman, who, the Walker at that time had about one hundred forty-five employees. And Mickey played a role in helping to ameliorate that. But I want you, Jack, to be there when Mickey turns to me and says, Jim, why don't you do that next month? And I want you, Jack, to turn to her and say, Mickey, which of Jim's dozens of employees should be doing that? And Mickey would look at Jack and go, Oh, thank you, Jack, you are right. We will walk that back and do it later. And it kept happening, and Jack was like, he said this would happen, and that was his role.

How I knew Mickey, was that, I tried these different efforts and I won't go into all of them, way before MCBA, to bring more fine printing into the community. This was before there were these big author tours and book tours, and speech agencies for famous people, and Walker Art Center offered] a series of four years, Nigel Reading was the guy. Technically he was the Director of Performing Arts. Great guy, I bought a car from him and he was still great. Used 1971 Saab 95 V4 with three on the tree. He had this money from National Endowment for the Arts, which of course had to be matched privately, to put on a really great reading series. I knew him through New Music, which was a festival he organized, at least back to 1978. So I had known him a little while. I asked him, why don't you publish a broadside for each of the authors? Over four years they had seventy-seven authors. And he said, fine idea, but I won't pay you. I said that is fine. I hired Allan Kornblum of Toothpaste Press out of West Branch, Iowa, and technically these series of

broad­sides were published by Book­slinger Editions. And I would get it from Allan and he did a wide range of work, because obviously he would have gotten bored out of his mind if he did it to a format.

In May 1980, the last reading in the 1779-1980 series, the reading was Donald Barthelme, who had written some stories, like *Spirit of my Heart*. And he is signing the broad­sides, and he is looking at this and saying, so, what are you going to sell these for? Now, I wasn't paying any of these authors. I would just give them ten percent of the print run. And they were all cool. But Barthelme and Allen Ginsberg asked me the same question: what are you going to sell these for? And I said, at the reading I am selling it for two dollars, but after the reading I am selling it for four. And Barthelme and Ginsberg both did the same thing; they said, take my copies for the cause. That is what Barthelme said, but Ginsburg just pushed them across the table and said, take them. Now later, I was selling them for four dollars at the reading and eight dollars afterwards. Rare book dealers would hang around the lobby during the reading and then swoop in.

So the Friedmans came to the Barthelme reading, and I had said hello to them a few times, and they invited Barthelme and me back to their house on Mount Curve Avenue. It was a beautiful night and we just sat outside talking. And I don't know if I should say this, but I was kind of surprised to see a copy of the broadside I gave to the Friedmans in the kitchen with a pushpin through it. Not exactly my intent. So that is started our relationship, where I would talk to them at openings and things. Now jump forward, and on March 2, 1982 (the date of the reading is on the broadside), Toni Morrison the novelist had not yet won the Nobel Prize. She was going to give a reading, and she was on the National Council for the Arts, which is the governing body of the National Endowment for the Arts. Martin had been on that, but at that moment in time I think he had rotated off. And so they decided to have dinner at 501, which was a swanky joint that I had never been to, which is very close to Walker Art Center. Now La Belle Vie is in that space. And they invite Toni and I to join them. And we sit down and sort of say hello and Toni has already signed the broad­sides. I sit down, and Martin grabs the wine list and hands it over and says, you pick. I still don't understand how they knew, but I had started collecting wine in 1979. My first warehouse space for Book­slinger was behind a paint and wall-covering store, on Ford Parkway in Saint Paul. Haskell's was next door. It has since moved three blocks furtherwest on Ford Parkway—that branch. And those guys started teaching me about wines. But I still didn't understand how the Friedmans would know that I should pick the wine.

Now, that conversation led to other things. Toni and Martin and Mickey [pointing] is where they were seated, started talking about cultural policy. What should the National Endowment [for the Arts] be doing, and what shouldn't it be doing? And how much of the budget should go to the challenge grant program, which was a big deal to major institutions at that time; it doesn't exist now. So these things I had been thinking about, about philanthropy in Minnesota and how did it work, and Margaret Wurtele and Cindy Gehrig and Pat Davis and others helping me. Suddenly I am sitting at a table and one

person was on the National Council for the Arts and two had been, and the three of them are having this, they are talking about national, cultural arts policy. And I was just drinking it in: this happens. People talk about not just the NEA, Minnesota State Arts Board, and the foundation community. And it was instructive. So that is a short version, believe it or not, of why I felt so comfortable inviting Mickey on the board. And she obviously helped with the design side.

BB: Absolutely, and there were alliances with the Walker including the Sol Le Witt exhibition.

JS: One of the other times I saw the Friedmans running into MCBA, they were tailing Sol Le Witt. And I am there and you are there, and Sol LeWitt is running into MCBA and he has a camera, and I said, why are you in such a rush? And he said I have never seen all my books in one place before. My eyes got big, and, you did the whole thing, you did the whole exhibit, and the Friedmans are like, really! Made the Friedmans prouder of MCBA.

BB: Yes. I just wish I would have known; I could have used that, could have said first retrospective, but it was a great exhibition.

JS: You did a nice catalogue.

BB: Did a nice catalogue and it was thrilling that he so appreciated it. What a great man, just very shy and genuine.

JS: But it was interesting as they rushed in. Is this a football formation?

BB: They also did the Japan exhibition; we had our own contemporary Japan exhibition; you made a link with their curator [Amy Reigle Newland] but she really linked us up with contemporary Japanese artists. That was another real partnership.

JS: I knew Ruth and Marvin Sackner in Miami Beach who had some of that material, and you borrowed some of their collection. And that was how I was able to introduce the Sackner's collection, which they call the Sackner Archive, to Martin and Mickey. And they later had the Sackners come up and give a presentation at the Walker Art Center.

BB: Yes, it is amazing how linked up it is. I do want to ask about the Winter Book before we go back upstairs to finish up. That is really the key publication here; it is created in the studios of MCBA, [and] several of the people we have been visiting with have brought it up. It just seems to be a moving symbol, I mean, people love the Winter Book. I wonder if you could share with us what gave you the idea of starting it up, and how that went?

JS: A couple of things, and it was pretty simple. I had been thinking...earlier I was talking looking at the models of the other disciplines. What was going to be our Nutcracker? What was going to be, what is the Dickens play—Christmas Carol. What is that for us? And there is a certain love-hate thing about winter in Minnesota. Good things, but torment if you are in a car. And so, I thought, let's do a special book, once a year, not a summer book. Let's call it a winter book, and it will change over time, and for me, part of it was, ok, this is going to be a steady income, but also over the years different artists will be involved. But there is another aspect, the Mr. Alcott aspect. And that is, how do we not get trapped in the walls of our space, and Mr. Alcott arranged for right around the time of the publication party, to have the text appear in the Minneapolis Star Tribune. You know, he was Vice President of Cowles Media, which owned it—on Sunday. And that at the time reached 600,000 people. It probably reaches less now. And so suddenly it is all over the state, 600,000 people reading this John Hassler piece, but then also we have a party, we get some earned revenue, some different papermakers and binders and printers. So it was actually a pretty simple idea and who was that, the Hassler one, the first one...

BB: *Staggerford's Indian?*

JS: Yes, the cover. I was shocked. Sometimes the equipment was so sophisticated that people would use in the workshops. They took a toy wheel, like a kid's toy wheel, inked it up and ran it all over the cover. And I said, ok! You can do that! So I looked at Nutcracker for Minnesota Dance Theatre, Christmas Carol for Guthrie, [and] what is our Christmas Carol? What is our Nutcracker? And then, Mr. Alcott topped it all off with 600,000 copies in circulation.

BB: Yes. And it is interesting that you talk about this whole vision, this comprehensive organization that that made a platform for those artists to interact and collaborate with each other. Not that they wouldn't be talking with each other, but that gives them an experience that several artists I have spoken with have shared, that that was a pivotal experience to spend intensive time creating something with other artists.

JS: And I can't leave without at least mentioning that Mr. Alcott went through so much with me, but Gail See was the second president, and Jim Lenfestey was the third.

BB: Absolutely. And the staircase is named in honor of Gail See here.

JS: Yes, I disagreed with that and I told Gail that. I said that in the early years of Open Book she was here so much that the parking lot should have been named after her! Because I would come here [and]—there is Gail's car!

BB: Amazing, she was always active, always working for us.

JS: Yes, she has got such a good manner. I can get along with some people, not others.

BB: She makes it happen. In her own way, she makes it happen. So, you two were probably a very interesting team when you were fundraising. Did you two go out and fundraise together?

JS: Sometimes. Not as much as Joanne. Oh and sometimes Joanne and Gail would come with. Which brings up some of the best turndowns we got. We were at New French Café, and we were asking this woman for money for MCBA, and I get done with my spiel, Joanne is gushing, and Gail is very calm, and the woman says, no. And I said, ok. She said we are giving all our money this year to hunger organizations. And, you know how elegant I am. I said, oh, that is great idea. That was one of my favorite turndowns. But when you said Gail. Gail and Joanne set up a meeting a lunch to ask [for support from] an older woman whose husband had passed away. This was at the Minneapolis Club, in a private room—there was a hearing issue—and we started talking. She collected—what do you get when you go to the theatre, the programs.

BB: I don't know, theatre programs.

JS: She collected them every year for most of her life. She would go to London and bring them back. She had this big collection, and other theatre books, and that is why they thought to ask her. We sat down at the Minneapolis Club and I have done my bit, Joanne has gushed, and Gail has commented, and she goes, no. I think it was Joanne who asked why, and she said, well, once my husband died I decided to leave all of our money to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts in a dedicated fund to help pay for maintenance and janitorial work. And I said, wow, they must kiss your feet! I mean, think about it, light bulbs and brooms! And wow, it was like, what a way to give a gift. That just impressed the heck out of me. And the other part of the lunch that was so memorable was [regarding commenting about] the opening of Minneapolis Institute of Arts. I said, oh, I was just there two weekends ago for the opening. And she said, no, you don't understand, the opening of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. She went there in 1915 as a girl, with her parents, at the opening. Wow.

BB: Well, I don't know how many people you met in that start-up, throughout those years, but I am sure we are talking hundreds.

JS: More than that, I had a mailing list.

BB: I imagine thousands. Unbelievable. We will have to have another meeting and have more stories.

JS: Going out in August in 1985 to New York and Rare Book School at Columbia University; there are all sorts of stories there and they all wanted to hear about this center.

BB: Well, I know we have a few more questions to wind things up with, so let's go back upstairs if you will, and we will finish it up.

BB: Jim, thank you so much for showing us those books. This has been a great conversation, and we could literally go on for a long time. And who knows, we may reappear in another iteration here. But if I just have a couple more things for you, one thing that came to mind thinking of our visiting today is the fact that I know that you came to the book arts through your love of literature, and as you have mentioned here today, it basically changed your life, it sounds like. So, what were your thoughts when you heard of MCBA's plans to move into a shared space with two leading literary organizations in the Twin Cities? Did you have any sense of how that might change MCBA, or when you walk through now, through Open Book, what does MCBA mean to you now in this very different shared public space?

JS: You asked more than one question there. When I heard about the plans for the three organizations to move in together, one of my first reactions was, what took so long? Susan Broadhead was the Executive Director of the Loft for many years, and I would bring her downtown and walk her around the neighborhood and walk her around MCBA's space and around the building, and tell her that, at that point in time, the second floor loft, or whatever you want to call it, in Mr. Lerner's building, was empty. And Mr. Lerner had been a very good landlord, and the Loft wouldn't grind up his floor to put in a papermaking facility, so I am sure he would be very reasonable to deal with. And she had two comments every time I brought her there: not safe for women at night, and not enough parking. And I just couldn't get her past those two things. Because I wanted the Loft to move in to [MCBA's] original building. So it wasn't like it wasn't talked about, and not just between Susan and I. So my reaction to news of Open Book really was, what took so long, because it makes so much sense. And again, when the Acting Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts was brought to this building by Gail See—I could remember the year if I took the time—when Gail brought her here, I knew her, [and] she said: why isn't there something like this in Boston or Cambridge? Why isn't there something like this in Washington, D.C.? Or LA [Los Angeles]? She was flabbergasted. It has something to do with Minnesota, I think.

BB: And that leads me to my last question, if we have to stop somewhere. If you think about the beginnings of MCBA and the life of this organization, are there factors that contributed to that life that you would characterize as essentially Minnesotan? What are the Minnesotan aspects to MCBA?

JS: Yes.

BB: Right! I mean, you have lived in New York for an extended period, you go to Washington, D.C. all the time; you have lived other places as well. Is there something characteristically Minnesotan, or not, that is held in this story?

JS: Well, it has to be, because, believe it or not, Minnesota Center for Book Arts is the largest of its type in this country.

BB: In the world.

JS: Ok, well, I don't know about Asia that well, but it is the largest. Now, the Loft is the largest of its kind in the country, and what that acting Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts was referring to was Open Book, and show me another place like this. There are places: Poets House in Lower Manhattan tries to collect all the poetry books that are published. So they have programming like the Loft, but then there is this library and archive. So I am not saying there aren't other organizations that do parts of what Open Book does, but there is nothing of this scale.

BB: Obviously, Center for Book Arts started in New York as you mentioned, well before we did...

JS: And MCBA is much bigger.

BB: And it is not just because space is cheaper here, is that simply it?

JS: I think I earlier referred to Manhattan as a one-off, it is fragmented, you wouldn't be able to, you would break so many eggs trying to put together a comprehensive book arts center, it just, they have got most of the pieces they have.

BB: I guess I am thinking about the founding board, the people involved.

JS: But the Minnesota characteristics are: one, it would be hilarious to me, to find out what the Loft's budget was in 1980—to pick a year, Milkweed, New Rivers, Holy Cow. All before Toothpaste/Coffee House moved here, Graywolf moved here, and MCBA opened, because it is exponential. And once with the help of these people, and Margaret Wurtele and Cindy Gehrig, not just these people, and some of the spouses of the original board, we were able to change the relationship of Minnesota philanthropy, which was normally excellent, change the relationship to, looking at a sign [for Open Book] with MCBA and the Loft and Milkweed listed. I mean, I wanted to open a book arts center, but I wanted to change the relationship with philanthropy because I didn't think we would thrive, and I didn't think the presses or the Loft were getting the attention and the money they deserved.

Once that work was done, and if you have to pick one person out, I guess, [it would be] Mr. Andersen. I mean, why could I meet with Ken Dayton one on one, or Margaret Wurtele? They didn't want to work with me; they just respected Mr. Andersen. And I think it was sort of the way that Minnesota works sometimes. And so the money started to flow, and not just to MCBA, it started to flow to the others. I remember when John Taylor left Northwest Area Foundation initially for First Bank Saint Paul, now it is called

US Bank, and later the whole First Bank Foundation, and he—I discussed him earlier, at least as he was then—he would send out a report of what grants they had given. Now this is either 1986 or 1987. So I opened it up, and here is a list of dance companies and a list of theatre companies, and here is, Book and Literary Arts Grants. And I was just; we are not going away. Because I know every foundation official, at least in the Metro, was going to see that, and there were grants not just to MCBA. The Loft, Graywolf, Coffee House, Milkweed. That was just a great moment for me. That was one of those moments where, ok, we have got a book arts center, we are really moving down the path of changing the philanthropic community to support these sorts of activities. And those are two things, but I think a lot of it had to do, I could walk into a room—well, not initially—but eventually, Mr. Andersen and then this board were in effect behind me, it wasn't Jim Sitter.

There were other aspects of Open Book and MCBA both, many different kinds of people, some early on. We were talking about school kids, which may not be rocket science, but you are right, some of the artists were really surprised that this was going to be part of the activity. It was going to be not just the artists but the community. It is done in a lot of different ways by lots of different arts organizations, not just the ones that I have been mentioning today. So there is a programmatic way and an openness that I think is very much Minnesotan, and once these fields of the literary and book arts were included in the philanthropic community, a lot of things began to thrive, and not just the big organizations. I don't know if Walker or MiA [Minneapolis Institute of Arts] would consider us big, but that is real change. It would be hilarious to see how the budgets began to soar in the mid-1980s.

BB: I think all of that contributed to a recognition and acceptance, and finally some pride. The later campaign to move here that Jay Cowles ran for Open Book, with all of the organizations working together.

JS: In addition to John Taylor joining the board later, Jim Lenfestey joined the board later, and Jay Cowles joined the board later. There is a lot of pressure on at the board meetings. And suddenly they would slap me on the back and say, let's go get a beer. And it was a little different. It is not just...Mr. Andersen and I would constantly have lunch, and not just talking about MCBA, [we would talk about] the latest fine press this or that.

Another moment that you were at, that maybe I shouldn't even say this, we are going to make it: one day, unannounced, you are at that first desk inside the door, and I am [at my desk against] the back wall, and Mr. Alcott walks in, and he sort of puts a hip on the edge of your desk and leans in, and he says, Jay and Page Cowles are moving back from Denver. Which one should go on the Graywolf board and which one should go on MCBA's board? And his wife Marilynn, when Graywolf moved, we got Marilynn to go on Graywolf's board. And the first thought that went through my mind was that—because I knew who they were—you must have known who they were—was that there have been conversations like this that have gone on for decades at the Minneapolis

Institute of Arts or Walker Art Center, but I bet never at a literary non-profit, or much less a book art non-profit. And it meant we were going to refresh the board.

BB: Yes. It was a commitment.

JS: Yes. And Mr. Alcott doing that, and the way he just laid it out. I was, we were going to make it.

BB: With those thoughts about what is typically Minnesotan in the context of the life here at Minnesota Center for Book Arts, Jim, we could literally keep talking for hours, and maybe we will come back and have another conversation, but I just have to end by thanking you for your thoughts and stories today; we wouldn't be here without you. I know I try to embarrass you regularly by coming up and saying that to you, whenever it is great to have you at MCBA. I want to thank you on behalf of the thousands, literally tens of thousands of people and kids of all ages—we have second-generation folks coming through now. This has been an amazing ride, and I thank you for your dedication.

JS: Thank you.