Interview with Gennie DeWeese in Bozeman, Montana
June 16, 2007 / Jeff Hull, Interviewer

Jeff Hull: I'd like to start today by just really briefly describing your career as an artist in Montana, just hitting the high points.

Gennie DeWeese: When we came to Montana, which is 1947, both of us had – Bob had just gotten his master's in Ireland and I had been having kids instead – when we came here – well, he taught a year in Texas – when we came up here, Jessie and Frances met us and said we have several students who will unload your truck for you, and it was Pete and Rudy, so we've been friends for many years. We spent a lot of time at the house, we traded baby-sitting.

JH: And you were at the time a painter.

GD: Yeah, both of us had gone to Ohio State and had a fantastic teacher, and both of us continued to paint.

JH: And you've been involved in the arts in Montana very deeply ever since.

GD: Yeah. Yeah.

JH: You never actually taught at Montana State, it was just Bob, right?

GD: He taught there – I wasn't allowed to because it was nepotism, but I used to substitute for people, and taught up there two or three times, taking over for somebody or other. But now they allow nepotism.

JH: I understand that.

GD: Ever since John (inaudible).

JH: Yeah, I've seen that several times. The University of Montana, too, where you've got – suddenly it's allowed.

GD: Is that true? They do it there, too?

JH: Yeah, I never quite understand how that happened but it's too bad I think a lot of talented people get squeezed out that way. You can understand how it happens, but on the other hand… Think of some adjectives to describe what it takes – what you think it takes to make it as an artist in this state.

GD: Well, I don't know how to do that. I think there is some fantastic artists in this state. Unusual – I don't know if other states have that many but I know there are a lot in this state. And I don't know many make a living at it. Most of them are either teaching or doing something else. John and Debbie are exceptions, of course, and I suppose there's others that are making enough, but Bob taught because that's how he made a living.

JH: What, though – what does it take to just – to make art, to continue to make art even if you're not making it as a full-time living? What does it take to get noticed from Montana?

GD: Well, I think when we came here we had sort of a nice connection with people because we had people – Rudy and Bill Stockton – who had studied in Paris – and took to Bob because he was doing more modern art, because everybody in Montana was all Charlie Russell. And so there were a group of us at that period of time that all sort of got together quite frequently and Bob used to have a lot of parties in his studio in town and people all over the state would come in and have a nice time.

JH: Well, Rudy mentioned that in his – in my interviews with him, he mentioned that one of the fun things that he found when he came to Montana State was you two, and he said – he mentioned that it was always a lively time. There was people playing guitars and drinking beer and laughing, that's part of what kept him in the arts was that community, a really fun community.

GD: Yeah. I remember.

JH: I guess what I'm trying to get at is, you know, what is it that endows people with the perseverance to keep going?

GD: Well, I don't know. I know that my kids – see, we bought our kids an easel, they assumed that everybody spent their time doing art. And all of them are good artists. It's something that we encouraged and that, and they didn't object. Bob had a little – well, he didn't have all that much time because he had to teach, and I had a long list of things I had to do before I could go to my studio.

JH: Why did you do it? I mean why did you –

GD: Why? Well, I got involved in it when I was in college. I did it when I was a kid, too, in high school, and we had such a good teacher in college that I spent time – I got totally into it. My father didn't think I was getting an education because I was majoring in art.

JH: I was an English major and I had the same struggle. When you first met Rudy, obviously you first met him when he unloaded your truck so it was a very early impression, what did you think of him?

GD: Well, we liked both of them very much, because they were all GI and had a lot of things to talk about with each other. So that was part of the – I think that was part of the connection at that time. Pete was in one of Bob's etching classes, and he came home one night and he said, I've got this kid in my class, he never comes to class, ever, but he's turning out the best work of anybody in the class. I had to either give him an A or an F. He got an A.

JH: Did they seem – I mean how would you describe him if you could kind of close your eyes and remember those first days, what were the things about Rudy that first strike you?

GD: Well, I don't know that I can think of anything other than just having fun relating to him and talking – we talked a lot. One of the nice things he said once about me was that he came in the house and he said, "I don't know how you do it all." Now, there's somebody who I appreciate.

JH: There's somebody who gets it. Yeah. Was he an enthusiastic young man? Was he shy?

GD: He wasn't real verbal about it, as I remember, except when they'd get together and talk about art, but it wasn't a big event. And then when Pete went to California, Rudy stayed in Montana because he didn't want to make that move and didn't want to – he was familiar with Montana. I think that's why he stayed.

JH: He wasn't a shy young man, though, was he?

GD: I don't think I can remember him as being shy.

JH: Was he playful, because it certainly comes off in interviews now that he seemed to me like he would have been playful back then?

GD: Oh, yeah, I think he was. He and Bob especially had these funny things going. He was talking the other day – I talked to him the other day and he said that one class – one painting class he took from Bob that they had a little bit of disagreement. That's 50 years ago. It's hard to remember some things.

JH: Yeah. Do you remember those first impressions being kind of borne out? Do you remember – now do you look back on it and think that your first impressions of those guys was pretty much right now?

GD: I think so. I think so, yeah.

JH: They were, in a good sense, easy to read?

GD: Yeah. Yeah.

JH: They came off as who they were?

GD: Yes, I think so.

JH: Tell me about those early days.

GD: Oh, boy.

JH: I know it's a long time ago, but Rudy talks about, you know, like it was this most wonderful period of his life being here in school.

GD: They spent a lot of time at our place. I was busy raising kids. I wasn't always involved in everything. He and Bob were very humorous. I mean the humor was a lot of it. I can't – I wish Tina was [here] because she might remember more than I do. I've gotten old, I can't remember that much.

JH: But they were fun to have around.

GD: Yes, absolutely.

JH: Enjoyable, and you as a mother didn't resent them being around, taking up your husband's time?

GD: No. It was just – it made being in Montana worth it. A lot of contacts.

JH: How would you describe Rudy's relationship to his work as a young man?

GD: Well, I don't know that he – I know that he was in Bob's painting class and he did different things. He did those murals. He did murals around the state. He came out – he'd work on but then he graduated and began to do more and more. Ceramics and large scale. And it's like the pots of his are an extension of the painting.

JH: When he was young, did he take it quite seriously or did it all seem fun to him or… Was he passionate about it?

GD: I can't answer that. Art majors go – obviously enjoyed what he was doing or he wouldn't have been there.

JH: Right. Well, you mentioned that they got pretty animated when they would sit around and talk about art.

GD: Yeah. Yeah.

JH: So they did share an enthusiasm for the conceptual notion of what art is and make it?

GD: Yeah. Yeah.

JH: Did they seem like – Peter, I mean, is arguably somebody who didn't seem like he took art seriously, never went to class, but he was brilliant.

GD: Well, what he used to do is pick the lock at the art department at night and go work all night. Frances would come to work in the morning and there would be all these pots everywhere, and she never turned him in, she never …

JH: He would pinch little bits of clay from everybody's stash?

GD: Yeah.

JH: Rudy told me about that, too. But was Rudy more of a – it seems like when everybody who talks about Peter talks about him being this sort of almost slightly kind of boy genius kind of guy who didn't really have to work very hard at what he did, although I'm sure he did work very hard at what he did, but the impression was that he didn't have to because he had all this talent. Did you get that sense from Rudy or was Rudy more of kind of a plotter that just stuck at it and…

GD: I just don't know that I can answer that. I think that, you know, fulfilling the requirements of the degree and… When they got involved with Archie Bray, that's when I think it became pretty clear that that's what they were going to do or become.

JH: That was the next question I had. What did you see as the most significant developments, like the turning points in his artistic career? Obviously, they Bray would be one of them, coming to Montana State would be one, and then the Bray –

GD: The Bray—they were the first people there. I believe it was Rudy who said, "We met this crazy guy is going to pay us to make pots!" Because neither of them – both had more planning – have to earn their living some other way. In the summer he was in the caverns, Lewis & Clark Caverns, and would take people on tours.

JH: This was Rudy or both of them?

GD: Yeah, Rudy. Assuming he'd become a cook, like [his father].

JH: So what other developments do you think? Once he went to the Bray, that was important, what do you think were the next kind of big turning points in his artistic career?

GD: Well, I don't know that I can say, but I know that when Pete left and went to California and Rudy stayed there, I think probably established his connection with the whole thing. He didn't want to go to California. They used to call each other up all the time, and both of them were playing guitar and play something for the other one. One time Rudy called Pete and put on – who is the big guitar player, famous guitar player? -- anyway, it was on a record or something, he played along, finally he said, "I'm getting pretty good, aren't I?"

JH: I was going to ask that too. Do you think that it was necessary at some point for Rudy to separate from Peter in order to come into his own as an artist?

GD: I don't think that was – no, I don't think so.

JH: You think they fed off each other in a way that was –

GD: Yeah, I think so. They were very close friends and I don't think that – I really don't think that he…

JH: But it was nevertheless important when they did split and Peter went to California?

GD: Yeah, I think so.

JH: There was some growth that went on, whether it was necessary or not, some divergent growth did happen and Rudy kind of sunk his roots deeper here?

GD: Yeah, right.

JH: And Peter went off to explore the world?

GD: Yeah. We drove down one year to see Pete in California. He took us around, showed us his class work and stuff. He would take his students and have them there and he'd throw a pot, a huge pot, tall and skinny and he'd put his stuff down and say to the students, "When you can do that, come and see me," and he'd leave.

JH: Oh, that's funny. So working alone at the Bray was important for Rudy. What other significant turning points were there in his – maybe he worked in minerals for a long time and then he moved into something else.

GD: Yeah. And I can't – I don't know that I can say when he started doing the big pots. Quite a bit later, I think, but, you know, I have a hard time remembering. I should remember a lot more than I do. I don't remember his large work like he does now from the early days. But I can remember the murals. In fact, I think he has a self-portrait in one.

JH: Do you know of any particularly important or significant turning points in his life?

GD: I don't know.

JH: In fact, maybe Lela was one of them.

GD: Well, yeah, but, see, they weren't married. They were married when they were in school. Because we took turns baby-sitting each other's kids. And I think that Lela was a hell of a good artist, and in some ways they were like Bob and I were. They had a relationship through art, I think. And, you know, when you've got a bunch of kids you've got to put a little bit of time into (inaudible).

JH: Did having kids slow Rudy down at all or change what he did very much?

GD: Not that I'm aware of. See, Pete didn't have kids then – well, he did but it wasn't – I had forgotten that (inaudible).

JH: Rudy mentioned in an interview with me that he wishes he could have been there a little bit more for his kids when they were a little younger, which is something I think anybody could say. Looking from the outside, what did you think of Rudy as a father?

GD: Well, his kids were such great kids, you automatically assume they have a good father as well as a good mother. And I can – well, I remember my son being interviewed once and saying that he felt neglected as a kid because Bob would be down in the basement in his studio and I'd be sitting up on the patio looking at the stars. I'm sure that must be true in most cases.

JH: Yeah, there's kind of an almost – seems like to be a truly successful artist – I don't mean successful monetarily but just in your own vision what an artist is – requires a certain amount of selfishness that you can't escape. Time is such an issue.

GD: Yeah, time is an issue, big issue.

JH: So it's difficult to have I think a really healthy balance between family and art?

GD: Yeah.

JH: It's hard to strike. Did you struggle with that?

GD: Not really, because we were both trying to get (inaudible), although I did most of the domestic part, and I think Lela did, too.

JH: Yeah, that's the impression I got. Can you think of anything else in Rudy's life that sort of affected him profoundly that you know of?

GD: I don't know.

JH: Anything that influenced his art at all?

GD: I know one time Pete said that he was always chasing the women down there in California. I don't know if you want to put that in an article.

JH: What do you think is the relationship between art and fear? Rudy and I talked a lot about fear.

GD: So what did he say about it?

JH: Well, we were just talking about the notion that there's always a little bit of fear involved, because you don't know what you're going to make, you don't know if you can make what you want to make, you don't

know if anybody is going to care what you make, and so there's all these fears that you can allow to interfere with what you do.

GD: Yeah. Well, I don't know that I ever felt that way. I know that – Rudy got the recognition, and he's world famous now. My husband didn't, but he was a hell of a good artist. So I don't know how you would sort those things out. Bob was really sharp. He had a lot more recognition than he did, but Rudy got it because (inaudible) got it.

JH: Rudy talked about getting commissions to do these murals. He said, "I had no idea how to do them so it was frightening, because somebody is counting on me to do this thing and I just don't have a clue."

GD: I know. I remember when he was doing…

JH: Do you remember how he kind of tackled those fears or…

GD: No, I don't.

JH: Well, it just seems like he just dove in but he didn't really…

GD: Yeah. Yeah. He got hired to do it so he was going to do it. It turned out pretty nice.

JH: Would you say that Rudy's approach to art has been sort of workmanlike, where he just takes things on as they come and…

GD: Well, I would say probably.

JH: A little prosaic, pragmatically takes on what is in front of him?

GD: I think so.

JH: Can you talk a little bit more about Rudy's relationship with Peter and how they interacted and how they helped each other and fed each other?

GD: Well, they were just very, very close friends and talked frequently on the phone back and forth from California to Montana. I told you about the music. Pete would come back here quite often, too, and they were always together. I mean they were always – a real friendship. They worked at the same time and did their own thing.

JH: Was there any hint of competiveness?

GD: I don't think so. Not that I know of.

JH: Do you find that remarkable?

GD: Yes.

JH: Yeah, I do, too. Two people who are in the same realm of an art that's really emerging at the time to not have a little bit of professional jealousy is –

GD: I know.

JH: Because wasn't Peter more recognized in his time than Rudy was?

GD: Yeah. Yeah.

JH: So there must have been – well, I don't know. I'll have to ask Rudy about that if there was a little bit of jealousy.

GD: If he was, I certainly wasn't aware of it.

JH: But you think that neither one of them held each other back, and, in fact, they (inaudible) each other forward?

GD: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

JH: Do you remember Rudy and Lela in the younger days?

GD: Well, yeah, we saw them.

JH: What were they like together?

GD: Just like every young couple with kids to cope with.

JH: By the time you met them, they already –

GD: They were married by the time we met them.

JH: But they didn't have kids yet; they had kids shortly after you met them, right?

GD: Yeah.

JH: So they had that sort of exhausted hairy kids look. Did they – what kind of couple were they? Were they …

GD: I don't know that – nothing jumped out at me one way or another. They were like most married couples.

JH: Did they seem young, madly in love, head over heels in love or did they seem sort of a little cooler, not detached, but sort of mature in their relationship or…

GD: I'm not going to answer that. I'm not much help to you.

JH: Sure you are. They did get married quite young, Rudy was definitely interested – he indicated to me that when he came to college he was very interested in the opposite sex. He said he chose art because there were – that's where all the pretty girls were. And he met one right away and married her, it seems like. Did they just seem to click?

GD: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

JH: They seemed so good together now, I can't imagine them as just starting out, what it would be like.

GD: (inaudible) good teacher, but she runs everything for him.

JH: Well, he gives her an enormous amount of credit for what he's been able to do, and seems rightfully so. But it could be hard, I think, you know, as a writer, it would be difficult to be involved with another writer, I think. But as an artist, there's some difficulties being involved with another artist, aren't there?

GD: I don't know. It isn't something that I have run into. I think in Montana there was so little support of the arts that the interaction of all the people around the state getting together supported each other that that became – I was not aware of any feeling of jealousy or doing better than I am or something like that. Nothing that I'm aware of.

JH: What kind of support was there for the arts in Montana at that time?

GD: Very little. Very little. I think we joined Montana Institute of the Arts in those days and were involved in helping putting shows together. In fact, one time when Bob was asked to run something, he said, "well, I would really like some time to paint," and Conrad's wife at that time – he was the head of the department – said, "well, you're [going to have to] learn how to do that before I try to teach you."

JH: It seems like you were as close – you are as close to Lela as you are to Rudy; is that true?

GD: Yeah.

JH: How do you think she has influenced him?

GD: Oh, I think she's – he claims she runs everything, tells him what to do and whatnot.

JH: He claims that she comes in the studio and tells him what to paint and what not to paint. He makes lots of claims.

GD: He says she's the boss.

JH: But she obviously has lent some things in his life that allowed him to do what he was able to do?

GD: Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

JH: Would you say she's been a stability for him?

GD: I think so. In fact, she did a lot less of her own work than I did. And yet Cy Conrad said he had her in high school and she was the best student he ever had.

JH: Do you think her artistic eye really influences his work?

GD: I think it's possible. It's possible. She has a good eye.

JH: Definitely.

GD: I have two structures up there of Lela's – I had had a painting of hers that she borrowed to put in the show, and she cut it in half and made two out of it. I told her I was going to sue her.

JH: Has Rudy's career sort of been a steady output or has he kind of gone in spurts, do you know?

GD: Well, it seems like when he started – he did things over in Finland, you know, and it's sort of like it just grew, kept growing and growing after – I think it had a lot to do with that end of it.

JH: Of being in Finland?

GD: Yeah, I think so. I guess we're kind of like (inaudible). He was – well, they have that big horse thing of his. I think he was getting the recognition there and then was starting to get recognition here.

JH: Do you remember when he went to Finland?

GD: Oh, God –

JH: In relation to when he was at the Bray? He was at the Bray and then he was –

GD: Then he was at school and – I know he's been to Finland more than once. I don't think I can tell you when.

JH: It seems like so many artists have periods where they are stuck, sort of spinning their wheels, but it seems like he's kind of avoided that.

GD: Yeah. Yeah.

JH: You don't remember any time when he was –

GD: Not that I'm aware of.

JH: I wonder how he's done that. Is there anything you know about it that, his technique or his process –

GD: He has a tendency to keep working --

JH: Although some people just –

GD: -- will get into a good one some day.

JH: But some people don't. People just get stuck and can't break out of it for short periods.

GD: Yeah. I was never aware of that in him.

JH: He just seems to have a doggedness.

GD: Yeah. Yeah.

JH: Just kind of plows ahead, it seems like.

GD: Yeah, I'd say so.

JH: Do you feel like Bob and the other people, Frances and other people at Montana State, influenced him greatly?

GD: I wish Frances were in good enough shape to be interviewed. I think probably. I think so. When my Bob died, Rudy gave a really nice talk about him and referred to, you know, what influence he had on him.

JH: How much of it mechanical skill and how much of it is how you see the world?

GD: I think it's how you see the world.

JH: Rudy told me that when he was in 1st grade he was drawing with perspective. Seriously, he understood without knowing that he understood how to draw. There was a gift – so when you have that gift, it seems like lots of people are talented drawers, can draw lines, so what makes somebody – takes somebody from being a pretty good sketch artist to an artist?

GD: In the old days, that's how you were taught. And I think kids – all kids are artists, absolutely. If they are allowed to do their own thing, feelings about things; at least my kids turned out that way and the Autios did too.

JH: You think that somewhere along the way some of them get kind of quashed? Some people – my wife, for instance, thinks she's a terrible artist. She's very artistic. She's a great photographer. We make cards and she makes these beautiful cards, but she thinks she's really bad at it, because when she was in grade school, she didn't necessarily do what they were telling her to do in grade school.

GD: See, that's the way schools were in those days, I think, and that's wrong and I think it's terribly serious that they cut art classes and music classes, because my second oldest son is – my second son is a topnotch musician and he was really good at math, and there seems to be a connection there that I think is interesting, and they should keep kids drawing all the time.

JH: What is it, though, that takes a person who is a pretty good drawer and makes them an artist?

GD: Well, there's a difference between what you call a good drawer, I think, that – kids do things if they're not being directed, you know, don't color outside the lines and that kind of stuff, that they are very inventive and very creative. They can get it knocked out by some art classes. There's a book by deKoonig where he went art school and all the necessary things, but that's the way it was in those days.

JH: Rudy has mentioned over and over that really quality instruction he received from Works Progress Administration Artists during the Depression, which was quite a gift for him, I think. But to take that and then to have this ability to draw representative figures and then to make what he makes, there's quite a step in there.

GD: That's right.

JH: Where does that happen?

GD: Well, I think you gradually begin to toss out the traditional taught things and get into your own thing and then you can keep going.

JH: Is that what he picked up here, you think, the ability to sift through –

GD: I guess even my husband might have had something to do with it.

JH: Because Bob was doing more abstract work that was not very fashionable in Montana at that time.

GD: Right.

JH: So a young artist like Rudy who has been looking at a lot of Charles Russell pieces might see that there's another way to do it.

GD: Yeah, right.

JH: How important do you think it is that he was in Montana or from Montana? You were talking about Finland a minute ago, and you seemed to think that was –

GD: Yeah. His folks were from Finland. I remember him saying to his father, when his father retired they gave him a watch, but I don't know – I think it was pure chance that things evolved the way they did. I think my husband had a lot to do with it. And that was the advantage at that time of being in Montana, because up to that point there wasn't too much going on around here. Sister Trinitas was good, Jessie and Frances were probably equally influencing.

JH: So you're not a big believer in that place makes a huge difference?

GD: Not really, except I think maybe being in Montana was an advantage because it's so beautiful, it's not overwhelmed by any specific thing, like a city would be. So I guess that might be why Rudy didn't want to go to California.

JH: How much do – you touched briefly on his parents for a minute – how much do you think his upbringing had to do with who he became?

GD: Well, it's true of everybody.

JH: True. But I mean there's the person who embraces their upbringing and tries to grow with it and there's the person who rejects it and tries to react against it.

GD: Yeah. Well, I don't really know because I didn't know his parents. I didn't know him as a kid. But I know he spoke well of them.

JH: Would you agree with this characterization, it seems to me like from what I've learned about him that his parents – his early life was not – it wasn't of privation, it wasn't like he was not given food or anything like that, but it was very austere, he told me that his family was fundamental Finnish and so they did not have a lot of things around the house, it was very stark, kind of austere, and that Butte was a tough place to grow up in the 1930s. And so when he got to a place like the Bozeman art department and people were having fun and there was a lot of stuff and noise and activity that he just embraced that. Does that seem fair to say?

GD: It seems very – makes a lot of sense, yeah.

JH: Did you ever talk to Bob about him in the sense that – did Bob ever talk about him in terms of his kind of teachability? Was he a teachable kid?

GD: (inaudible). Well, he respected him. I know that Bob respected him. Delighted to have somebody to connect with.

JH: Well, that seems like what it was, really, it wasn't a teacher/student relationship – it was at first but it quickly became kind of compatriots relationship.

GD: Yeah.

JH: Which is not usual. I mean you would have to say that the relationship developed between your family and Peter and Rudy was an unusual relationship.

GD: Yeah, it's just one of those things that happened. It came by accident and thought Montana might be a nice place to live. These two guys just contributed a lot to the whole thing.

JH: Did they make living in Montana more fun?

GD: Oh, I think so. I think so. I mean it was nice to run into somebody that was interested in working the way you worked, you know. In those days, that was before not much was known about – those guys in New York, deKoonig and Pollock and those people, they didn't come on the scene until after we – well, they came on the scene just about the time I guess that we were out here.

JH: Rudy had kind of a repudiation of abstract expressionism.

GD: Yeah.

JH: He was telling me that he thought that they ultimately got it all wrong. It really, it was all about the impressionist. There was no comparison to anything but impressionist. He told me about how he went to a gallery in Washington, D.C. – I think it was one of the big museums – he just wept, with the impressionists.

GD: Interesting.

JH: It is interesting because it was really abstract expressionist that kind of freed him from –

GD: Yeah, freed (inaudible). But we were, you know, Picasso, Matisse were the big guys. Bob was more of a Picasso person, he was more of a Matisse person.

JH: You see a lot of Matisse in Rudy's work and Picasso too, you see a lot of that.

GD: Yeah. They were a bigger influence I think, because these other guys hadn't come on the scene yet. Our art teacher at Ohio State was Roy Lichtenstein's mentor and (inaudible). So all these things sort of emerged and they change here and they change there and then somebody else comes along and does something.

JH: That's what keeps things exciting.

GD: That's what's happening now. I mean I don't feel much affinity to what people are doing now, except my kids.

JH: Are your kids all active in the arts?

GD: Tina is and Gretchen does some makes lots and lots of cards and writes children's books, Jan's a musician, Josh is a potter. Rudy's been really nice to Josh.

JH: And vice versa.

GD: Yeah. I thought it would be (inaudible) because she used to write plays when she was little but she got into head start stuff and now she's a migrant head start director.

JH: Do you remember the first thing Rudy did that caught your eye? Do you remember looking at any of this early stuff and thinking, this kid has some talent?

GD: It was probably Bob.

JH: Because he was more active.

GD: Yeah. He was involved in that and I was involved in raising kids.

JH: But it seems like you were around when a lot of art was being discussed.

GD: Yeah.

JH: Was it like that a big parlor room discussions about Picasso and Matisse versus – Picasso versus Matisse, for instance?

GD: I don't know if there were. I don't remember. Bob used to have parties up at his studio that he had in town. Lots of talk there in every direction.

JH: Rudy remembers going over to your house and just sitting around and talking art.

GD: Yeah.

JH: Lots of discussions about –

GD: Yeah.

JH: Do you remember –

GD: They were mainly with Bob. I didn't really get into the art scene until – I'm like a piece of cheese, I get better with age.

JH: So at the time you weren't that immersed in it?

GD: Yeah. I was doing it but I wasn't busy doing –

JH: Raising kids.

GD: Yeah.

JH: Which is 50,000 other things right there. So you don't remember his early work that much at all?

GD: No, I don't. It's too bad because – Frances could come up with it, but she's in bad shape.

JH: He says that he was not very good at throwing pots, he was much better at hand building but he never really could throw them.

How important do you think Rudy's family is to his career?

GD: I don't know what you mean.

JH: Well, I mean does the stability of having a family allow you to take risks that you wouldn't? Or does the responsibility of having a family make it more difficult to take risks, for instance?

GD: I really can't – I can't answer that. I think – I mean it's a wonderful family and they are related. So I don't know how you would say – I doubt that he felt handicapped by it.

JH: Do you think he felt inspired by it?

GD: I don't know.

JH: It seems like he's got some very talented kids. It seems like they all – it seems like a tight-nit group so that's what I was thinking – I threw the other out as a counter idea, but it seems to me like – I don't want to make stuff up – but it seems to me like he got a lot out of having that family.

GD: Yeah. Have you talked to Lisa at all?

JH: No. I'm going to talk to as many as I can.

GD: Yeah, because she was just here recently, and she and my – two of my daughters were very close friends when they were little kids.

JH: Well, you've had a long artistic life.

GD: A few years.

JH: Yeah. So what factors are important in having a long artistic life? So has Rudy. It seems like a lot of artists don't. They – there's a few that do but a lot of them kind of hit and fade away.

GD: I don't know. I mean it's been so much a part of my life that I just kept doing it. I have a wonderful T-shirt that my daughter made for me, it says, "The way to get away from home without leaving home is to do art."

JH: Does the vision change over time? Or are you trying to do the same thing?

GD: Oh, it changes some. It changes some. I do – I mix – I do a lot of landscapes but I also do non-objective things.

JH: Has it been a progression?

GD: Well, I was in to doing it non-objective things and abstract things before we moved out here but there was just so much visual out here that I made that switch and went back to landscapes again. So I still do both.

JH: Rudy told me last winter that he just – he knows that his time is limited and he just wants to make that one more – that one perfect thing.

GD: Exactly. I understand that perfectly.

JH: That's what I was going to ask if you know what that feels like, if you have that –

GD: Yeah. Maybe I can do a good one some day.

JH: I heard – I read this thing that says that nothing is better than art – let me see if I can get this right – that the gap is never so obvious as an art between what you set out to do and what you end up doing.

GD: Yeah, that's right.

JH: But there's always that – does the gap get smaller as you get – as you progress through your career or is it still a pretty good size gap?

GD: Heck if I know.

JH: When you set out to make something – Rudy and I actually had a long talk about this, and I said, how come if you sit there and draw that plant and I sit here and draw that plant – or sit in the same place, sit in the same seat, it would look totally different? How does that work?

GD: Everyone sees differently. That's the important thing I think. That's what you have – well, Gretchen taught some wonderful – had some wonderful, wonderful things that her kids did that she taught – not her kids but she's teaching school – just absolutely fantastic. But she knew just how to – without seeing it your way.

JH: Well, that's it, is it a mechanical thing between how my eyes get to my hands or is it my idea of what that plant is?

GD: I think it's more an idea. Our teacher that we thought so much of after we had left school had a class that he had – kids sit in the dark and he'd flash something – it turned out he say, all right, now draw. And he had people in there that were nonart majors that were turning out wonderful stuff. And he had that – then graduated, leave the light on a little longer, a little longer but they always had to draw what they had seen and draw without looking at it. And it was amazing the results he got. So he was a good teacher.

JH: Yeah, and that's real interesting because it feeds right into what I'm wondering about, which is that notion of how you achieve that vision, you know, that you're searching for, when do you know you're close?

GD: Well, I don't know. I think that sense of feeling what you're doing is important. (Inaudible) was doing a drawing (inaudible) said, "now that's the stuff masterpieces are made out of!"

JH: Are there moments when you feel like I've got it, I just got it?

GD: Once in a while, not often.

JH: Are those what keep you going back to the drawing board?

GD: Yeah. Yeah. Build a good one some day.

JH: That's exactly what Rudy was saying. How would you describe your relationship with the Autios today?

GD: Well, since we're all getting older and we live miles apart, we don't see a lot of them. I talk to Lela quite frequently. I talked to Rudy the other day because he answered the phone, and he said, "Who is this?" And I said, "Gen." And he said, "Who?" Anyway, we had a fun time. I couldn't remember if he had been in one of Bob's classes or not. That's when he said, "Yeah, we got into a big argument one day," a painting Rudy was working on.

JH: Do you remember was there ever a time that you realized that there was something about, probably Rudy and Peter, that distinguished them from other art students that Bob was teaching at the time?

GD: Well, I think he felt that, yes. Probably because they were older. I mean they were on the GI bill, and Bob had gotten his master's on the GI bill so that gave them a lot to talk about. Yeah, I think so. They were exceptional.

JH: Do you know what it was that you recognized that you could say why you thought they were exceptional?

GD: Bob might be able to. I wasn't in that position. I was on the sidelines.

JH: Right. Sometimes the observers see more of the game. It just depends. Sometimes you have to be in the game to see it. I just wondered if there was – if you and Bob ever shared discussions where he said, these guys just got something – not kids – these guys have something that everybody else doesn't have?

GD: Yeah, I think so. Just like that – his paint class where he had this kid that never comes to class and does wonderful stuff, the best I've ever seen. So, yeah, he was very aware of that.

JH: I wonder what that is. I'm just – I'm not asking you to be specific to Rudy and Peter, but what is it that makes somebody just have it, an art?

GD: Well, if I knew the answer to that… I think – like I say, I think our children are and I think everybody would be if they – everyone has their own responses and ways of seeing and they vary because they belong to the individual.

JH: But it seems like some people are recognized by an establishment, I guess, as being somewhat distinguished from the rest. What –

GD: I don't know what the answer is.

JH: It's probably not even fair really that some establishment decides this person has it or this person doesn't.

GD: Another story that I think is funny that – one book about Rudy that said he did all these female figures and so on and on (inaudible) – Lela got a whole bunch of things out of his and drew a circle around all the male (inaudible) and sent it to the office.

JH: So Lela will defend him?

GD: Oh, yeah.

JH: She'll go to bat. Because he probably wouldn't have done that, he probably would have just let it go?

GD: Yeah.

JH: She felt like she needed to say –

GD: Straighten him out a little.

JH: "My husband is not a sexist." He does seem quite enthralled with the female form.

GD: Well, that is true.

JH: Not that he doesn't ever do male forms, but I found it interesting that he's enthralled with the female form and the horse form. I don't know really whether to intersect.

GD: The small horse up there is Rudy's. The one on the right.

JH: Would you say – you were close to Lela right away, right?

GD: Right. We were good friends.

JH: Sort of fell right into it, they were one of the first people you were friends with in Montana.

GD: Yeah. Yeah.

JH: And you raised kids together, which nothing can make people closer than that.

GD: I think we both lived in faculty housing for the first year we were here, and they lived around the corner from us so we saw them –

JH: So it was very much a – it was just like neighbors and friends more than students and professors?

GD: Yeah.

JH: For you and Lela, you were more peers than –

GD: Yeah. Right.

JH: Lela was a student then, too, right?

GD: I guess she was. Yeah.

JH: What do you think other artists can learn from Rudy's career?

GD: The new (inaudible) thing.

JH: What lessons are there from his work for people who are just starting out or been at it for a while and thinking about quitting?

GD: Well, I just think that what he's done, really, is a lesson, because it's gradually become – actually it's a combination of painting and sculpting. They are very beautiful. Another story about that; they take a lot of his pots and break them up and dump them in the dump. So I called one day and I said, next time you go to the dump, would you save one of those things for me.

JH: Does he do that because he doesn't want stuff that he thinks is not his best?

GD: I'm not sure. Must be. Probably is.

JH: That seems almost criminal to take those to the dump.

GD: I think so. I love this thing.

JH: Yeah, no kidding.

What do you think, if there's any—what do you think is the artist's responsibility to society?

GD: Well, I suppose to hope to introduce them to see things their own way and doing things their own way and being individuals.

JH: Is the artist responsible for going back into the community and teaching or giving back or is just showing your work enough?

GD: Well, I think it depends on the person. If you like to teach, then that's fine.

JH: But it's not the responsibility of the artist?

GD: I don't think so. I don't think so.

JH: Do you think Rudy's met the responsibilities that you think an artist should –

GD: Well, yeah, he's spent all those years teaching.

JH: So he's really done everything you could ask from an artist. He's shown (inaudible) and he's gone back and taught other people to do to the extent that you can teach art?

GD: Yeah. Yeah.

JH: Do you think art is teachable?

GD: (inaudible).

JH: It would be interesting to talk to some of Rudy's students to see if they thought art was teachable. Particularly some of those who did not necessarily go on and become artists.

GD: I'm trying to think whether it was Gretchen or Tina that took a class from Rudy.

JH: Were Rudy and Peter were they – and Lela, were they outdoorsy Montanans or –

GD: We used to go camping up at Flathead Lake.

JH: Of course, there probably were places to go camping at Flathead Lake then.

GD: Yeah.

JH: Instead of houses.

GD: And I remember one time my daughter Gretchen was coming out of a tent and sitting on a thing on the ground and he was asleep and he opened his eyes and she was looking at him and she said, time to go now.

Gretchen lived with them for a year in high school because she was (inaudible); it's a long story. So Lela had her come up and stay with them and go to high school there.

JH: And how did that work out?

GD: Great.

JH: Whatever influence Rudy and Lela had helped her out and get straightened out a little bit?

GD: Yeah. Actually it wasn't –- it's a very stupid thing. It wasn't because she had done anything but it was because she had not taken home ec., they wouldn't allow her to graduate.

JH: So she went to Missoula to take home ec.?

GD: No, she didn't graduate. They didn't allow her to graduate.

JH: It's hard to start college if you hadn't graduated from high school.

GD: Well, Tina did that, she had everything that was required, she got accepted at Evergreen.

JH: Interesting. So Gretchen went and lived with Autios while she was starting college?

GD: Yeah, I think so. I think so. So she was probably (inaudible). She will be here this weekend.

JH: Well, it would be great to talk to her on the phone maybe.

GD: Yeah. Well, she will probably be here tomorrow night.

JH: I could call her any old time.

GD: Yeah, okay.

JH: That would be interesting to talk to her about an outsider's view of life at the Autio home.

GD: Yeah.

JH: Because they would have had kids at home, too, then, right?

GD: Oh, yeah.

JH: Rudy told me that he and Peter used to go out in the hills and just dig clay.

GD: Yeah, they did.

JH: So they had that kind of Montana – well, Peter is not a Montanan, right?

GD: Oh, yeah.

JH: Where is he from?

GD: Here.

JH: Bozeman. I didn't realize that. They have that kind of Montanan – not worship of the outdoors but rather just –felt very comfortable in it?

GD: Yeah. Yeah.

JH: And you come from the outside, did they sort of help you to embrace it or introduce you to it at all? Or were you enthusiastic about it anyway?

GD: We were enthusiastic anyway. It was just so beautiful.

JH: So you did a lot of camping trips that included them?

GD: Yeah. I don't know that Peter was on any camping trips but the others were.

JH: And you'd go to Flathead Lake and – what would that be like? Drive up for the weekend?

GD: Yeah, I'm trying to remember. Yeah, we camped together. But whether it was Flathead or – by Polson?

JH: Flathead, yeah.

GD: So there was a campground and we'd go camp in the campground.

JH: Go fishing and swimming in the lake?

GD: Yeah.

JH: And hot dogs and hamburgers on the grill or fish – fresh fish on the grill?

GD: Yeah, probably hot dogs and hamburgers. I wish I could remember some of these stories. There's one time that Bob went out in a boat by himself – he wasn't good at that, couldn't swim either (inaudible).

JH: And Rudy was there?

GD: Yeah, it was when we were with them. I can't remember what the occasion was. If I remember it, I'll tell you.

JH: And you were worried he was out there by himself on the boat and he couldn't swim?

GD: Yeah.

JH: When was the last time all four of you were together?

GD: Oh, God, I don't know. We used to go up to Missoula.

JH: Rudy at a point, at least he sort of suggested in interviews to me, that he had – there was a bit of a wild life there for a while. Was it something like – I mean did everybody kind of participate? Or was he off on his own?

GD: Well, I think maybe he was more on his own. But I can tell you a story but I don't –

Tina DeWeese enters the interview:

Tina DeWeese: Well, you know, mostly Rudy was – he didn't come to class a lot those days. He wasn't there a whole lot.

JH: A workshop, though, right?

TD: It was class. And what I do remember about Rudy is that he would do demonstrations, you know, and do slab rolling and we had to just learn how to do that. And while we were practicing, you know, while we were working, Rudy – he'd pop in once in a while, you know, and kind of look over your shoulder and he'd say, gee, that's nice. So it was always encouraging.

JH: He was a positive teacher.

TD: Oh, absolutely. He just loved seeing what people were making. He was always just very, very – he wasn't critical, he wasn't anal about doing it right. Basically just let people go. And everybody that was in that class was excited about it. We just kept making stuff. There was one kid who used to stay – well, he'd go up at night and we'd come in the morning, he did a lot of the same thing that Pete used to do, fill up this house, you know, come to class the next day and the shelves are filled up.

JH: So he was a very encouraging teacher?

TD: Oh, yeah. I mean it was always – whether positive reinforcement or he was just genuinely interested and liked seeing what people were doing.

JH: It goes back to what we were talking about in terms of how – why some people become artists and other kids you just encourage rather than tell them to fit it into this little box and this is how you do art.

TD: Right. Yeah.

GD: There's many things I couldn't remember. I wish you'd been here.

TD: Well, we had a busy morning.

JH: Do you remember camping trips with –

TD: Oh, yeah, that was the high point of our lives as kids, yeah. It was every summer for – in our early childhood that it was the week or two weeks that we'd spend up at Big Arm with the Autios. So that was like peak of summer.

JH: Annual summer event you'd go to Big Arm for a week or two. What did you do?

TD: Swam. One of the things we did we all – we got real – how would you put it? – we were little entrepreneurs, you know, and we'd go around and pick up the bark, chunks of bark from the – what kind of pine trees are those?

JH: Ponderosa.

TD: Ponderosa, yeah. They'd shed these big chunks of bark and all these puzzles. We spent a lot of time putting puzzles together. So we also – the big chunks of bark we would just sit down and make things. We'd carve stuff and then we'd wander around the campgrounds and sell them to the campers. It was like – we were proud of making things. So we'd go sell them and people would buy them for 25 cents.

JH: People did buy them?

TD: Sure. We were kids. How could they refuse?

JH: Exactly.

TD: Yeah, Lisa, Gretchen and I, that's how we spent a lot of time, and carving.

JH: When I talked to him about the article, it was a tough time. He felt good and he felt like he was potentially going to be good for a little while but he was still obviously underlying everything.

TD: It is. It's been a while but it's been underlying.

JH: Which of his kids are close to your age?

TD: Lisa. Lisa was like the peak of summer vacations, whenever we could get together with Lisa it was always –

JH: Is she older than you or younger than you?

TD: She was a year older than me and a year younger than Gretchen so there were three consecutive years.

JH: So you were the one that kind of idolized those two, probably, and whatever they did was the coolest thing on Earth?

TD: We were a trio. Yeah, we were all in art together.

Let's see. What else do I remember? We used to, you know, I just remember sitting around the campfires at night and everybody sit around the campfire and Rudy and you had your guitars, and so we'd sing every song that was in anybody's repertoire. It was all these great old folk tunes. It seems to me we had that big old black book about American folk songs, and we'd go through that and sing everything. I don't think you guys could play everything but we sang everything.

JH: So it was just the standard American stuff, swimming, camping, and barbecuing hot dogs and hamburgers and fish that you caught?

TD: Yeah. I don't think we went fishing at that lake. Well, the boys – but it was just the romance of going up to Flathead has been kind of a lifelong ritual, you know. We haven't gone up there very much recently but since we used to camp at Big Arm, they built a cabin. They bought land and built a cabin. So we get up there pretty adequately, and it's always that same kind of magic.

JH: Yeah, I was trying to get Rudy to go to Butte with me, tour his old hometown but he said he's not in town.

Are you the one that went to live with the Autios for a year?

TD: No, that was Gretchen.

JH: But you did go to the University of Montana?

TD: Yeah.

JH: Did you major in art?

TD: I did for a little while. I was there for a year and then I took off for a while and came back and went to Bozeman, quit that and took off for about eight years and went back to Evergreen.

JH: So you were taking art classes?

TD: Mostly art. Well, yeah, I took art. I was pretty much liberal studies.

JH: Just the one class with Rudy?

TD: Uh-huh. Yes.

JH: What do you remember about him when you were like a little kid?

TD: Well, see, you know, when – he was probably – I would say he was probably close to like a surrogate father, you know. Our families were so intertwined that Rudy and Lela were like the other parents.

JH: So a lot of times that surrogate dad person – I remember having one too – is like a little bit more fun version than your dad, because your dad is the disciplinarian –

TD: Oh, he never was.

JH: That surrogate dad always seems to be the really fun person to be around.

TD: Yeah, and there wasn't any – as I recall, it wasn't like we didn't have personal interaction with Rudy, I don't remember that kind of thing. It was just this – it was just sort of the – it was a sense of community and sense of family. It was like we were all so engaged and interactive, but, of course, our parents were more engaged than we were. But, yeah, we just loved him.

JH: Were those camping trips a pretty fun time, were the adults pretty permissive and let you run around and do whatever you wanted?

TD: Oh, sure. Yeah, we didn't have very many restraints. I mean, there was none as far as I remember. We just kind of – it was probably what hooked us on being in the wilderness. We just had that kind of time to explore the water.

JH: The adults back at the campfire doing their thing and you just run around like Indians?

TD: Oh, yeah. Yeah, very different times I think than these days.

GD: There was some funny story and I couldn't remember it about daddy in the boat by himself –

TD: I can't remember.

GD: And not being able to swim.

TD: Well, that was frequent. Yeah, I'm not sure, you know, what else, really. If I have any real specific memories, you know, I just remember, you know, Rudy was – oh, gosh, he was just – we loved Rudy and Lela both. We were completely at ease and comfortable and livened by their energy.

JH: And there comes a time when you have a relationship with somebody whose an adult like that, when you become and adult and the relationship changes to an adult relationship, did that happen with you and Rudy?

TD: Yeah. You know, when I was going to school in Missoula, I used to go up to Autios periodically but I was a little strung out in those days, and I remember Lela would always sort of – she would say, well, what's new? I'd try to get into some, you know, I had some (inaudible) that I really, really loved and so I would try to tell her about what his class was like, and she'd just kind of roll her eyes. Come on back when you're doing something. Probably more philosophical.

JH: Have you seen them much in recent years?

TD: When, you know, whenever we go to Missoula we often and usually stay in their little house and so we have morning breakfast and – we were just up there for graduation – Tom's daughter's graduation and spent the morning with them. Rudy was not there at the time. He had driven to the lake. He had some plumbing issues so he went on up to the lake. They were a little concerned about him because he was driving alone. So Chris was on his way to go up there to meet him. But in the meantime, Lar's kids were at the house, it was so familiar that activity of family. Lar came in, Chris came in, there were puppies next door, we all went over to see the puppies. It was kind of busy, lively.

JH: It seems like a really close family. The kids all seem very intertwined and –

TD: Yeah. And we always get to hear about – Lisa hasn't been living there for quite a number of years so it's really great to have her back in Missoula.

JH: She's got at least one daughter, right?

TD: She has a daughter and a son.

JH: And the daughter is frequently at their house, I think?

TD: Actually, she's living in Madison.

JH: Whose daughter – which granddaughter?

TD: Probably Lar's.

JH: There's a bust of her in the –

TD: Probably Phoebe and Chloe.

JH: Chloe's the one. There's a bust on the table when we were doing this interview. She was sitting right there and there's a bust of her.

TD: Yeah. And, honestly, I don't know those kids much. We don't know Lar's family that much. We see them periodically.

GD: Yeah, we haven't seen them.

TD: But they are always very warm, always giving us pastries and coffee.

JH: It does seem like a nice warm family.

Well, any memories you happen to come up with, I'm happy to hear them.

TD: Okay. Yeah.

JH: I have no idea what shape this story is going to take yet.

TD: So you're writing for a magazine or ..

JH: No, I'm doing something for the Missoula Art Museum. They read that story and they got – they had a grant to do some outreach programs and so they are going to do a website and publish this article, my article, and then another guy is going to do an article on Rudy's place in the art world. I don't think we have to deal with that. I'm just doing Rudy the person.

TD: Oh, good.

JH: I don't know anything about art.

TD: Well, that's what I really enjoyed about this article.

JH: That's what I was telling her, I just find so many articles about artists so pompous because the writer really doesn't know – you can tell. You can tell they know three things and that's dangerous to know only three things. So I decided I'm not going to pretend I know anything about art, I'm just going to find out about this guy.

TD: I think that's why it was so refreshing because it felt real human. It's just really refreshing because it's really honest. It talks about Rudy's suffering a lot.

JH: Well, that's kind of at the forefront of the circumstances so it seems kind of unavoidable. And that's the other thing – I've got a brother who passed away from blood disease at an early age, and I just sort of decided that I'm not going to dance around this. I mean it's important to Rudy and Lela. Why pretend it isn't?

TD: Absolutely. Really, really, and it's important for the world to know that these are real human lives we're talking about.

JH: And I think the way he's facing it is really brave and really – it's a way that other people can learn from to say I just want to go make that one piece. Everyday I want to make that one thing. And so for people who are facing a limited time period, it's nice to have goals and to have – I think a lot of people struggle and they feel end of life is near and they just think, why bother doing anything. That wastes end of life. Whereas, I think going out and doing something every day further in the distance every day.

TD: Yeah, and it also just makes you feel like present.

- *end of interview* -

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