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Interview with Martha Gies (audio)

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Narrator: Martha Gies (MG)

Interviewer: Heather O. Petrocelli (HP)

Date: July 8, 2011

Place: Martha Gies's house in Portland, OR

Transcribed by Carolee Harrison, January 2014

Audited by Meg Langford, February 2014

Semi-Verbatim Transcript

HP: This is Heather Oriana Petrocelli, interviewing Martha Gies on July 8, 2011, in Portland, Oregon, in her home. Martha, do I have permission to record you for the Center for the Moving Image Oral History collection?

MG: Yes, you do.

HP: So, I basically just wanted to start learning about how you learned about CMI, and if you took any courses at CMI.

MG: I took one course in filmmaking, it was in the catalog as a Tom Taylor course; it was the summer of 1976, and so I think it was one of those summer course that met a lot, maybe every day—obviously that was a long time ago so I might be wrong about that. When I arrived, I found the whole place kind of shrouded in worry—Tom had just had a heart attack. I did not know him; it was kind of a hobby of mine in those days to take courses on college campuses, and I would take Chaucer, or Russian history, or Sanskrit, or what have you. But this was my only filmmaking class, and so I felt sad, even though I didn't know Tom Taylor. But everyone around CMI was very worried about him. So John Stewart taught that class for him; he pulled John Stewart in at the last moment. And that's where I immediately met Jim Blashfield, because Jim Blashfield had a little job—I think it was a job, I don't think it was a self-appointed volunteer gig, but he was the guy who checked out the equipment when we took cameras out—and I met Dave Milholland right away, because there was a girl in that class named [Lynn Fenders?]. She and I would go out and sit in the Park Blocks and smoke, on break, you know these were longish classes. I think we also, I think maybe our projects were supposed to be team filmed or something, but we worked together all the time in that class. And her boyfriend was Dave Milholland, or, her *ex*-boyfriend from Lewis & Clark was Dave Milholland—but they are, or were, good friends. So I immediately met him. I didn't meet Tom Taylor during that period at all. Presumably he came home from the hospital and was convalescing, but he didn't come down to CMI during John's class.

So he was like this legend that was floating around us, to begin with.

HP: Did you have any knowledge of Andries Deinum?

MG: Oh, yeah, I mean, Andries Deinum was a different kind of legend, you know. Tom, it's funny, but Tom, kind of on the practical side, because he taught people hands-on filmmaking, and Andries, of course, more on the theoretical or historical side, because he lectured. I did, over the

years, in the early years, sit in on classes when I could have – Deinum’s – but never took a class from him.

And I would see him at Tom’s house once in a while before he got sick.

HP: Based on what you just said, does that mean that Deinum kind of had a reputation in Portland?

MG: Oh, totally. Even before he started CMI, yeah. In fact, I was just reading Brooke [Jacobson]’s bio of him in the Oregon Encyclopedia, there were things I had forgotten that he had film classes and things before CMI.

HP: So then, when you said you took... you said you were in ’76...

MG: That was the summer of ’76.

HP: I’m just trying to piece the timelines together... [**MG**, interjecting: Me too.] Isn’t that... so basically, let’s do it this way. How did that morph into you becoming, essentially, the [Northwest Media Project] director?

MG: The point person for it. Well, what happened was... backing up, and you’ll have to make this interleaf with Brooke’s, probably better, accounting of what happened before that, but, Brooke and Bob [Summers] had, of course, as you say, with a lot of people involved, started the Film Study Center. I should say, and surely someone has told you this, they ran the film program at Portland State before that. I mean, they slid into a lot of things. But the reason I’ve always heard why the Film Study Center started when it did was because the National Endowment for the Arts had announced this media element. So you could get a media program grant. And the reason it started at the art museum [Portland Art Museum] rather than Portland State was that, Portland State was the *logical* place to start it, they were all over there, but Portland State, when they went to them, was going to take like a 30% grant bite or something. For what? And so they went to the art museum and got a much more reasonable and favorable administrative overhead charge.

So when the art museum co-opted the program, after Brooke and Bob got it running, the way it was explained to me—and, believe me even coming along later in the mid-70s I heard this story *plenty* of times from *plenty* of people—but, by the time the Media Project had its second wind—I was its second wind, Brooke was its first—the Film Study Center, as configured by Bob Sitton, then the director, and by the art museum itself, and without any of the original people—there was a big walk-off, people walked off the board of directors. The intervening board of directors, the film studies board of directors, they had a big walkout after the takeover, and when I came on board, there were people who would not enter the art museum; in the film community who would not *enter* the art museum. Or any of the films, some of which were quite rare and wonderful, they would not go to there.

The situation that was still needling Tom was that, okay, now we’re a few years down the road, and we have a film program, housed at the art museum, but they’re showing old Laurel and

Hardy and Humphrey Bogart movies. And they're rankling the commercial exhibitors, who don't get NEA grants, and don't get non-profit status, but they're [the art museum is] charging money for people to see them. And so there was an uneasy relationship with the commercial community, and there was an uneasy relationship now with the Northwest filmmakers, because Brooke and Bob's idea, and of course Tom's, who had trained these people, would be this could be both. It would be an exhibition center where people could learn from admirable films, which aren't always the Laurel and Hardy rake-in-the-dollars films, and they could have a place to exhibit their own work, and it could be an education center, obviously, but also a place for exhibition—and exhibition for the general public.

I honestly think somebody at some point on the board of directors of the art museum must have said, "Why are we showing Harry Dawson's work, or Will Vinton's work..."—before Will was famous—"and we're getting 35 people in when we could get 350 people in if we show *The Maltese Falcon* again? What?" So I think they were looking at, you know, more revenue, even though the media grant was given to encourage the local arts. So that was the thing that stuck in our craw.

The other story I heard—I mean, you're going to record a great deal of gossip, and a great deal of rumor, and probably a great deal of misremembered history—but the other piece I remember was that while everybody was still very worked about this issue, Brooke herself had gone on to Los Angeles and had other fish to fry. And so when I met her, I was astonished that this was the last thing she wanted to talk about. I think she had, and has, come to terms with it with a pretty healthy attitude, just in terms of getting on with her life; she's not someone who would never go to a film... you know, she's just not that type of person. But it was impossible, almost, when you'd go take your marbles, what's left of them, across town, to start the Media Project, with which they hoped to start all over again, make what they meant to make in the first place, *do* what that first grant request said, which now wasn't being done. It was very hard, because, you can't take your marbles across town. You can't take the exhibition center, you can't take the money that they'd written the grant for, you can't take that prestige that, that combination... so, it was very hard.

I can't remember now, Heather, how long it was between the time Brooke left and I came on, but I know why they... "they" being the ex-board of directors who were still pissed about it and one is Ron Finne in Eugene, he and Tom were very close. Jack Sanders, a couple of women, Carol Thomas, whom you may have heard about, and Pat Joy, who has since died, she was the first woman news cameraman on the west coast, they were all involved. She was actually Carol Thomas's mentor and she too became a shooter for TV... These people were the people who hired me. It was Dave Milholland who asked me to apply for the job.

But why it happened when it did in '77 was President Carter and the CETA grant—the work program. All the arts organizations in town were taking advantage of these federal grant funds for the time being, to try to get positions funded that they hadn't. You know, you can get a project grant but you can't get overhead, you can't get staff salary, that's the way grants work. CETA permitted you to have salary. So Tom's bright idea was that... you have to understand that I *loved* Tom Taylor, and *everybody* did. You could not breathe or walk at his wake [chuckling]. So if I say Tom's "bright idea," it was with a great deal of impatient fondness, or fond impatience. [laughing] His

bright idea was, “Oh, we’ve got the CETA grant, we should get a director, we’ll get a CETA grant for one year, and if we have a director...”—never mind that there were no funds for an office, to rent an office, or postage stamps, or a telephone line or anything—but “If we get a director for one year, then she can raise the money to make the thing go.” And there were a lot of people who wanted that job. Looking back on it now, that’s hilarious to me, that anybody wanted that job. It sounds very glamorous; you get to run a film organization. But given the paucity of, and the improbability of, wherewithal to do it, it is pretty amazing that we pulled it off.

HP: So what were those early years like, once you had the grant, and you were now in... ?

MG: Well, first there were five interviews. You have to understand that they put me through five interviews and the last time Tom Taylor called my house, he was at that point chairman of the board, and the last time he called my house I was ready to tell him that I wasn’t doing any more interviews. But on that particular call, which was the sixth, it was to tell me that I had the job. But I think he, they understood, you know they’d been burned, I didn’t know all those stories at the time. They didn’t tell all those stories to the applicants, you know, we didn’t learn until later why they were so cautious. He just wanted to make darn sure that they didn’t squander that CETA grant. And so then, what I had was the CETA grant, that is to say, a salary of let’s say eight hundred dollars a month, which you know, however many years ago that was, ’77, thirty-four years ago, that was a salary, it was a salary you could live on. I had about sixty, I think, what my mother would call “recipe cards,” that had filmmakers’ names on them and a phone number. And in some cases maybe an address. And they were old—how old they were, that’s what Brooke left behind.

So, [pause] I don’t know. I don’t know. Sometimes it’s very hard, you probably should be talking to Melissa Marsland who worked very closely with me, and who is Jim’s partner. She was the first person I hired, and when I left, at the end of 1980—I was there three and a half years—we had somehow, and I say “we” because it was always Tom. Tom and I were inseparable in those years, and again, not as lovers, just as conspirators practically. A lot of working till 9 and then drinking after work, and then more work, you know. He somehow, by the end of that, we had two offices in Film Row, and an in-house staff of five. And we got our first NEA grant because I had gone back to a big conference in Washington [D.C.] and just told the appropriate people what the hell the problem was out here. They didn’t snatch those away from the Film Study Center, as far as I knew, but they did understand that there was no endorsement of local film. I mean, had it not been for us, I doubt if there even would have been a Northwest film festival. I think that was all coming from pressure from us, that we were saying that they were doing nothing, and so they had to hurry up and think of doing something—but the principal difference was, the Media Project, as it was reconfigured, was reconfigured as a distribution collective. So people were *members* of the Media Project; that was a big difference. They had an ownership there.

HP: You just said something that I’m not quite sure about—you called it Filmmakers’ Row, or...?

MG: Oh, Film Row? The old film building in Portland, at Lovejoy and 19th, it's a whole city block with a tile roof, it looks like thirties studio Los Angeles... and it was. That's when before the great—what do they call that—vertical monopolies were broken in Hollywood. All the theaters were also distributors and studios, so they all had offices in a Film Row building. It looked like the thirties. But when we were there, TekniFilm, the lab, the film lab here took half the building, and the other half was a bunch of the old small distributors and a screening room for the press, and then we had rented an office there, and then we rented *another* office there.

So we were pretty darned visible, you know, by the end we had not only the staff but a couple of other CETA grants running that employed lots of people to do media around town, and we had, finally, collaborations with the labs. We did two nationally advertised seminars that brought people in from Europe even; one at the Benson Hotel on film distribution and one on film production at the Sheraton. Or vice versa—the hotels may be vice versa. And they were money makers. We brought a teacher up from Los Angeles, from UCLA, to teach filmmakers how to direct actors, because that had always been kind of a sticking point; Portland was very strong in animation and documentary film, but there was a little bit of a gulch you had to jump over to get to where you felt comfortable directing actors on film; and she came up and we did a wonderful workshop with her. We may have brought her up more than once; I know they continued to bring her up after I was gone, that was one thing they did continue.

The Media Project never had the juice again ... I mean it flagged and had a number of short-term directors and then quit, effectively, although as I said they've kept the 501(c)(3) viable. You wouldn't want the Oregon Department of Revenue hearing this part of the tape, probably, but it just never had the juice it did when we were there. And I say "we;" it was very much a "we." The board was amazing. Karl Simons was amazing on the board, and, Tom. You know, Tom was just propelled, because he was a very driven guy anyway about the potential for social reform through film. But he also had, I'm sure, to prove that by God they could do it and do it over again, you know. He was an amazing individual.

You know, talking about it like that sounds like there was a lot of machismo there, and there was *none*. There was, you just...have you seen film of Tom? Oh, well. Tom Chamberlin would have some, yeah.

HP: At that time, basically—this is a kind of grand sketch—but the PSU Film Committee sort of begat the founding of the Northwest Film Study Center, which, the mission of that kind of got overhauled ... which then led to the foundation of the... [interrupted]

MG: Tainted, I would... [laughing]

HP: [interrupting] ...which led to the foundation of the Media Project, to very specifically serve local, regional, filmmakers' needs? Can you recollect, from then, what the community's initial response to the Media Project was?

MG: Well, I don't know what its initial response was because I wasn't around when Brooke was there. But when we got underway, my first two staff people came on at the same time, Melissa Marsland and David Gettman. David Gettman has since passed away. Melissa's still alive and kicking—she stayed on as assistant director with at least one more director, then went off to produce films for quite a while, and then went back to University of Portland and got a master's degree in teaching and now teaches Spanish in a very poor Portland high school, and is still a “true believer.” She's my oldest friend.

So, she and I got a grant from the Oregon Department of Economic Development to do the first directory of Oregon film services. So we were working both sides of the street; we were trying to help the Oregon economic development recognize that when people came to Oregon for a shoot, because they wanted to use Crater Lake or Mt. Hood or Portland or whatever as a backdrop, that they didn't have to bring every last grip and, you know. And so we produced the very first directory of film services, and we continue to produce that. I had money from that...is this true?...Yeah, I think actually we hired David and Melissa on CETA grants, but then I had money for their projects from Oregon Department of Revenue. So that was the commercial side. And that was very exciting to the film community, because there was a lot of the film community that that's what they wanted to do, they didn't want to make their own, you know, David Lynch-type garage film, that takes seven years of cab driving to produce, they wanted to work in the big time, they wanted to be a sound person on a “real” film or whatever. So that made the film community very happy.

And then we served as umbrellas for films that were funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the National...what is it, Committee...is it Committee for the Humanities? It's the NCH, anyway. And the Oregon Arts Commission used to fund film, and the Oregon Humanities Commission used to fund film, OCH, used to fund film. So we umbrellaed at the state and the national level so that people could get film grants. So I was effectively, to the extent that I was the executive director of the Media Project and the person responsible for filing for all the money every year, the reports of all the money that passed through the organization every year, I was effectively the executive producer on all these films. I mean, which is an interesting role, because I wasn't a filmmaker. But I'm a pretty well-organized person, you know, I'm a paperwork person. And I've always been a writer, and I help people write grants, to get grants.

HP: Could you just expand a little bit about a few of the films or filmmakers that stood out?

MG: Well, let me answer more directly your question first. So then Melissa, after we did that, I think her first project was working on that directory. But after that, she kind of took over the exhibition end. We got members in Washington and Idaho and...let me see...British Columbia... Washington, Idaho, British Columbia, Montana, and Alaska; we had a few in Alaska, and she would, we collected their films, they were juried; we had these long three-day jurying sessions out at Tom Taylor's cabin in Cannon Beach. And then we would put together a film catalog and then we would try to get libraries and art galleries, mostly, sometimes schools, to show those films, to rent a whole program. So that was the rental part of the catalog.

And then we also—to get visibility for our filmmakers—then we also would produce them ourselves, like we would just go to a tavern to let us project one night, and we put posters up all over town, that we were going to see, you know, a night of animation or whatever. So how the community responded? Well, if you worked any idea long enough, you know, [laughing] you'd get some return, I mean, it's PR work, what can I say? We did it in Seattle as well. We had one issue of the newsletter that was all a profile of Seattle filmmakers. And they were very jealous, I remember; they were like “Wow,” you know, “in Oregon they have all this *stuff*, they have the Film Study Center, and they have you guys, and...” you know, there was really nothing equivalent in Seattle at all. [25:59]

HP: Do you have a recollection, of, during your tenure, the height of the membership?

MG: I have no idea of membership numbers. But what I do have, if you want to turn this off for a minute, is I have newsletters... [recording cuts off]

[recording resumes in mid-conversation]

MG: I think we all were so fond of Tom [Taylor] that there was this huge effort to vindicate him. [laughing] It's so funny. [pause]

HP: Vindicate him from his... ?

MG: Well, I mean, vindicate his original vision for film education, and the visibility of filmmakers and so on. Okay, these were Media Project's publications for sale, and we produced all of these. [looking through publications] So there was, the copyright primer for film and video, I forgot about that, we worked with an attorney, Joe Sparkman, who was a copyright and trademark attorney, and he and I wrote a little booklet that we published; we sold it for three dollars and fifty cents, and two dollars and fifty cents to members. “Financing the low-budget independent feature film,” which was a twenty-dollar transcript, that was from one of our seminars; that was the first one. *Printed Matter*, the quarterly newsletter; the film program catalog, and that's what I thought I had, but I don't, but it says, “A rich and diverse selection of Northwest film art, both old favorites and new films, available for rent or sale; selected 16mm short films; programs range from 30 to 90 minutes; special interest documentaries, regionally made feature films...” over 80 films in all that we were distributing. And the Oregon Guide to Media Services. That's the definitive sourcebook on media-related personnel and services for the state of Oregon, production services, technicians, service agencies, sound studio equipment rental. So that was what was for sale.

And these were the two big seminars that we did, “Financing the Low-Budget Independent Feature Film” was a three-day seminar and we brought people in from New York and Los Angeles to do this. This was at the Sheraton, that was the second one. The first one was the distribution... [looking at materials] Oh, okay, so that was financing... the first one was distribution, that was at the Benson, also three days—attorneys, investors, producers. And I had one of the... he was a

lawyer, but he had been one of the vice-presidents of Fox, I mean we got some big names in. Not big names in the sense of Steven Spielberg, but big names of people who had the answers to questions that our filmmakers wanted to know. Like raising money and distribution.

And this you can have, it's the June 1980 issue of *Director* to leave the media project. Sparkman, the attorney who helped me write that copyright book, had a column in the media project newsletter, which was nice; Karl Simons, who was on the board, here was reviewing [Ollie Gregory's?] book on making films for business; so it was all geared to filmmakers, really, not to people who wanted to go out on Saturday night and see an old Italian film. How to pick a film festival to enter... well, anyway, you get the idea. You can have this. And a general meeting, I guess we had annual, summer general meetings, so it sounds like maybe there were two of them. You can have that; that one you can take. And that's my...[pause]

HP: I see a photo by Jack Sanders was he...[interrupted]

MG: Right, Jack was very active the whole time. He was on the board, he was on the hiring committee.

HP: Going back to... basically, I just wanted to see if you had particular films or filmmakers that were regional filmmakers that stood out...

MG: Oh yeah, well, Will Vinton; we distributed Will Vinton's films in those days, he was one of the original members of the Media Project. Karl Krogstad in Seattle, who is super-super-prolific; Jim Blashfield, we had Jim's films; we had films that Tom Chamberlin had made with Susan Shadburne and Rich Blakeslee, they were a little trio company; we had Harry Dawson films, we had [Jim] Likowski, we had Diana Cvitanovich, we had Ron Finne, this guy from Eugene. I think we might have had some films from this wonderful man... who taught at Lane Community College...the art department at University of Oregon, it's actually the art and architecture department, but there were some filmmakers floating around there. I didn't know them as well socially, so I can't remember their names, ditto with the Seattle filmmakers. Um, Ken... [pause] I can't remember his name. I'm really sorry I can't find that newsletter that profiled all the Seattle filmmakers, because Melissa and I went up and spent the better part of the week there just interviewing everybody we'd ever heard of. [remembering] Oh, Maxine Martell, who is a very well-known painter now in Seattle, but in those days she was kind of finding her genre and she did a beautiful little film that I just saw running on a loop at a retrospective, a huge retrospective at a museum. But that was in our catalog. [pausing] I'm not doing very well, I'll call you in the middle of the night with a whole bunch more names.

HP: Kind of stepping back a little bit to a very bigger "scope" question, which is, if you could speak a little bit about how your relationship to film developed? You took production classes, a production class with Tom, and you sat in on a few Deinum classes, so...?

MG: Mm-hmm. You know, my relationship to film is a product of my young adulthood, it didn't come out of my childhood. Because I grew up in the Oregon countryside, and there were no movie theaters in the Oregon countryside. I guess, like other children, sometimes on a special Saturday I would get to see a movie with some kids, a matinee, a Saturday matinee, but I can't say it was a big part of my childhood. And then after television came around, I had some interest in it for the first year or two and then completely lost interest. I think that I remember, this may be a false memory, but I think I remember getting up off the floor where we four children lay to watch television and going back to my bedroom and never coming back down. I mean, I just... and I, to this day, have never owned a television set. So that... it wasn't that, I didn't grow up with it.

But when I lived in San Francisco, I was down there for summer school one year in the sixties, I went to films at the Surf Theatre, which, unless you're from San Francisco you wouldn't know, but they had a... I'm thinking like a twice-weekly change, and they did double bill. Back in the old days, a double bill, back in the *way* old days, where you could smoke on the side, you know, sections. And that's where I saw Godard, that's where I saw Truffaut, that's where I saw Kurosawa, that's where I saw Antonioni, that's where I saw... you know, all the great Italian, French... Italian, French, Japanese, some Brits, and it just became, I mean, it became a big thing with me. I saw *Shoot the Piano Player*... I've seen it eleven times. I guess we saw Bergman, Bergman wasn't quite as important to me then. He might be my guy now, but I really loved Truffaut, I loved Godard.

So, but when David asked me if I wouldn't apply for this job, I mean, you'd have to ask David, *Why in the hell Martha Gies, she doesn't – what does she know about film?* Maybe he and I had talked about those filmmakers, but, I wasn't a filmmaker. I mean, I was a writer; I published a little bit in Portland that he would have read; in fact one of the first pieces I ever wrote, actually, I think was before I was running the Media Project, was a profile of David—I could send that to you—on a film he did. And I was mostly doing arts profiles, so I would like do a piece on a jazz musician or something. I think my writing skills and... I give the appearance of being very organized. [laughs]

I think also there may have been, Heather, some concern that if you got a filmmaker in there, into that job... I don't think it was a filmmaker they were looking for, because if you had a filmmaker in to that job, they'd be bored, or restless, or really wanting one side of it and not the other, you know. And to do their work. So it's not for everybody. Arts administration, in general, is not for everybody. You've got to have enough of an appreciation and a respect for it to work... in our case, to serve the people. I mean, that was the thing that at Film Study Center, a lot of what goes on in Film Study Center is figuring out what the public's going to want to see, not what filmmakers are going to want.

Though the woman you mentioned, if I'm not mistaken, I think she was behind a program for which I taught at Bushra [Azzouz]'s request, or [Ene Vicebread's?]'s request. I am bilingual and I taught some kids, who were Hispanic, scripting in a couple of workshops that they had. One... summer work... you know, were... like camps, film camps. And I think Ellen [Thomas] was behind that, I think I met her on that occasion. I remember a very funny moment when I stepped out into the hall, we were all having some kind of pow-wow, probably me and Bushra, me and [Ene?] and I stepped out into the hall to go to the bathroom or something and bumped into Bill Foster, and Bill

said, “What are you doing here?!” I mean, just because, we sort of famously never went, certainly, to the offices, nor were we invited, [laughing] and I said, “Oh I work here, haven’t you heard?” and then [laughing]... I do get a kick out of Bill, I must say that over the years he’s kind of learned to roll with this...

There was a very funny thing that happened just in terms of the famous rivalry between the organizations. Bill used to come over to see us at the Media Project, and we never visited them, he would come to see us, and Melissa would always cover what she was working on, because she *really* thought he was coming over to kind of see what we were up to, and this was when he still assistant director when Bob [Sitton] was running it. And I wouldn’t be at all surprised if that was the case, I can’t imagine—I mean, certainly he wasn’t socially involved with any of us—we were clear across town in Film Row and they were downtown in the art museum.

Anyway. On that same conference that I went to, that actually triggered the successful NEA application for the Media Project, [Robert] Sitton was back there, too. And one night after dinner, in this big old lodge, we were staying up somewhere up in the... practically in the Catskills; I don’t remember who spoke first, but of course we were alone there... well, he was one of the few people I recognized there, and I was one of the few people he recognized there, and we’d both probably had a couple of drinks, and we sat down and it just dawned on us both at the same moment that this was hilarious—that this was the only place that we could be seen talking! [laughing] Because this whole thing had gotten so built up, about the rivalry between these organizations. So we enjoyed a couple of drinks together and later, no, I think it must have been then, because I can’t remember seeing him back here, but, he told me that he wanted a sabbatical, that he desperately needed a sabbatical and he was going to go I think do some part-time teaching in one of the Carolinas. I can’t quite remember the... I think it was in the spring of ’80 that he left. And so I said, “Well, honey, I should be the one to give you a good-bye party.” And it just cracked us up; it just cracked us both up. I mean, we both saw all of the crazy little ironies of that.

And I did. And so, Bob and I put together the guest list. It was jammed. I lived in a huge apartment over in Northwest Portland, and everybody was invited; I mean *everybody* on his list and *everybody* on mine, I mean the Eyerlys would have been there, for instance. And, in fact, I sold my car to buy a dress, a designer dress, a Norma Kamali dress that I wore once, that night. Anyway, when we invited people, I sent one to Bill Foster, of course. They were formal invitations. We really put on the dog. In fact, Bob may have paid for the invitations—I don’t remember. But the invitation said that it was welcoming people to come to Bob Sitton’s good-bye party. And Bill, who must have thought that he at least had *some* relationship with us, because he used to come over there, but had no idea that I had any relationship whatsoever with Bob, called me up and said, [conspiratorially] “I got the invitation. Does Bob know you’re having this party?” [mirthfully] He thought we were celebrating the fact that Bob was leaving, and it had nothing to do with Bob! It was really funny, it was funny. It was a *great* party. Great party. Roger Kukes is another person whose work we showed. Because I remember the tofu sticks that Roger brought to the party!

But then, you know, a very sad thing happened. Sitton, when he was gone, the same thing was pulled on him that was pulled on Brooke and Bob Summers. When he came back, he didn’t have a job. Somehow, somebody had finagled to take his job. And, you know, I personally felt

outraged—I'm like *how does this keep happening?* But there were some people who thought, *Well, it couldn't have happened to a nicer guy.* [laughing] I mean, “the old guard,” you know, the old guard. And Bill has stayed planted there, and he has stayed planted I presume with one eye looking over his shoulder, because that place has been a dangerous throne to sit on over the years. [laughing] And if he lives to a ripe old age, more power to him! I mean, I don't carry any of this anymore; it makes me laugh to think of all of this.

HP: At the time, though, was it a pretty palpable tension between the two?

MG: Yeah. Well, particularly when Bill would come over. Melissa's like, [incredulously] *What's he doing here?*

HP: I have an article from the *Oregonian* from '79, and basically it's like an aside from the article, actually, about the Media Project, but I see that there's an event that's happening that is sponsored by the Northwest Media Project, the PSU Film Committee, and the PSU Center for the Moving Image. How often did you partner with the other groups?

MG: Well, that's interesting... I can't answer that. I can't answer that. But you understand that to “partner,” for whatever reason, would be simply a matter of Tom signing on. I mean, for God's sake, Tom was chairman of the board, you know. What were we doing, there [in the article]?

HP: “Optical film demo. A free demonstration of computer-programmed and other special optical effects on film, presented at 7:30 PM at 75 Lincoln Hall. Is sponsored by...”

MG: Yeah. That sounds frankly like the reverse. It sounds like something Tom was doing at CMI, and, because of his passionate allegiance to the Media Project, he signed us on. You know, I mean he could have done it either way, he could have arranged something with CMI and then signed us on, or he could have arranged something with us and... but that sounds more likely, actually one of their events, in fairness. We did very ambitious programs, but I don't remember that one at all.

HP: Basically, going back to your relationship with Tom Taylor, do you have specific memories of his time at CMI? Did he talk about it?

MG: Tom *was* CMI. I mean, that was his whole thing. It's funny, so many of my memories with Tom are working very late at night on something either in the Lovejoy Tavern or in the Media Project office, it was a board meeting, they just went on and on. We did a five-year plan for the organization which just took forever that Karl Simons just worked very hard on. What I started to say was, I think we were all so fond of Tom that there was this hope that we could please him and make it all come out right. I know that Melissa felt that way.

And there was a time when Melissa and I took no salary. We were paying, at this point, another gal named Eleanor, a guy named Jim Wallace, who is still in town, he's a musician, and

[David] Gettman, who was there as the distribution guy, he was the guy that physically did the film, cleaned it and stored [19:24] it and inventoried it and shipped it and so forth. But there was a time when Melissa and I were either taking no salary or taking a very low salary. And there were people on the board like, I think, at one point the owners of both film labs, Frank Hood here in town (who is George Hood's dad, by the way) and Les Davis in Seattle, who at one point owned three film labs, one in British Columbia – he sold it – one in Seattle and one out in Spokane, and he was on the board, and these guys, these *businessmen types* were like appalled. *What do you mean, you're taking no salary? How long is that going to go on? What do we owe you? What percent are we giving you in your notes? What are...* Melissa and I are looking at each other like, uuhhh.

But Tom never asked those kinds of questions. I mean, with Tom it was just all, *Fine, if you can hold out and do that*, you know—it was just, that piece of it just was not important to him. Tom did not come from no money. Tom came from money. Lots of times, people with the greatest disregard for money come from money, as you have no doubt figured out. Maybe you're one of those people, I don't know. But there's a very cute story about Tom. Sweeping up... who the hell told me this story? Maybe somebody he brought up here, or a houseguest of his from out in L.A... Tom was sweeping up film ends... where? At a studio, somebody's studio in Hollywood... and everybody thought, *Oh, a nice young man starting out, he's living off of two dollars an hour* or whatever the hell it was, but he had a home overlooking the ocean in Malibu; his father was a big insurance mogul, you know. I mean, so that was Tom.

So if Frank Hood and Les Davis were concerned about the fact that Melissa and I were working for nothing, it was because they worked their way up. They were both born *not* with a silver spoon in their mouth, you know, and it was important to them that they not be part of a board of directors, even a non-profit board of directors, that had exploited the employees. Meanwhile Tom, without any social consciousness, was like *Oh well. If these girls want to do it, we know they believe in it, and we believe in them, and they'll be back on salary someday!* [chuckling] We did have, finally, notes; Les Davis insisted we get notes, but we never called them in, I think we burned them when I left.

And then, as I say, we did pull it around; I mean we did pull it around. Those seminars made money, really made money.

HP: I think from my research, if I'm not mistaken, it started in '75, you took over in '77; how long did it effectively work?

MG: See, Melissa would know better than I, because the reason I left was, I was recruited to go run the Motion Picture Seminar of the Northwest in Seattle, which was a project that predated the Media Project, and that was a commercial show that the labs put on. And it was a three-ring circus. It was the original Northwest Film and Video Festival. But the original one, that took in all of the Northwest states. Eventually, the Film Study Center did too, but it was the one with the 900-seat house at the Seattle Playhouse where everybody wanted their film shown on the big screen. And so that was one ring.

The second ring was an equipment exhibition, and Kodak was a big supporter and all, you know, all this stuff with bells and whistles, I had to get forklifts to load in editing decks and stuff for the Playhouse lobby; that was all, that was all exhibition space. And then the theater was all-day-long with programs, and we brought in—this was in some ways a kind of a prototype for the seminars we did in Portland, except that the ones in Portland were very specifically focused. Distribution was one, financing was one. So we looked at distribution from every angle, from like what if you get studio distribution, what if you try to do it yourself, what if... you know, how do you get a distributor, you get a distributor as a producer before you make the film... all this. Whereas the film and video seminar was... they tried to get anthropologists who made films; they tried to get, you know, Kellogg's commercial filmmakers, they tried to get TV people, they tried to get feature film people... so that was really a potpourri; it was fascinating to program that. So I went and did that for five years in Seattle.

I was close enough that I was kind of having my heart slowly broken at... this Media Project, you know, was kind of getting smaller and smaller in its outreach. The guy who took over from me, who's still around, he's a poet named [25:03] Morrie Warshawski, and Melissa stayed and worked with him. And he was really a poet. And there they had, I think, kind of fallen into that thing where somebody has their first agenda and their second. And the Media Project was more of his second agenda. And then, I may have this in the wrong order. I think he lasted maybe a year and a half; then [Lenny Stovall?]. Whose politics, God knows, are excellent, I mean... she's married to a wonderful red-diaper baby, I don't know if they're still together, but they're great people. But I think she lasted a year. People couldn't keep the money piece together; they couldn't keep themselves paid. And nobody, after Melissa and I, ever had the drive and the passion and the allegiance to go on a salary hiatus, believe me. For us, it was just so exhilarating to come out of a spell like that, and to see not only were we now getting paid but we were getting our first NEA grant for Christ's sake, you know, beating them at their own game kind of thing, you know, or we were getting a seminar, but on teaching actors how to direct – it was fully subscribed before we got the publicity out. I mean, those were really what made our hearts pound. Anyway.

HP: I'll change the tape real fast.

[New tape]

HP: I basically wanted to ask if you could talk a little bit about the filmmaking community at that time, and if any characteristics or things that stand out in your memories of the filmmaking community in Portland...?

MG: It *was* a community. It was a community. It wasn't... when I said we had to knock on doors and... it wasn't to get to *filmmakers*, it was to get the money, you know, to run an office and to do what the film community... would serve the film community. There's a difference there. I think if we were going to do something like that today, we'd have to go around and introduce ourselves to... even if we were from... maybe even Jim Blashfield. I mean, Jim Blashfield is kind of an icon

here now, just because we've all gotten old, you know, but he would probably have to introduce himself to half of them. I mean, it's just very fragmented.

For instance, I remember a Media Project meeting, shortly after I was hired, and I didn't run that meeting, it was run by somebody on the board, probably Tom, but maybe somebody else. Oh, maybe Pat Joy. But I remember that at a certain point in the evening, half an hour into it, and we filled—I'm thinking we were at Chapman School, but maybe we were somewhere else—but we filled the room. And there were probably forty of us in the room, it was right after I started; it may even have been the meeting at which they introduced me, I don't know. Gary and Terry Adams came in. Gary was a very well-known filmmaker here in those days. He did a lot of work for the Educational Service District, he mostly did, you know, commercial work, but a very cool guy and friends with all these people. And Gary and Terry walked into the room. And instead of coming in the door and you know how like latecomers sneak around back? Gary had this, you know, a lot of kind of Mick Jagger in him, you know; so he parades across the front, and people whistled, and I just thought, you know, these people know each other, they love each other, and there was just something about his entrance into that room that made me think, *Jesus, these people all really know and like each other.*

So, three and a half years later, when I did resign and I did go to Seattle to run the Motion Picture Seminar, at the request of the Motion Picture Seminar, and that was a different kind of thing. That was, you worked for six months to get this show on the road, and this show is a four-day show at the Seattle Center Playhouse. And that's all there is to it. There's no membership group, there's no other effort, there's no presence throughout the year; it *took* me six months to pull it together, I had thirty volunteers, I was the only person earning any kind of, whatever, contract I suppose. I mean, it was a contract. I can't even remember if I was paid. I certainly wasn't paid by the hour or it would have had to have been two cents. But it was, you know, and I had to talk to Kodak, and we flew down to L.A. and we banged on the doors of studios and got people to come up here. I got David Lynch to Seattle before, you know, he was, before, I think *Elephant Man* had just come out. A lot of people who, in their field, were like *Wow*—editors, and cinematographers, and so forth. A lot of Academy Award winners. The Academy Award winners are only famous if they're an actor. I would often talk about... later, I got interested in screenwriting after that was over with, but somebody asked me one time, because I had been... I went out to Sundance a couple of times, and I was on a project that was invited to come to Sundance, and they gave us mentors who were famous screenwriters. I was describing that to somebody back in Oregon and they said, "Like who?" And I said, "Can you name any screenwriters?" knowing whatever I said, they would not be *famous* screenwriters. Anyway, they were great people.

But in Seattle, there was this guy, I just can't think of his last name but I can see him, his name is John and he published in some little film notes somewhere that Martha Gies had come to Seattle to "galvanize the Seattle film community as she had the Portland film community." Because they were jealous that we had all these, it seemed like, film resources here. They welcomed the opportunity to be part of the Media Project when we had gone up there and interviewed them and put on film shows. And written about them. I pointed out to him that a community that's already collaborative and collegial and helps each other doesn't need "galvanizing," you know, they need

funds, they need visibility, maybe they need distribution opportunities, but they don't need what you're talking about.

People in Seattle, the first thing I noticed, didn't like each other, and often times they didn't like each other *not knowing* each other. Which is very sad. I mean, Ken Levine was one of the most successful filmmakers at the time. He made documentary films; he was a very good filmmaker. And a lot of people didn't like Ken Levine and I swear to God, Heather, they'd never met him! He was a sweet guy, I knew him and his wife, in fact they used to loan me their house on Hood Canal to go hole up and write in the summers. They ended up in Kauai; he ended up being the film... the film, what do you call that, the guy you have to go to to film on Kauai, you know, the film person on Kauai. But there was another guy that I did some writing for, who was a kind of what you want to call an investigative filmmaker, I mean he shot film making trouble, bless his heart. And I wrote a piece, I used to write for a film magazine, so I wrote a piece that was I think actually a cover story for *Filmmakers' Monthly*, which was out of Boston. It was a slick. And this same John, whose name I have blocked apparently, said to me, [scoffing] "Well, that story was very good about First Amendment rights, but I don't think *he* (his name was Otto, this other filmmaker) is a very good example of that," and I was just hearing stories like that all the time in Seattle.

The point about that story was, when the volcano blew here, the FEMA and all the law enforcement agencies were trying to protect people, and so they had a red line and a blue line. And the blue line was the line over which people were not supposed to go, and the red line was the *inner* line which, nobody could go, because you could get, it could *blow again* or something. But the *blue line*, the press got in between the blue line and the red line. And so, this particular filmmaker couldn't go in there because he was a freelancer, even though he did have actually an assignment from *Geo* magazine, as a still photographer, but he was a filmmaker. And so I wrote an article about the right... the freedom, the right to film, and what is a licensed press? And how did we get the First Amendment in the first place? Why do you have to be licensed by being on staff, if you have a contract and you're... anyway. So, this person was saying, "That's a very interesting point, wonderful story, Martha, but he's not a very good example"—and I was saying "What is with you people?"

Here in this town there was a house, not far from our office, probably three blocks from this Film Row building, that was rented by a guy in the film community, either Ray [unintelligible] or Dan Biggs, one of those guys that made money, did a lot of commercial work. [8:08] And they would—I know other people had studios in there, I think at one point Dawson was in there and probably Rich was in there... I'm thinking of their Christmas parties and who actually had offices there—but they would hire people like Tom Chamberlin to paint the place, or scrape the paint off the place, or... I mean if they couldn't get film work to some of these people who wanted to do a different kind of work, non-commercial kind of work, they would get them whatever work they could think of. To keep them going. There was a great deal of respect and counter-respect, and you would never hear Tom Chamberlin, you know, Mr. Beatnik, please-let-me-make-no-money-ever, you would never hear Chamberlin say, "Those assholes, they're working for the TV station." He would never say that! It's like he respected their decisions. That's what I mean by it was very collegial. It was really a community.

HP: Is there anything in your opinion... why does Portland have this nexus of cooperative and...[interrupted]?

MG: Well, that's, I mean... wait a minute, that's a loaded question. You're not supposed to ask those questions. I mean, that comes from CMI. When I was running that organization, it was very hard to find a filmmaker who hadn't come through CMI. Or at least had some classes there. I mean, that was the foundry out of which the product came, which were the filmmakers. I don't think Gus Van Sant went to CMI ever, but he came to town at that point, and started working here, and certainly felt that... the difference, being here.

HP: I heard a story that he was like the sound guy on Penny Allen's *Property*?

MG: Oh yeah, well, let's see, we... [laughs] Yeah. I was the executive director on Penny Allen's *Property*. When I got that... I should have added that, when I got the sixty index cards, with half of the phone numbers disconnected... You know we had to reconstruct that... These are the members of the Media Project, or were at the time Brooke left. [10:20] Penny Allen, it turned out, had gone to somebody—this is what I mean about the resource that is a 501(c)(3), they would never let their 501(c)(3) lapse—and Penny Allen had gone to someone and gotten their permission to use and, and I mean, use, the Media Project's 501(c)(3) for her intended CETA grant to make the film *Property*. Okay? This is another *great* Tom Taylor story, for Christ's sake. So, he's like, I sort of have this feeling, this sense, it's not a true memory, it's the *emotional* memory, it's not the factual memory, it's the emotional memory, of Tom going, "Well, good luck... Oh, and by the way, this woman... you might want to look into this, this woman is getting these monies through the, you know, they were funneled through the county or the city, I can't remember, to make this film... and, we should probably have some kind of oversight over that." Yeah?! So we didn't *lose* our non-profit status and so there was accounting, because now money was coming into it.

So I had to go meet this woman, who was [in French] *formidable*—she now lives in Paris—and tell her, "Look, sweetheart," [laughing] "we have to... the money has to come to us. It's in our name. We exist now. The money has to come to us, and you have to provide me, you know, with... I have to do a payroll." She had all these people involved. Let's say she had gotten... let's, I can't quite remember how it worked, I've probably tried to forget this, but let's say that she had... nine people, who she'd written as grant-target salary. But in fact on the film were working thirty people. And she'd gotten everybody to buy in by pretty much all the money coming to her and then she would parcel it out. But that ignored things like taxes, social security numbers, you know what I'm saying? So, it all had to come to me, to her *intense* annoyance, and then those checks had to be written to the actual recipient people, to her *intense* annoyance, because some of that money needed to be creamed off for production costs, you know, this is film we're talking about, not video. And then I suspect, I mean, Penny and I have never sat down and talked about this, because, you know, our relationship went around the corner and went somewhere else after that; we've never really reviewed this period of time, but, she, I'm sure, every month then had to re-talk everybody into

adding in their salary, because now they were getting actual checks, you know what I mean? It was very funny. But, Tom was like, *Uh, oh yeah, you might want to take care of that situation.* [mock-indignantly] “What? You did what?”

There were eleven. There were eleven people on that; it’s all coming back to me. Because we later did the same thing with some people who came to us who wanted to do a project called ...Women in Film [questioningly]. It was going to be six videotapes and six radio tapes or something. And the people who dreamed up this grant... we had more oversight from the beginning. They wanted us to umbrella it, and we walked through all the steps of it. But then we were on, Tom and I were on this hiring committee for the other women, I think there were like three of them and they needed three more, or two of them and they needed four more. And I remember there were spats from jump street because Tom and I figured, foolishly it turned out, that they should be people who had some background in video or radio or television.

But it seemed like their idea was more of a, what I call a kind of a... off-course, misguided feminism. What they wanted was people who had been screwed by the system and... [chuckling] hated men. And I don’t—we’re not talking gay, this is nothing about sexuality, it’s about a kind of a misguided feminism who, as I used... no. I shouldn’t even repeat this, this doesn’t belong on tape. So it was a compromise. It was a compromise. We got one person on that crew who probably never liked them and they never liked her, and so it didn’t work out probably that well to have “won” by getting one really competent woman on that crew. But she is a very, very interesting woman; I’m still close to her. She lives, I think, in Turner, Oregon, or Jefferson, Oregon, or somewhere down there beyond Salem. But she, she was trained by Tom at CMI. Her name is Diana Cvitanovich.

And she made a film that was in our catalog about Johnson Creek, and it’s been shown a lot. Kind of for political reasons. And there were these two guys who were supposed to help her edit it, and I know one was Likowski, and I don’t remember who the other one... might have been Mark, that Mark that you’re looking for. But it got away from her. They were all working and other things during the day and they were doing this all night at night, and it got away from her. They didn’t like her, and she... finally at some point decided, *I can either fight them or I can just sit here and watch and learn how this is done... and keep in mind what I want for later.* And so they got clear to work print, and Diana thanked them very much, and then turned right around and went back and stayed up another six months of nights taking that damn thing apart and making her film. And did it. And the film that is shown is her film. Now, I don’t say this to say anything about Likowski and whoever the hell that was, it’s just that Tom seemed to be able to turn out people who had that kind of commitment and doggedness, you know? Anyway, we got her on that project, and they, they, she wasn’t anybody you could push around, you know? [laughing] She was great. She was amazing.

HP: Was that *Riparian*?

MG: Yeah, *Riparian*, of course. Yeah, *Riparian*. That was in the catalog. I just wish I could find a catalog for you.

HP: If you were telling the history of the Portland film community at this time, what would you think was important to know?

MG: Well, there was, I guess, a golden moment, and I'm sure it predated me and... I think that that CETA grant opportunity... and probably with a lot of arts organizations, was an opportunity to, to kind of circle the wagons around our energy and really put some resources together; there was a lot of creativity, a lot of creation, a lot of product in those years. But it does, it starts with CMI, I mean you're definitely on the right track here. I would say really it goes from CMI to Media Project, there was this unfortunate misstep in the middle, you know, about... we did a... I don't think we so much, and when I say "we" I often mean Melissa and the people that worked in my office with me... we didn't do it so much, but we felt around us this, this kind of holy quest to make the Media Project work. You know, to show the sons of bitches, I mean, and... we didn't feel that because we hadn't lived through those times, but boy, was that contagious. You know, my dad used to say, "America loves an underdog," and we do! We're the only country that does. Most countries love heroes. We love underdogs in America. And so, it's something to think about. We had that kind of, we had that kind of passion, we had that kind of push, you know?

And Tom... I wish you could have known him, because he's just not the kind of person who cracks a whip, or did coaching, or gave speeches or anything. He mumbled! Actually, I later studied fiction writing under Ray Carver; he was the only other person I knew who mumbled as bad as Tom did! He mumbled. He would listen to anybody's ideas; he was very open. He loved, you know, his own, I mean, underdogs; later ended up as I'm sure you know doing a show on and about and by seniors, and—who are certainly underdogs—but there was something about him, that you loved him so much you wanted to make it work. His dream, you wanted to make it work. I don't know.

HP: Any final comments on Deinum, Taylor, CMI, Media Project, Portland at that time?

MG: No. But Tom, you know, all of that that we felt for Tom, Tom felt for Deinum. I mean, that was clear. We were all in that little pyramid. That was real clear. We were the worker bees, you know, at the bottom, and... we got a gender problem here if I continue this metaphor, but, [laughing] but, you know, there was Deinum and there was really Tom under him, I mean, you know. We answered to Tom; Tom... not *answered*, but wanted to build something that Deinum would be proud of. Deinum, I guess, answered to God! [laughing] I don't know.

HP: Thank you.

MG: Thank you.