

Interviewee: Dick Lehman (DL)
Interviewer: Meredith McGriff (MM)
AFC Collection Number: AFC 2018/030
Interview ID: 5120
Date: November 16, 2018
City/State: Goshen, Indiana
Venue: Dick Lehman Pottery
Language(s): English

Video File #1 (afc2018030_05120_mv01.mp4)

MM 0:14

So today is November 16, 2018, and for the record, I am Meredith McGriff behind the camera. And if you would introduce yourself and maybe just say a few words about where we are right now.

DL 0:27

Sure. I'm Dick Lehman. We're sitting here in my studio. I was for years a production potter in a big old factory building. And now I have the leisure, really working alone in a space that's well-equipped... Goshen, Indiana.

MM 0:46

Right. So, I mean, let's just start with how did you become interested in clay? And how did that turn into a career path for you?

DL 1:00

I really had no experience in the arts except for the requisite seventh grade art class. In high school, my electives were taken up with music pursuits. I was a first year in college and a friend, Bob Smoker, who is now living and working in this area. And he was an art ed [art education] major and had a concentration in an clay. He had a potter's wheel that he and his brother had made, a kick wheel. And I became friends with him. And he showed me how to make pots. And I said, I'd like to learn how to do that, would you would you teach me? So he gave me an evening's tutorial, and showed me where he hid the key to the little building we were in. So I could come back and work if I wished. And I think, as opposed to the academic pursuits that I was pursuing, at that point, there was something so tangible about making pots, you knew what you'd been doing, you could see evidence of it. Not so with some of the academic pursuits. And so that was kind of a counterpoint to the other part of my academic career. I worked as a hobbyist on his wheel for a while. And then when I had an opening in my schedule, an opportunity to do an elective, but took a clay class and that bloomed into four or five before I left college, but I really don't have a proper art or ceramics education in, in an academic sense. So you won't find it on my transcript. But it did become a passion. In the years I after college, I, I pursued a job as an administrator in a Voluntary Service program that was run by the Mennonite Church. And that was, yeah, and then went back to school, I went back to grad school in a field that wasn't clay. And I was nearing the end of my third year of master's level work, which was in a theological education. And I just thought I can't do this. And I suppose it was that the chasm of long term employment that was on the heels of graduating from a master's program, the expectation was really pretty high to get a job and pursue it. And I guess that forced the issue for me. And I did something there that I rarely had done in my life. And that is not finished something that I'd started. So with a semester to go or so, I dropped out of seminary and immediately built a kiln, found a space to rent, remodeled and refurbished an old factory building studio. And set up a six day a week retail shops making and selling pots in a building that also housed another craftsmen, a woodworker. Where would you like to go from there? Do you want more about that story, that trajectory?

MM 4:39

Oh, I think that's really interesting. Yeah. So that was in Goshen? at that time. Yeah. If you could talk a little bit about sort of the challenges of getting started. And what drove you to stick with it? At that time?

DL 4:59

Sure. Yeah. Yeah, it was challenging getting started. To think about... I thought I was becoming a potter. And actually, I was becoming a business person. I was totally unprepared for that, with the possible exception that my, my father was a salesman. And I suppose kind of by familial osmosis, I kind of picked up some of his general principles about how to do business with people. But I really wasn't prepared. I had no bookkeeping or accounting background or skills. Yeah, I think I was 28 at the time I made that jump to open the studio. And I think I was still carrying enough naiveté that I believed the mythology, that a liberal arts education offers us: that if you learn how to learn, you could do anything you want. And I believed that. So in the process of trying to set this business up, and to begin a retail trade, I went back to school, and took some business classes and audited them. I went back and took some clay classes and with the help of Marvin Bartell, kind of designed those around what I was experiencing as needs, as a new studio owner. From the start, because I had such a small following, I needed some place to sell my work in addition to the retail studio. So I did, we did some Jolene and I did some arts and crafts shows for a couple of years. And that kind of gave me that needed retail exposure and sales. Until the business that... walk through the door business picked up.

DL 7:01

And, how to promote oneself at any stage of life is a challenge. And I kind of look back and almost giggle because this wood worker, this furniture builder and I, we were both pretty new to the business, he had a little more experienced than I. I remember we bought placemat ads in diners, and you know newspaper ads and radio and television ads and billboards. In fact the, this line drawing that's on the wall back there, you can see it. Yeah, that was my half of a billboard. They, they built a half, and that's what we had on the side of the road.

DL 8:07

Ultimately, I think if one can survive the first years, the future is in our hands with respect to how we conduct ourselves with respect to customer service, if we provide a well made product, and if we're thinking about the needs of the customers, and provide good service and satisfaction, then the odds go up a lot. But you have to make it through those first years. For me, that was particularly challenging because the location, after three years in that location, I was just beginning to take some salary money. Before that we just lived off of Jolene's income, and I paid off the loan, the startup loan that I took from my grandmother to build the kiln and, you know, make some studio equipment. The county took the building that we were in, in an eminent domain suit. They wanted that space to build a new county office building. That, so a really short amount of lead time we needed to move out. And in Indiana, if you own the building you're in, you do get some compensation, it's arguable always about whether it's enough. But if you're renting space in a building that's been condemned for eminent domain, your only responsibility is to be out by a certain date. And so there was no, no real help financially there. So that was a bit of a setback. I did consider stopping. It looked like it would be harder to restart than start. I'm not sure why that was. Maybe I understood what I had gotten myself into, and understood that I'd have to do it again. I suppose that was part of it.

DL 10:14

And this wood worker and I, we looked at I don't know, a dozen buildings over the course of the 60 days we had to get out. We looked at trying to find a place where we could continue this dream of maybe gathering a covey of producing artists and craftsmen. And we also looked at going our own ways. And I think both of us gave serious consideration to just stopping and saying, well, maybe this wasn't such a good idea. But as it turned out, we both went on, we actually ended up in the same place. And that dream of a covey of producing artists and craftsmen blossomed in that spot. In retrospect, a much better building for that kind of enlarged arts presence and capacity or exposure in the Goshen community. I think at its best, at its height, there were more than 20 producing artists and craftsmen in the building. The building always housed some non-artist businesses as a matter of necessity for keeping rent incomes coming in to keep the building liquid.

DL 11:34

But... let's see, you asked about why I kept going, right? I still, I still get such a satisfaction from making things. And I think it's, making pots is an inexact enough science and there's enough failure built into it and enough surprise and disappointment, a good balance for my temperament. I, I lose interest if the task is the same every day. And of course, it's not. Being responsive to customers' needs meant that I didn't just have the freedom always to make just what I wanted to make I needed to make what I knew would sell. But I could make it in a way that kept my interest. And so I could continue to develop as an artist and work out my own vocabulary of shapes and forms. And the challenge without losing control. I felt like it was a nice blend to be a production potter bringing works of beauty and utility and durability and longevity into people's lives. And doing it in ways that I found interesting and in ways that create the beauty where, where there hadn't been any before. That's, continues to be, and was then, one of the biggest satisfactions.

MM 13:17

What was your... What was your support system like as far as a clay community in this area, at that time?

DL 13:29

It was hardly any. There was a potter in Osceola who did art shows full time. He had no retail space and was on the road for most of the year. And he spent the winters in Florida doing Florida art shows. There was John Bauman in Warsaw, Indiana, who is still making lovely, wonderful work. And he, for most of his career, did the same. So far as I know there, there were no other potters with a retail outlet anywhere nearby. I'd have to think a little more carefully about, where the closest one might have been at the... Maybe, maybe John Glick near Detroit. And there would've be, in Central Indiana there were some, some potters who had locations that at least included for part of their income, a retail setting. So I think initially I, I looked to artists in other media for support. For many years, I was part of an artists' breakfast once a week. Painters, photographers, another clay person, graphic designer. Yeah, that's what I'm remembering from those, from that. And that was, that was substantial support. Yeah, for sure.

DL 15:15

I probably leaned pretty hard, I'd be interested to know if [Goshen College ceramics professor] Marvin Bartell, how he'd reflect on those years, I think I leaned pretty hard on him, although we had a hard time getting out of the professor/student mode. And I was of course asking for advice. And there were some things he could help me with their things, other things he couldn't. He'd never run a retail business. He'd never run a production pottery. He's really more of a designer, an inventor, and a teacher. And so, I think I had to learn what it was he could help me with and what he couldn't, and what I needed to look for other places. Yeah.

DL 16:02

I began making some long distance, connections. I've never quite thought about it this way, but the way you framed the question makes me think about it. Even in those early days, I had some what I would call ceramic heroes, Robin Hopper, Jack Troy, John Glick, John Leach, the grandson of Bernard Leach, son of David Leach in England. And I sought to strike up relationships with those. And in those days, it was largely through letters, and an occasional phone call. They were people who had made a name for themselves in the clay world, were giving back, making contributions to the rest of us, were making really successful noteworthy pots. And I thought I needed to be connected people like that. My work doesn't look like any of those guys' work. But I wanted to put in front of myself both good work and good workers. I remember spending a lot of time when the path, when paths crossed with Robin Hopper. I remember interviewing, extensively interviewing John Leach. I had, at that point, Nick Rees, I think is the name of the fellow who has worked for him, I think still does. Nick had worked, I think, for him for about 15 years. And at that time Mark Goertzen had been working with me for two. And I asked John, how do you keep a long term person at your studio? And he talked a bit about that. But as I, as I think about, I don't think I really got much good advice. It was just, he kind of said well, that's the way it worked out. But I, I think I knew intuitively that if the studio was going to be a good place to work, I have to have some long term

people with me so that some of the leadership could be shared, some of the responsibilities could be shared, some flexibility for both me and that employee could exist. And then that's, as you know, Mark Goertzen turned out to be that person he came. He said to spend just two years, two years, only. Two years max. At the end of two years, he said well, and maybe it'd be good to get this from him. But I've heard him say, "I looked at myself and I thought, Well, what do I want? Well, I've got a place to work. Okay, a steady job. I've got all the freedom in the world, got a full studio that I have access to all the time. Why would I leave this?" And so he ended up staying.

DL 19:24

The Nick Rees, the John Leach, Nick Rees thing, I thought of a lot during those years. And I, while I didn't know what John did I, I'd often ask myself that question, if I were in Mark's position, what would I want? So a number of things happened. One is just basic compensation. I tried to keep his salary moving up. And in fact, there were some years, he actually made more than I did. Now, that's not a, that's not a good business... that's not evidence of good business. But I, you know, we're told pay yourself first. But it was so important to have him around that some years, he made more than I did. We built in flexibility. So there was always two weeks of paid vacation. I say always, I think from near the beginning, two weeks of paid vacation. I also made it possible for him to leave for more protracted periods of time to do some continuing education. So he went to Tokoname in Japan, he went to New Zealand for I think, eight weeks, maybe 12 weeks, I think, I think Tokoname was nine or 10 weeks. And he had a job when he, when he got back. I kind of figured well, the kind of richness that he was going to experience there, and the growth, would just be a benefit to the studio. And then you know, as he was there for a longer period of time, and could essentially begin to run the place, I could do the same. And so then I, my first sabbatical of sorts was teaching, kind of a blend of teaching and visiting resident artist at Arizona State University with Randy Schmidt and some of the others. And so, having him around for that length of time, meant that we could both advance our careers.

DL 21:37

One of the things about Mark that I've so appreciated is, in those years, he really badgered me to take care of myself. And while I couldn't always get away for a sabbatical, I always tried to reserve about 15% of the time to pursue things that were more developmental, that if they didn't produce anything saleable, we'd still be okay. Because the other 85% of the time, and, would pay for that. And so over the years with, with, in conversation with Mark and looking at both our schedules, sometimes I'd take a month or two in-studio just making those things. Sometimes it was a week here, a week there, two weeks there. Sometimes I would go other places and work. And sometimes it was a day a week, to try to get that 15%, the better part of a day a week. So worked at that, and that kind of development's always been a part of, of my life. Probably, in part because I, you know, for most of my college and seminary years, I figured that a sabbatical would be a part of my life because in those days, mental health professionals and ministers and church administrators did get sabbaticals. And I remember saying to someone one time, how I wished I worked for someone who had the, you know, the wisdom and the financial and fiscal planning to make a sabbatical happen for me. And of course, that would have to be me. So, when I said that out loud, I had to laugh at myself because yeah, that's kind of obvious isn't it? That's when I set out to make sure that that could happen.

DL 23:41

One more thing, perhaps about caring for staff. After Mark was working at the studio for about 10 years... This was prompted by another conversation with, with Bill Hunt. I decided to offer to Mark to rename the DBA, the "doing business as" that had been Dick Lehman, Potter. And that's, that was the sub-s corporation name. But I suggested changing the business name to Lehman Goertzen Pottery. Because at that point, after 10 years, he was making a serious contribution to the studio, to the customer service, every part of business. And I thought it would reflect more accurately what was actually going on. And I thought it would, it wasn't financial ownership, but it would give him a sense of emotional ownership to have his name on the door, and on the business cards. I also was thinking ahead, you know, at some point in my life, if Mark continues here, and if I give up or sell my business... if it's called Lehman Goertzen Pottery the easiest thing, the smoothest thing in the world will be for

that to go from Dick Lehman, Potter to Lehman Goertzen Pottery to Goertzen Pottery. And as it turned out, that's actually what took place. So Bill's suggestion was fortuitous, I thanked him for that.

DL 25:24

Another thing I did with people who stayed past two or three years. I gave them a chance to market work in my show room space. And I also failed to mention, but we tried to, to get... Full time in the studio was four days a week. So that employees would have time to work on their own work. I subsidized that, what they paid me by the pound was less than what it cost to make it. I wanted to pay something. But I was subsidizing their, their growth and their development. And then I gave them I think 64, 65% of the sale, which is better than you can get at a gallery anywhere, I think. So they were earning, they were earning additional income by selling things that they didn't really fully pay to make. And so that was a benefit of working in the studio, a reason to stay perhaps, or at least to recognize their ability and that they were there for a while and then moving on, it gave them a chance get genuine retail response to their own works.

DL 26:46

Yeah. That's really great.

Video File #2 (afc2018030_05120_mv02.mp4)

MM 0:00

...start again. So, talk about, if you would, developing a production line and developing your style and the items that you were selling in those early years.

DL 0:15

Right. So that was, as you might imagine, without an art background, without a really, more than a piecemeal ceramics background. That was a challenge. I didn't really think visually, until I started working with clay. So there was a lot of starts and starting overs. I did slip, well, I did a lot of things. And I also in the process of exploring and trying to find a voice in clay, there's always that overlays, is, well, it's interesting to me, but is it interesting to customers? So that was always the interplay. I think for the first five or six years, I took the point of view, and I think it was probably correct for me at that time, that I needed to design everything. I just think that was important to begin to have a voice and to have a line of work that had some cohesive qualities, you could tell they were made as part of the larger body of work, that they fit together. After five or six years of that, and I think also, you know, as a... There's a whole sense of, of my, my sense of self, my ego, my sense of where I stood in the clay world, it was important that I do that for myself. As I began to, to give myself some of that sabbatical time or that development time, I gave a little more focus to those works, which were different from the studio production work. And I think as a result, I felt a little more openness to having other people contribute to it. Now, when Mark had been around for, I think, his fourth year, so that would probably be, that might be eight years into, into my work, into my full time work. Anyway, regardless. I invited him to, to add products to the studio, if he wanted to, that were consistent with the aesthetic that I was developing. I say, I offered, because over the years, I offered that to a number of people and some, some people were less inclined, they said, "Well, you know, that's, why should the studio benefit from my development work?" Fair enough. Mark, and many others saw that as an opportunity to have a little more ownership in the whole, the whole place. And frankly, the pots get better when there were more than just me doing the designs. What was it, exactly your question was..?

MM 3:39

I was curious about the process of developing a production line, just generally.

DL 3:46

That, that grew to 100 products, which was a lot. Now that would mean, if we had three different sizes of whisk bowls, mixing bowls, that was three, that was three out of the 100. But we made an extensive line of work. And,

and that came slowly. And it came as a result of involving some other people, and getting faster, as a result of involving some other people in the design process. I always had a hand in it, there was always communication. I think initially, I kind of suggested some things and then they would try it and then move away from that to giving them free rein to suggest something to me, that would be a new product that would fit the studio aesthetic. I think, I remember, I think until David Gamber was working there, I always got involved in some of the throwing, so if you were, if you were working with me and you proposed a whisk bowl, I would probably sit down and try to take your idea and, and bring it, nudge it back to the studio aesthetic a little bit. So, we were involved in this making conversation, that I had some people who were so skillful, and I didn't even need to do that. I remember it first happening with David Gamber, he made a, he made a piece, a square mug. And instead of me doing it I said no, I like that, but you know, I think that to lean toward, lean into the studio aesthetic, this and this and this have to happen. Well, he just did this and this and this, I never, I never made that pot. Ever actually. I never made that pot. It was, it was only made by other people in the studio. One of the functions of studio management, we usually had the equivalent, full time equivalent of three people working. Myself, Mark full time, and one or two other people. But I think we had as many as four FTE, at some points in the process. With a production line as big as it was, 100 products, I felt like I needed to be able to make all of them. But in actual practice, each of us made about a third of them. And could make 65% of the 100. So if I was away on a trip or Mark was away on a trip, and we needed more what either of us made, someone else was making that as well. So we kind of diversified the, the skill around a number of people. And that seemed to work pretty well.

DL 6:52

Also involved employees in sales and customer service. And I think, to the extent that folks who worked for me and went on to their own careers, I think that was probably pretty valuable to them. It'd be interesting to hear them reflect on that. But everybody who worked there, I trained and encouraged how to do sales in a responsible, ethical, supportive way. And I think, I think our customers benefited from that, I think they my employees did too, to the extent that they went on and pursued their own careers. Then there's the whole element of, okay, you've got a production line. But then, what about glazing? What do those look like? And what, what part of... a previous to now, I mean, I've been talking mostly about the shape of things that, that aesthetic. There's a whole thing of, you know, how's it decorated? How's it glazed? That was one place where I held on to, and not so much by, not so much... because I didn't want anyone else to do it. But as it developed, I was kind of the only one who could. I did a brushwork decoration on all the pieces. And that actually changed just a little bit over time. You could look back and see what had happened five years ago, and really clearly understand that they're very much related, but, but they were different. And so that became something that I kept doing. Now, I will say at points Mark picked that up when absolutely necessary. But even now, some people, and it's been what, it's been eight years, I think now that Mark has owned...

DL 9:03

Right? I think that's right, 2010. That he's owned that... he still has some of our customers coming back and they collected a certain pattern and they broke a, I made dinnerware for them or whatever, and they broke this or that or the other. I go back and decorate for him now. Because I still sort of had that in my, in my neurons and my, in my hands and on the end of my brush. Although he doesn't, he's, he's clearly made, the aesthetic is all him. He doesn't do that brushwork. But yeah.

MM 9:44

Interesting. What kind of input did you get from customers? Was it? Was it verbal? Was it people who were coming back for return sales? Or was it, just watching people? Like what kinds of interactions were you having?

DL 10:07

With repeat customers, we'd often ask them, how they liked the product. And if they have any suggestions. So in you know, in that respect, we also kind of involved our customers in the evolution of design. Most of that was ergonomic things, you know, how did it, how was it in the hand? How was it on the lip? How did it pour? How did it balance, was it, I mean, was it easy in and out of the oven with mitts? Just really practical things that we,

and we got a lot of suggestions for, on that score, and we solicited them and got them. We also got quite a lot of product suggestions and requests from customers and we often followed up on those.

MM 10:59

What kinds of products were requested?

DL 11:02

Well, I mean, I think the most memorable was brie baker. I was making some little miniature pie plates, let's say, okay, and they just languished on the shelves. I could not sell them. And a customer came in and said, "You know I been looking for something like this, but it's not complete. It needs a nice wooden paddle, spreader of some kind and a recipe a baked brie recipe." And my goodness, I mean, I sold, made and sold tens of thousands of those. And at first I was making the wooden paddles myself. And then I had someone do the blanks and I would on a drum sander, sand out the blades, and then, and finally I started having someone else make them, but...

Video File #3 (afc2018030_05120_mv03.mp4)

MM 0:03

So, talking about customers. Were you, at what point--or maybe it changed over the years--you had your retail space, but you were also selling at shows or fairs sometimes, or through galleries? How did that transpire over the years?

DL 0:27

Yeah, so actually, the art shows were really time limited, the summer festival kind of thing. I think, I may have done that for three years. And then, after our second child was born, it just was too much work to do it as a family. It was too big of a job for me to do alone. And I still wasn't generating enough income to hire someone. So we just stopped that. And I thought, first, well, you know, with the production that I can do, I can sell wholesale. But I had assumed all of the overhead of a retail space. And so every time I sold something on wholesale, I lost money. And that was to the extent that I pursued that, I was making it harder and harder for myself to succeed. That's one of those places where I went back to college and audited a sales and marketing class to see if there were some ways I could take better advantage of the customers, serve them better, the customers that were already there. And what actually generated out of that class was 20, 20 questions that I really needed answers to, to be, have a good service. Now, I didn't ask every customer all twenty questions. But I, I realized that the primary job of sales is listening to what the need is, or soliciting the need, to see if I even have something that can help. So what was your question again?

MM 2:11

I was curious about that shift between selling elsewhere, and, but I think

DL 2:15

Yeah...

MM 2:16

Let it take you where it will.

DL 2:17

Yeah. I... And I left wholesale, almost entirely at that point, I think I had one wholesale account, just because it was someone I knew. And I did that. But for the most part, there was none. And the other thing is, I had no gallery relationships. As the Old Bag Factory grew, as there were more producing artists and craftsmen, there was more traffic. I know in the best of those years, we had 125 to 150,000 people coming through every year. And that generated enough foot traffic that we sold absolutely everything we made right there. So, I didn't need to develop

a relationship with the gallery because I could sell it myself for 100% of its value, instead of half, plus shipping. Now, fast forward to my being in this space with no retail traffic. Not having any established gallery relationships has been a rude awakening. And a challenge for me. But that's another whole story. So yeah, no, no art shows really, no wholesale accounts, after just a little bit of trying and no galleries. So everything was made and sold there.

DL 2:41

As I pursued the development of the non-production body of work, in wood firing and initially raku, some saggar firing, some side firing, it seemed to me that I needed a space that would show those differently than, than the lines of pots like you see here, this kind of shelving. So I took part of my storage space, and then turned it into a gallery. And I showed those development pieces there. And to my pleasure and surprise, there was an appetite and an audience for that. Not everything, but most of it. And so that gave me permission, on a financial level, to keep trying and keep developing and keep refining some of those things. And that, that provided during the course of my career, a really good balance. 85% of my time toward production work, 15% of my time towards development work, exploring new ways of working and honing those, following the, following up on them. You know, of course, had I changed that, if I had spent 15% in production and 85%, I was, I wouldn't be in business, because my that wasn't my market. But that seemed to be a really proper and appropriate blend. I guess in a way, it said that about 15% of my customers were interested not only in production things but in, in things that didn't have the necessary utilitarian applications. Although some of those development pieces were, I mean, yeah, it was, those pieces were utilitarian, many of them, but a lot of them were vases or pieces that brought beauty into being and that was their job. They didn't need to hold flowers. They didn't need to do anything but just be. They could, but they didn't need to. So yeah, that, that's kind of how the marketing developed over those years.

MM 6:18

Thinking about your wood fired work, and what that takes, the effort and the time and the resources. How did that develop over the years for you? And how, how maybe did that relate to having a community of potters in this area?

DL 6:39

Yeah. Well, that... kind of a one to one relationship to that. As far as, pretty hard to fire by oneself. I've done it once or twice and it's, it's not, it's, it's not a model that has a long life. Yeah. A couple of things coalesced with the wood firing. In my very first kiln, when I was a hobbyist, after college and before grad school, was a wood fired kiln but it was, it was a wood fired kiln only because we were poor enough that we didn't think we could pay for the deposit on a propane tank. And I talked to some other potters and educators and they said well you know, all you need to do is get it hot. You could, you could blow sawdust in, you could, now you could use coal... blowers, you could drip oil, you could use wood. Wood seemed to be the easiest for me to acquire and the least technical. And so that was my first kiln. And I was very, very upset when that, that created brown and tan stuff got all over my glazed pots. And so my, my solution to that was to try to turn myself into a human gas valve. And so I had these little sticks from Smoker Oar and Paddle Company, hard wood, and I put one in every 10 seconds for 10 hours. And that got to cone 10, and that minimized the amount of ash. So, I knew nothing about wood firing. For me it was just a fuel to make the kiln hot enough for glazes.

DL 8:37

I became aware, when I, after I took that kiln down and began gas firing. I became aware of what was the wood firing community around the world, will have probably first learned of Jack Troy during those years. Had a good friendship with him. He was another person I don't think I mentioned earlier, but he's been instrumental. Had a chance to do some long wood firing with him and with some other people. Loved that, loved that sense of community. And really the mystery and the paradox of making work that I couldn't really make--I couldn't do it myself. And so the ownership of that work when it comes out of the kiln is also kind of up for grabs. I made it, it's mine, but I didn't do it by myself, but I really couldn't make it, but I did. And so there is that, I liked that collaboration. I liked being able to do some things with a group that couldn't be done [alone]...

Video File #4 (afc2018030_05120_mv04.mp4)

MM 0:02

Heavy lifting.

DL 0:02

Yeah. Yeah, wood firing is a good example of heavy lifting, there's all the preparation, the splitting, the moving, getting the kiln ready, of course the firing, the shifts that you have to take for long fire. I started out doing short firings and very quickly the aesthetic of those long fire pieces, the beauty and the mystery and magical nature of, you know, sodium, potassium, calcium that's in the soil that gets up in the bark and canopy layer of a tree that gets wafting through a kiln that lands on a pot that's got some silica in the clay body. And you start making sodium silicate, potassium silicate calcium silicate glazes, and trace, trace amounts of non-soluble metals from the ground they get, by the enzymes in the roots of the trees, gets transported, transformed into soluble metals that land on your pots and change colors. That still excites me. And I think about those pots as being ones we receive more than we make.

DL 1:24

And about that time too. I did some teaching and some working with Jack Troy at Juniata College. He was at that time working on one of his seminal books, Wood-fired Stoneware and Porcelain. And the galley proofs were in, and all the photos for the whole book were on his dining room table. Of course, in those days, it was slides, transparencies, four by five transparencies, even some eight by ten transparencies. And he invited me to go through the images. And I saw some work from a Japanese potter that I just couldn't believe the colors. The brights, blues, the greens, the grays, the golds, not just browns. Remarkable coloration. That was Shiho Kanzaki, and I was just amazed by his work. And I even took the ISBN number off one of his big catalogs that he left with Jack. Hired a book finder to find it and never did. And discovered that he hands those out as gifts. They're really never marketed. But they're, they've got their ISBN information. So I said, "Hey, Jack, you got those books from him. You suppose you could give me his address, I'd like to see if I could buy one." So I sent an introductory letter and a request to buy one of these books. And in typical Japanese fashion, that illustration of Japanese hospitality, he sent me three, with no charge. That was then the beginning of a budding friendship that lasted until Kanzaki-san ["Mr. Kanzaki" in Japanese] died this last year. And it included my helping him with a copy, proofing, copy editing all of his English on his website. And it led to chances to work and exhibit in Japan with him. And more importantly, as I began to experience the long wood firing, knowing that if I was going to wood fire, that's what I wanted to do. So I built a kiln, remodeled a kiln and made one that allowed me to do 15 day firings without taking 15 days off of work. Would you like to hear about that?

MM 4:10

Please, yeah, absolutely.

DL 4:13

I had a, I rebuilt essentially rebuilt that first wood fire kiln after my, my studio was up and running at the Old Bag Factory. But right at the time I did that. I became aware of what was possible with long wood firing. And this kiln was really designed as a cross-draft kiln that might only make toasty warm pots, it didn't have a big enough firebox to ever burn enough wood to generate those kind of drips and runs and lovely complex surfaces. So it sat unused for a while. And then on a whim, I thought well what if my build a firebox on this kiln, it was about as big as the kiln. So I can, kind of like the most inefficient firing possible, that I'd have to burn lots of lots of wood. And so that's what I did. I built a firebox onto this kiln that was almost as big as the kiln itself. I'd heard stories of a Michigan potter Ken Shenstone who has a wood fire kiln that's just a tube up the side of the hill, but at the bottom, there's kind of an igloo, I don't know three, four, five fire boxes in it.

DL 5:29

And you know the mythology about Ken... was that he would, he'd meander on down there and he'd stoke all three of those boxes or four or whatever it was, and then he go back to the house and have a beer and an hour later he'd walk down stuck again. You know, my experience with wood firing was, you know, a piece every 10 seconds or later, you know, those 12 to 15 minutes stoking cycles that most of us are familiar with. And I thought, "Wow, you know if Ken can make his stokes an hour apart, what would it take, what would it take to make the stokes even farther apart?" So that I could do other things while I was firing. And so that, the idea was to design a firebox so big that I could stoke it only five times a day. So I would stoke it at breakfast time, I'd run off at lunch, stoke, supertime I would stoke, just quickly fill it with wood. And manage the draft so that would take five hours to burn that 65 cubic feet of wood, and then twice during the night. And that allowed me to be firing when nobody even knew it. I showed up at work every day, I, the only difference in my schedule is that I went home for lunch instead of eating there. And that allowed me to do these firings that ultimately ended up being where I sort of made a contribution to the field in terms of this kiln design. During the first 12 days, those five stokes a day, the kiln would reach about 13 or 1400 degrees in front, and a thousand degrees in back. And I was using Chinese elm, rich in potassium. Potassium starts to melt at about 1100 degrees F. So during those, during those first 12 days, actually, the flash was sticking and starting to melt on the pots. So it's building up a big base of natural ash. And then the last three days of the fire would be more like what we're used to. I would transition into a normal 15 minute stoke cycle around the clock with shifts of people helping. And we'd reach cone 10 in front, and then start the clock for 50 more hours of stoking. And that produced some really remarkable pots. In the middle of that time I went to Japan helped fire kilns there and realized that they were firing a lot hotter than I was. The color of the flame was whiter than I ever saw in one of my kilns. And so I started doing that and started getting color development that was outside the normal brown range. Oranges and pinks and blues and greens. And so that defined by wood firing for quite a long time.

MM 8:52

Well and that aspect of balance between trying to... trying to do that while working is really interesting.

DL 9:00

Yeah.

MM 9:04

Eventually, you weren't doing that by yourself anymore.

DL 9:09

Right.

MM 9:11

How did that, how did that change happen?

DL 9:15

Well, I would, you know, I probably picked an unlikely place for that kiln because I lived in a rural subdivision. And the person that owned the unsold lots was an attorney who had retired and I think needed something to do. So he looked around the subdivision and he saw the kiln. He wrote me a letter on his official, lawyerly stationery, and said, in essence, "You need stop that, I don't like it." And so I called and tried to talk with him. And he was not a nice, he was not a nice man. I guess that's the way, that's the best way to say it. And he told me in essence that, you know, suing people was his stock and trade, he could do it for free. And he would sue me until I didn't even have a place to live if he, if I wanted to, you know, argue with him. And so that kiln came down. And then I began looking for other opportunities. And, of course, the standard wood firing approach is to fire with at least six people and, and share shifts. And so my work in wood firing over those years had that element to for those last three days. So there was the beginning of this, this camaraderie and, and joy and you know, some of those people went on to build wood kilns that I helped fire. Tom Unzicker and Jeff Unzicker, Mark Goertzen, Todd Pletcher,

and probably even others. So, suddenly we have a number of wood fired kilns in this community. So we're helping each other. And Mark Goertzen, I think kind of coined the phrase... what was it? You wrote about it.

MM 11:12

The Michiana aesthetic.

DL 11:12

The Michiana aesthetic. And I think that that Michiana aesthetic was, was informed by the way I fired that kiln and my interest in Japan and those kinds of pots. We did fire hotter and longer than, than many people did. And so the works were juicier and there was a lot of side firing and a lot of upside down firing, I think. I think the Michiana aesthetic certainly changed and surpassed what it was when I was kind of helping define it. But it's it's been, it's been formed by a whole bunch of people pursuing that hot, juicy aesthetic. And we've all made pots that we never could have dreamed of because we had this opportunity to work in other people's kilns, participate. Learn from other people and their approaches. and participate.

MM 11:14

Yeah.

DL 11:38

Yeah, for sure.

MM 12:03

I think for a lot of people, if you're looking for a community of artists, you're not necessarily looking at a tiny little town in Indiana. But clearly, that's, that's developed and it sounds as though, even when you were getting started, there were artists to fill out the Old Bag Factory and...

DL 12:41

Right.

MM 12:42

What is it about this area that brings people in or that keeps people here? And how have you all made that work over the years?

DL 12:52

I wish I'd thought to bring that list out. I had the opportunity recently that to speak at a monthly event in Goshen, and the question was how did little sleepy Goshen become like a destination for the arts. And I outlined 10 things that I thought had had an effect on that. I'll try to reconstruct some of that. And I'll probably, I will forget part of it. A lot of people in this area come from an Amish or Mennonite background, I mean, not the majority, but a lot. Enough to sort of leaven the community with a hard working lifestyle, a responsible, hard working work ethic. And appreciating things that are well-made, last a long time. And there are, I mean, among the Mennonites and Amish, you know, there's, there's quilting... that's another community. Very few people make quilts by themselves. Some people do. But it's a social gathering. It's something we do together. There's a lot of strong wood working tradition here, of course. So there was that sort of undercurrent of work ethic here that I think played a part in some way.

DL 14:28

I think the fact that the Goshen College was here, and it was a liberal arts school, where every student going through had to be, had to take some art and art appreciation classes and some studio classes. I think that informed generation after generation of people, many of whom stayed in this area, about the value and legitimacy of art. And you know, with a greater understanding, there's greater appreciation and the potential for greater support for the artists themselves. So I think Goshen College would be a second thing.

DL 15:12

The Midwest Museum of American Art, I'd say, is a third thing, they I think are, I think they're in over their 30th year now. Maybe 40th. Of having regional juried competitions, so a 16 county area, Michigan and Indiana. And they've done a terrific job at cultivating collectors. So there are some, like there's best pottery, there's best painting, there's best, best, best with small financial prizes attached to them. But the biggest financial prizes, come in form of purchase awards, they've developed relationships with this community, businesses, doctors, I mean, not just the wealthiest of people, but crossing that whole spectrum. And I think there probably are, I don't know how many, but this last year, there were more than \$25,000 in purchase awards, and it's been at about that level for I think the last five or six years. And you know, in the teens and 20s, low 20s for many years as well. And, and so, I think Midwest Museum, in cultivating collectors and compensation to local artists also played a piece in that.

DL 16:40

I think Notre Dame University benefitted this whole area the same way that Goshen did, Goshen College did, but in a, it's a different way. A different way. The performing arts there, and such.

DL 17:03

There's a guy by the name of Dave Pottinger, who lives in Goshen, he his wife have for many years remodeled buildings, and made them available to artists, on terms that artists could afford. That had to do with the amount of lease, rent, the terms of the lease, the flexibility, the opportunity to have a hand in some of the remodeling to reduce your, your lease amount. And he's done more than I even know. But I think if you isolate one individual, that made Goshen a welcoming spot for potters, excuse me for artists, but potters also, with affordable studio spaces, it would be him. He's still doing that.

DL 18:03

Then I would say Larion and Nancy Swartzendruber when they decided back there where our previous building was condemned, when they decided to buy a building that was far bigger than they could fill, and invite me to be a part of that. And to set out to, to create that oversized covey of producing artists and craftsmen. That made a significant impact on the community. Now we were a viable destination point, we were, and I talked about this in that meeting. Initially, there was such a buzz about the Bag Factory that's located, you know, as you know, a little ways out of downtown. That it created some tension, we were, we were a direct competition, were perceived as a direct competition to downtown merchants. And there was, for some time, there was no love lost between the two groups. And I think we at the Bag Factory shared in that sort of unfortunate thing, because we were kind of high and heavy on how this was going. And we were well received, traffic was growing, the occupancy was growing. And it took us and the downtown, some time to realize that we'd be much, both of us be much better if we worked at this together. And there was a, I think, a genuine healing and a genuine sense of collaboration. I think that got, that got illustrated formally, in a couple of ways. Invitations for people to be a part of the Downtown Merchants Association, and oh, what's the city? The organization that businesses are a part of in a city and...?

MM 20:04

Uh huh.

DL 20:07

Yep, we'll remember that.

MM 20:14

I know what you mean, and it's...

DL 20:16

It'll come to one of us, but anyway... two things happened. The cost of joining the, what we can't say...

MM 20:30

I keep thinking Chamber of Commerce,

DL 20:33

That's it!

MM 20:34

...doesn't sound right.

DL 20:35

That's right. The cost to join the Chamber of Commerce was prohibitive for many of us as small one or two or three person producing artists and craftsmen. And for, when, when the relationship wasn't that good, the Chamber of Commerce said well pay or you don't get to be part of it, you can't be represented. And they had a change of heart. That said, "You know what if we, what if we considered the Bag Factory as an, as a one business, one entity? And what if we made each individual shop's membership, a smaller fraction of what was normal?" So that was saying, "Yeah, we really do want you here, we'd like to have you a part of us." And then another thing that was sort of an explicit recognition was that each year the chamber selects two businesses as like, Business of the Year. And they selected two businesses out of the Bag Factory, the Swartzendruber Hardwood Creations and the Pottery at a point. And so that was a real explicit way of saying, "Yeah, you're, you're one of us. We're not, we're not other, to each other."

DL 21:58

What else? Amish country, the fact that Northern Indiana was already a destination point. And that people coming had a preconceived notion, right or wrong, that they were going to find fine, handcrafted, works there. Items of integrity, durability, longevity, beauty. So Amish country kind of pre-sorted the audience that came to this area. And so we, we made up our contribution to that by creating a destination point that reinforced those same values.

DL 22:39

The recreational vehicle industry also brings a lot of people to this part of the part of the world, I can't tell you how many times we'd see 65ish, 60ish couples roaming the Bag Factory, very leisurely with a lot of time on their hands, and we soon came to recognize that they had brought their RV back to the factory to have some warranty work done, or some repair work done, and they had a lot of time on their hands. And we were someplace that they could go. Now they weren't, many of them weren't the best customers because they're in a vehicle that's not very big going down the highway, right? But they told their sons and daughters and families and relatives and friends and I mean, they were promoters of that, of the arts in Goshen as well.

DL 23:37

Back to Dave Pottinger, another contribution that he made is he started creating and nurturing the guild system that is in existence. So there's a jewelers guild, a painters guild, printmakers guild, photography guild, woodworkers guild, jewelers, did I say jewelers guild, clay artists guild. And Dave has helped create spaces for all that and has really nurtured that. And so now, suddenly, the residents of Goshen who want to participate in any of those things have a place to do it. And so they're being educated. They're valuing the work, not only the chance to do it and make it themselves but the work of those of us who are working professionally, full time at it.

DL 24:28

That's most of the 10, but I think that's why this place was able to do it, the confluence of all of those streams none of which alone, even Dave alone couldn't have made it all happen, but all these other things working together made the kind of perfect storm for a good thing to happen in Goshen.

MM 24:49

Yeah. Yeah. That's... It's really, it's really impressive to think of all of that coming together. I think it's a rare place that sees all those things happen in the same span of time. Let me check our time...

Video File #5 (afc2018030_05120_mv05.mp4)

MM 0:05

So, you're at a point now where you are "not retired." But you've seen a shift in, you know, the types of work that you're doing, the place that you're working. How has that change worked for you, and, you know, thinking about the last 10 years or so? What does that point in your career look like for you?

DL 0:34

Yeah. That's a terrific question. And...it's been, it's been really positive. All those years, I worked the Old Bag Factory, I was surrounded by employees, and customers. And, you know, we made it a point to speak with everybody who came through. So we did, when the traffic was 120,000 people a year we would spend a lot of time going out to the showroom, and inviting people into the studio and chatting with them. And so for the first time, I'm working alone. I mean, I worked alone as a hobbyist. And maybe for the first six months, in 1981, when I opened the business, and after that, there have always been other folks around. So working, I mean, I miss that, and there's value in... that could be a whole other discussion, the value of working with employees around. But, but that's different for me, there's this quietness. And over the years, you know, maintaining that, as a production potter, maintaining that 100 product, product line. And also, taking quite a few custom orders. I thought I needed to that, it was my least favorite part of the work. But I thought I needed to do it to be providing customer service to those people. And to the extent that I could do it, I did. Sometimes people ask for things I couldn't do. And then I've just said I couldn't. But if it was possible, I would try it. And when I, when I moved here, I decided that I wouldn't take any orders. I would try that. I would try that. And I wouldn't make anything that I really wasn't interested in, not meaning to imply that I wasn't interested in the production line, I was, but there were things, there were objects that I prefer making over other objects. And so I, I gave myself permission here to only make what interests me.

DL 3:06

A challenging part of this time of life is, establishing new ways of marketing. I don't have those people walking through my showroom. I hadn't developed any relationships with galleries. So diversifying my, my ways of selling. And my ways of making my work known to others has been a challenge. Social media is an important part of that. And you know, as an old dog, I've needed to learn some new tricks. I'm glad that that's really nudged me to do that. I can talk knowledgeably to my kids about things, things related to social media and all that. Yeah, the schedule is different. I feel like I'm working almost full time, but the amount of flexibility I have is just remarkable. If I want to take a nap in the afternoon I do. If I want to take a deer... a day processing this venison that I took last week. That's what I'm doing today, except for this. So I can. And that's really a pleasure. I'm really grateful for that.

DL 4:27

One of the things that puzzles me about this time of life is that I'm not writing as much as I used to. I can say definitively that over the course of the 25 years or so that I've been writing articles for ceramics publications, I have always had a list of other articles that I want to get to. And I don't have that now. And it's kind of a puzzle, it's kind of puzzle for me. I think in many respects, you know the, the subject matter of those articles paralleled my work life. When I treated myself to that sabbatical, I wrote about how potters can plan sabbaticals for themselves. I, you know, I worked in saggar firing and raku and wood firing and side firing, and I wrote about those things. And opportunities to travel to Japan. And I wrote about those things. And you know, most recently, I wrote about this whole business of slowing down a bit. And I wrote about the people who had worked for me who had gone on to their own careers.

DL 5:43

But I wonder, you know, what do I, what do I have to say now? Maybe, maybe this is the time to be listening more than speaking. I want, I want not to be so driven, and ambitious, that I can't slow down. Ambition is a really important part of my success as a self-supporting potter, but I have seen some people my age who are, who seem so ambitious that they don't want anyone to surpass them. And so they strive to be on top of the heap. And I've, I've said, not so much in jest that they, some of those people have become caricatures of themselves, working so hard to stay ahead of everyone that they don't make so much room for others. And I think my job now is to do whatever I can to make sure that the people coming up, surpass me. And so I resigned from my position as, on the editorial advisory board of Ceramics Monthly magazine, because I thought somebody younger should be there. And it was well received, graciously received. And yeah, so... doing those mentorship, doing the workshops was a way I saw myself as contributing to the next generations. Certainly the writing was. But I think that's a question, okay, what is the shape, for me right now? I'm 66 next week. I'm working alone. I don't have as much contact with other clay artists as I once had. What's the shape of contributing to the next generation? I'm not sure. I think it involves social media at some point.

DL 8:01

And I, kind of test this idea with you. I'm not sure it's, I'm not sure I've settled on this. But you know, when I got sick, in 2004, for a better part of five or six years, I kind of disappeared because I was, I was sick. And I was being, I was in treatment, I was not working, and I was getting better, getting worse, and getting better. And when I finally resurfaced, the field had gone on, it had sort of forgotten me. And I wasn't writing much during that time. And so I, I wrote an article about reemerging, reemerging what happened to, many of us reemerge for a lot of reasons, maybe we take some time off of our work to be with aging parents, or in the early part of our children's lives, or, you know, lots of reasons, illness. People retiring from teaching positions, have to kind of reemerge and evaluate their contribution to the field. Where did I start. Oh, I said I wanted to test an idea with you. I disappeared, I disappeared then. And moving here, I've kind of disappeared too. And I, someone encouraged me to think about whether, maybe some retelling of my old story would be appropriate, with a view towards a general audience who doesn't know me, but who's, who's in the field. And so I've started doing some of that, I don't know if you've seen any of the longer text posts in Facebook, or Instagram, retelling some stories with a view towards sort of putting it out there and not saying this is what you should learn from this, but sort of what, what would you learn from this? This happened to me, kind of thing. So I'm trying that as a way, of testing to see whether that is really of value to other folks. And I'm going to have to make that evaluation, I think, based on the responses I get, and not very many people do more than like or, or nothing. So to kind of review what I've learned through narrative, through storytelling, and they have to be interesting stories to get people to read them. And that sort of challenges that writing urge. I'm re, reworking some things that I've written or published, with a view towards what I'm trying to do. I don't know, we'll see if it's well received or not, and then if it, I'll only keep doing it if I have a sense that it's, you know, really making something, a good contribution and not just a breast beating.

MM 11:21

Have you thought about a book or an autobiography or anything like that?

DL 11:27

I visited that idea. A few times. And I, you know, I sort of wrote my book, in 50 chapters that were published in ceramics periodicals, you know. I don't think I have something cohesive to say, that I haven't already said in a variety of other ways. And I looked to see whether there would be any interest in the part of publishers for, you know, a reprinting of some of these things. And in an assembled book that had a focus, and I didn't, I didn't find any interest in that... publication. I mean I could self publish, but then I'd have to learn how to market books.

MM 12:29

There's a new career path for you.

DL 12:35

So maybe, maybe I retell a few of these things. I think that it might be a little bit of a counterbalance to the fact that that, that "Retirement, Meaning, and Generativity" article seem to indicate that, to too many people that I was actually announcing my retirement, which I wasn't. So maybe, an increased presence, retelling some stories to people who've never... it'd be retelling, but they'd be told to people who've never heard them. That might be, that might be the way I could focus on, you know, offering something to the next generations of potters who are coming up. Hope so. If not, I'll have to keep looking for something else.

MM 13:24

Yeah. Yeah. And you mentioned, you know, kind of looking to see what people would learn from those. But if you were, and I mean, you've done some mentorship, some workshops, if you were to think about, and this is, this is probably too big a question for a few minutes. But if you were to think about advice that you would give to folks who want to be a potter, pursue that career.

DL 13:49

Yeah, yeah... That's such a big... I address, address it a little bit with a handout that I give, seven questions that creative people must face. And it has to do with our understanding of failure, what that means and what it doesn't mean. It has to do with how will we embrace ambivalence and ambiguity and contradiction? It has to do with, one of the questions I ask, it's not meant to be redundant, but what do you do when you don't know what to do? I'd want to advise people to take stock of what their backup plan is, what's the knee-jerk? Yeah, some people just try harder, put their head down, go. Some people step away, some people seek advice, some people research on the web. I would, I'd want people to think about that in advance. I want them to identify the people they most admire, and start to assess what are the qualities about that person that they most admire? And if that's, identify it, then how do you go about developing that yourself? I would advise people to, whether they're production potters or art potters or even hobbyists, are you making what really moves you? That's what keeps me here. And you know, at this time of my life, I'm making fewer things and having less exposure, I'm still really vitally interested in what comes out of that kiln. And trying to break some of the rules. But I'm in a spot now where I can, I can afford to break the rules. Not everybody can. I can, I can afford a little more failure, and a little more experimentation. And beyond that I think, advice, just have to keep making pots every day, or I say every day, but you just have to keep making. Keep your eyes open. be, and embrace surprise, embrace stuff that doesn't turn out the way you want. And, and wonder aloud, what about this little area right over here in this failure pot? If I could do that over the whole pot, wouldn't that be something? Ask those kinds of questions. And most important thing I'd say probably is, create a community for yourself, whether that's a physical community of potters in your area, artists in your area, whether it's, we have lots of access to people through social media, email, phone, Facebook, FaceTime, I mean, build community, find ways to regularly be with them.

MM 17:21

As far as it's, I mean, some people don't have a choice in where they are or what region they're in. But if someone's choosing a place, what are the sort of concrete benefits to having somebody down the street? Or a 10 minute drive away?

DL 17:37

Yeah, it's, it's counterintuitive, in a way. We've been taught to think competitively, about so many things. So, you know, another potter? That's gonna hurt my business. You know, I think we've taken a point of view here, this Michiana group, more, more is better. And, I mean, not every community is as open and embracing. And so I can't, you know no one can guarantee you how you're going to be received. Some people continue to think competitively. But... restate your question again.

MM 18:30

I'm just thinking about the, the... it maybe wasn't a clear question. I'm thinking about sort of the, you can have this online community, community at a distance, but there, if you're in a position to chose working in a region with other potters, what do you get out of having them right there down the street?

DL 18:51

The density of the relationship is so much different. You're, you're working with, eating with, yeah, exhibiting with. Promoting with. Yeah, they're, I think there develops then a sense of loyalty and loyalty then spawns all kinds of other good things that are positive for relationships. And I think, you know, the spill over to the rest of life is pretty dramatic. I mean, when we see ourselves as collaborators, with other people, we understand in such a deep and intense way, it's life is better when we work together. You know, we need more of that right now, don't we? It can't happen in as vital a way if you're not actually looking someone in the eye. And being involved in the stuff of life, making yourself available to help, seeking assistance when you need it. That stuff can happen. And it enriches in ways that are hard to... It's not that they're hard to describe, but they're hard to get explicit about... we know it when we have it, don't we? And it, when we're in relationship with other folks, an awful lot of good can happen.

DL 20:32

I remember, one of the things that I'm proudest of, in a way. Back when Mark was at the studio, Tom Unzicker, Jeff Unzicker, maybe Eric Strader. We learned of a program called Soup of Success, SOS. It had been pioneered in Denver, Denver. It was a job training program for women who'd never been, who'd never held a job in the workplace. And so they mix these soup and cooking mixes, you may have seen them around here for sale. And they came and they learned how to show up on time and be dressed appropriately, and how to relate to other employees and to bosses, how to be timely with production, how to meet with customers and work at customer satisfaction issues, how to plot and plan strategies for, for growth and budget change and development, product, product growth. And so that was successfully happening in Denver. And there were people in this area that were just starting something and they needed some seed money to hire a short term administrator to put the final touches on a package, a plan that they could sell to get some grant money for. And we raised \$10,000 in one, I say in one evening. We, we each made, five of us made 100 bowls in an evening, we invited friends who are all good cooks, by the way, we only invited people who could cook. We had a, kind of a deluxe kind of a gourmet picnic in the studio. And then we had, we had people pugging clay, bringing us clay, taking away bowls, and we all five of us threw 100 bowls that evening, and we finished them. And then we did a, kind of a soup, kind of a empty bowls kind of event where people paid for a bowl of soup, and they got a bowl. And all that money went to this, to the seed money for this organize... and that's, and that's continuing to function, and it's impacted the lives of a lot of women in really good ways. And that, that's the kind of thing that can't happen when you're alone. You get together and you say, "Hey, we, you know, we could, couldn't we?" So yeah.

MM 23:23

That's really fantastic. I'd not heard that story before. I don't want to keep you too late. But one of the questions I like to ask toward the end of these interviews is, what have I missed? What about your career, or a career as a potter have I, have I not asked about that you think is really crucial?

DL 23:46

I might take a rain check and try to think a bit and offer you a bit more if I think of a... I mean, I feel like I've been really, really fortunate, being able to do what I wanted. And I think, at least I've been told, and I believe that it's true, is that I tried to run the business, both with employees and with customers in relational ways. One of the stories that illustrates it the best, and it's only an anecdote. But you know, when we got bumped out of that building, and had to relocate. It was nine months before the studio was finished. And I had some of these very ware carts with all my finished goods on them, covered with plastic, because were remodeling. And I had one hot electrical outlet in 3000 feet of space. So there were extension cords everywhere, and I had some clip-on paint lamps, that was the only light in there that was generated by the power in the building. And you had to walk, you had to actually kind of clamber up a plank and walk past a \$60,000 hot tar tank that was kind of in the way of the, what was going to be the main entry. And I was, I mean, I didn't make anything for nine months. And people kept coming. They followed me over there. And they kept coming. And I think some of them shopped more than they normally shopped, because they were interested in seeing me succeed. And the shopping experience was, you

came in and you got a flashlight, I had some flashlights, you lifted the plastic, and you're shopped by flashlight. And there were I think, a lot of days that they probably were more convinced that I could survive this than I was. But it's, I mean I'm, I had this career totally because there were folks that supported me and were interested in my success. I think some of them would probably say the same of me, that they were customers because I was interested in their lives and their relationships. And so in the, in a way I've just had the best of the best because the, with very few exceptions, the, very few exceptions, the relationships with my employees are ongoing. They're friends. And friends, I mean, a large number of the people I'm still really good friends with came out of originally meeting at the Bag Factory in my studio. So, yeah. Yeah, the relational aspects of this are, are essential and they'll make it really, really good.

MM 27:31

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you.

DL 27:34

Thanks for the chance to think about this.

MM 27:38

It's always a good conversation. I really appreciate it.

DL 27:44

I'll be interested to hear from you, too...