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OH 698

Full transcript of an interview with

MILTON MOON

on 02 & 09 July 2004

by Peter Donovan

for the

EMINENT AUSTRALIANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Recording available on CD

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J.D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA: INTERVIEW NO. OH 698

Interview with Milton Moon recorded by Peter Donovan on the 2nd and 9th July 2004 for The State Library of South Australia Oral History Collection and the National Library of Australia.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

This is Tape 1 of an interview with Milton Moon. Milton has followed a distinguished career in pottery and art and related fields, but is currently retired. Milton will be speaking to me, Peter Donovan, for the Eminent Australians Oral History Project conducted by the National Library of Australia and the State Library of South Australia. On behalf of the Director General of the National Library and the Director of the State Library of South Australia, I'd like to thank you, Milton, for agreeing to participate in this program.

Milton, do you understand that copyright is shared by you and the libraries?

Yes, of course, yes.

This being so, may we have your permission to make a transcript of this recording should the libraries decide to make one?

Of course.

We hope you'll speak as freely as possible, knowing that neither the tapes nor the transcripts produced by them will be released without your authority. This interview is taking place today, the 2nd July 2004, at Milton Moon's home at 4 Osborne Avenue, Beulah Park, in suburban Adelaide.

Now, Milton, for the sake of those who will listen to this, I'll put on tape the fact that you have written an autobiography of your life, so we're not going to canvass all the details of that, but we'll try and look at issues that you haven't covered. We'll probably treat on most of the major issues you've covered in your autobiography, but just look for other aspects of that that you didn't cover.

Yes. Peter – interrupting just for a moment – it is an unpublished autobiography. I did it mainly because I wanted to give some sort of record to those institutions that have major holdings of the work that I've done, and also too because one doesn't always find that things written are accurate, and I thought, 'Well, if I do this, at least it's from the horse's mouth,' so to speak.

Well, that saves one question I was going to ask: why you wrote it.

(laughs) Why I wrote it, yes.

But let's go back to the very, very beginning, because the autobiography doesn't say much about your time, really, before pottery. So tell me about your family, what influences they might have had.

Well, I was born in Melbourne, 29th October 1926, which [for] people who are interested in astrology means that I'm a Scorpio born in the Year of the Tiger; and later we'll come to the fact that, when we were living in Japan, the significance of the year in which you were born is something that the Japanese think is quite important.

Yes, well, I was born in a suburb that is one of the nicer, leafy suburbs of Melbourne. As I often look back and think, we probably were the least affluent people living in an affluent area. But my father, he had been married twice. His first wife had died; there were two children living, two children had died. Presumably his wife had died in childbirth. And my mother was a girl from Wandiligong up in the high country of Victoria. And she had six children, so there were two from the first and six from the second marriage, so there was a rather crowded house, eight kids at times, although when I was quite young some of the older ones began leaving home so they weren't there. What else can I say?

What was your father's occupation, profession?

Oh! Well, my father, he was a clever bloke. He was a timber merchant but he was also too a lay architect, although he was a licensed architect. Back in those days it was just as usual for those who went – well, people could go to universities and do an architectural course or they could do one and become licensed through the city councils, and he was a licensed architect. But because he was a timber merchant, back in those days there was a different sort of values to those now. It was frowned upon for anyone who was in one side of the business, so to speak, to also practise in another side, so the amount of work he did as an architect was quite limited. But there are houses still in Melbourne that he did architect. He was a very talented person.

His parents had come out from England, so on my father's side I'm a second generation Australian; on my mother's side I'm third generation. My mother's name was Kaighin, which is a Manx name, but her mother's name was Lund, and that caused me some interest because Lund is a Danish name and her grandfather, in fact, had jumped ship. Apparently he came out to Australia, he was on a Danish naval vessel, and whether it was gold or a girl I don't know – or maybe both: it was in the

1850s when gold was the big lure for people coming to Australia. So he left the ship and went up to the Wandiligong–Bright area of Victoria. And I know about the fact that he had jumped ship because I had a cousin who was a librarian and she had heard this family story and thought that she'd do a bit of checking up, so we know that that is correct. So on my father's side I'm English, on my mother's side Manx and Danish. And there are still, apparently, too, on my mother's side, they were involved in building and architecture, and there are still buildings in the Bright-Wandiligong area that are Heritage buildings that were erected by the Kaighins.

Where did you fit in the family as far as your siblings are concerned?

Where did I fit into the family? Well, let me see, my mother, she had – let me see – one, two, three, I was the fourth, so there were two after me.

And whom do you take after?

It's very difficult. It's curious, you know, this thing called the 'genetic pool'. When I look at the family I think how extraordinary it is that there were six people who, although there are similarities, there are great divergences and, you know, but coming from the same sort of genetic stock you think, 'Where on earth did that come from?' Or maybe it goes back to the old notion, the old Hindu notion or early Buddhist notion of the *alaya*, the sort of 'store' consciousness, and indeed I do think we probably inherit a lot more than the colour of our eyes and whether or not we lose our hair or not. And to me it's quite strange.

My eldest full brother, he was a very bright person, he was practical. See, growing up in my time not everyone reached their full fulfilment, mainly because of the [Second World] War. I remember my elder brother, he was in, he went into the Air Force; first, before that, he was in the Army, he was in the Australian regular Army, but he left that and then went into the Air Force. But he was a practical person. He was – oh, he could turn his hand to anything, and I think he got that from my father. My father was technically very good.

Now, after him my elder sister, she was someone with – well, I'm told that she was quite an eccentric person. People looking outside the family say, 'Oh, your sister M...., she was quite eccentric.' I remember she went to university and she did, which I thought was quite unusual in those days, she chose to do German and Dutch. But she joined the public service. But probably the most important thing I remember

about her is the fact that she was a natural poet. She was an introverted person, but she was a poet.

Then I had my immediate elder brother, his name was Wesley. He again seemed to inherit a lot of my father's skills. I recall when I was young my father used to build radio sets and he was a marvellous cabinetmaker. Well, my brother Wesley, he inherited those sorts of skills. To me, living in the same room as – I remember at one particular time there were three children living in the one sort of sleepout room – and I used to me amazed at the fact that this bloke was able to first design and make crystal sets, and then he was able to design and make radio sets. And he had these books with strange circuits and valves and things. And he and my father would talk about lots of these things. And to me it was a world that I just didn't, didn't, didn't understand, and I found that quite odd.

I suppose I'm closer to my mother. She was a literary type, she was very artistic. Being a girl that grew up in Wandiligong – again, as an unusual thing, her sister decided to go down to Melbourne and become a teacher and she ended up the Vice-Principal of a school in Melbourne – but my mother elected to do office work. She taught herself shorthand and apparently she was extraordinarily good at this, and she was also too a marvellous singer. In fact, at one particular time – had times been different, she had a voice that people say could have been one of 'those' voices that might have achieved fame. But she sang all her life. So that – yes, she was someone – I suppose, yes, if I inherited anything, and I can see where it came from, it did come from my mother. The art skills, the – – –. She was also what I'd call a happy person. I mean, she could model; to her, art was something you didn't have to be taught, it was there as part of you, and it was so with me. Art was just a very natural thing. I could draw much more easily than I could talk in those days. When I was very young I was extraordinarily shy, but I remember at school when it came to written English or artwork there was no problem; to me it was just a natural thing.

Then my next younger brother – his name was Meredith – his early inclination was to music, and in fact he did become a musician, he became a musicologist. That was interrupted for a while when he elected to do Theology, and in fact he came over from Melbourne to Adelaide and he went up to the college – I forget the name of it now – up on Mount Lofty and he was working up there. But he had, by this time, he had already obtained a Music degree from Melbourne University or Melbourne

Conservatorium. And then, when my parents died, he then I suppose had a lapse in faith and he decided that he'd go back to music. He eventually went over to England, he won the Birmingham Research Scholarship to do a master's degree, and then after that he was awarded a scholarship to go to Cambridge [University], Christ College Cambridge, to do a Music degree. He had some problems at Cambridge with his supervisors and eventually went down to Oxford [University]. They said to him, 'You come down here and put in a certain period, a residential period, and you can continue your PhD down here.' But by that time someone else had done work similar to the work that he was working on, and he became a musicologist. In fact, he had one of the most coveted jobs, I suppose, in the musicology world: he was in charge of the Bodleian[1] research department and he used to buy original Handel manuscripts and things like that, so he had a very interesting job.

Then the last child in the family was a sister called Lynette. She was also someone who was very involved in the arts. She became an art teacher and then she became an art librarian.

So the family is a sort of a mixture of practicality and art, art and literature. Oh, the other thing I didn't mention about my elder brother Wesley was that his interests in the radio technicalities, during the War he became a radar person and after the War he became an electronics engineer. He eventually then went over with the Department of Supply and worked in England. He was working on such projects as the Blue Streak missile back in those days. Then, when they stopped the Blue Streak program over there he then decided to come back to Australia, and so he came back. He also too had a family, and they were talking about year eleven studies in England and as to whether or not it was better for the kids to grow up in England or back in Australia. And so then when he came back to Australia he – it was the early days of television – I remember he installed Channel Nine up in Brisbane, and again I was mystified. I said to him, 'You've never been in television; how on earth can you build a television station?' And he looked at me as though I was a nong and said, 'A circuit's a circuit and all you've got to do is to just follow what has been drawn up and do it.'

[1] The Bodleian Library is the main research library of Oxford University in England.

Apart, other than that, he then went into another company. He worked on various projects. He worked on the acoustical controls for the Sydney Opera House, I think the people who worked on that got one of the Prince Philip Awards for Design. At different times he – I think he automated the British nylon spinning company[2], he then later worked on space probes, and he eventually went up to Hong Kong and he was one of the people responsible for that – well, now they say it's one of the wonders of the world – that *enormous* big television screen at ..... Hong Kong racetracks and he was responsible for that. But he had a change of heart; he went from working on offensive weapons to defensive weapons, and he was working out of Hong Kong mainly.

I find it interesting, I found out a lot about him because after he died – he was also, too, had lots of skills. He was a boat builder. Again, I remember when he was a child he used to make canoes and things and he and my father used to talk about how you steam-heated timber and bent it and, then again, things that I just didn't understand. But he was, he built a yacht in Sydney at one time, and in fact it was quite a public one because he was building it right opposite the Sydney Opera House, and in fact someone told him that he can't build a yacht there, it's just not done. Anyway, he was up in Hong Kong and he knew all about the latest navigational equipment, and he took a team of people from Hong Kong on holidays over to the Caribbean. There was a – I don't know what happened, but the only thing I found out was that he apparently pulled in to St Kitts, went ashore, went for a walk and went up a mountain, and they found his body at the foot of the mountain, they had to rescue his body by sea. And I didn't know, but he had nominated me to be his executor, so – – –.

But I found out more about him after he was dead than I'd known about him while he was alive. It's funny, you know, you can be in the one family, you can have sort of associations, but you know very little about the other person because they live in their world and you live in your world. I mean, he didn't understand very much *my* world.

When you were growing up, was the family a close on?

[2] British Nylon Spinners, BNS.

Mother kept us very close, yes. She was one of these extraordinarily strong people – 'velvet hand in the iron glove' – but she was also too an extraordinarily religious person. But she did hold us together, yes, all these disparate directions she brought together. So yes, she was a very important person.

You've mentioned your mother was very religious, a brother trained to become an Anglican priest.

Yes.

Was religion big in your – – –?

Yes, it was. And my sister, I have a sister now who probably the only – that was the poet – the only direction she's got now in her later life, and has been for many, many, many years, has been theological study. She's a person of – just a natural, she has a natural religious instinct. But yes, probably the religion part was overdone. We used to go to church – we were Methodists in those days and we used to go to church four times on a Sunday, which was a bit much for a very macho kid, which I was. We used to go to Christian Endeavour, then church, then Sunday School in the afternoon and church again at night. Well, I sang in the choir. I also inherited my mother's talent, I could sing. But it's an odd thing: I don't think very much about my childhood. I think I'm the sort of person that lives in the immediate moment, you know, what's gone, what happened, is past, and your life is a continuing – it's just like putting up a building, you know. You stay, you're adding another plank or taking a plank away or putting on a new tile roof, or whatever.

I suppose all these questions are trying to reflect on what influences might have influenced you later. Why you are what you are now.

Well, it's very difficult, isn't it? I mean, I don't know that anyone can properly trace these things out. As I say, we inherit a lot, and I think probably in years to come we're going to find that the so-called 'junk' DNA[3] contains an enormous amount, that no-one is able to trace and probably will be able to trace, that these are fragments that come from earlier lives. If I do have any religious beliefs – incidentally, the family were Methodists then they became Anglicans, and then in the main they became Catholics. I have people say to me, 'Are *you* a Christian?' I say, 'Well, I

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[3] DNA = deoxyribonucleic acid, the part of body cells which contains genetic information.

never claim to be that, I'm not good enough.' Most of the people I know who *do* claim to be Christians I think Jesus Christ would have (laughs) something to say about it, say that they weren't. You know, I think quite wryly about some of our politicians who boast about their religious beliefs, and I think, 'You're not religious.' But – yes.

But I've gathered you're very spiritual.

That is something that you don't make a decision about. Probably the – we'll come to it later – but probably one of the most important things that happened in my life was that I did become interested in, and I took instruction in, Zen Buddhism. But that's sort of jumping ahead.

Getting back to my childhood, it was very confusing. I had three goes at school. I was at University High School. Academically I wasn't bad, but I was not good. I was a lot – I think, in retrospect, I was probably a lot brighter than what my academic results would have shown. I had a confrontation with one of the teachers at University High – not my fault; his fault – and then I walked out in a rage and I worked for a couple of years in – well, of all things, a school of physical education, a very important one in Melbourne at that time, which was very good for a kid who was enormously physical. But I decided to go back to school. I went back to school and was in the same class as my younger brother – not in his class, but in the same year, which he found marvellous because he was picked on a bit because he was, well, I think some of the other kids would have said he was a bit of a ciss[y], and when they picked on him suddenly he had a bruiser of an elder brother (laughs) who was able to protect him. And then, after that, when I then – well, by that time I had three brothers who were in the Air Force. My eldest half-brother, he was – again, he was a very practical person, like my father, understood all about timber and what you did with timber. He could build houses, he could do anything like that. And he in fact had an interesting wartime career because I believe at one particular time he took a team of people behind Japanese lines and built an airstrip in New Guinea, and I remember him saying that he was able to have a look at some of the timber rights that my father had in New Guinea at the time, and my father had this – it was quite an important timber mill, but they also made joinery in Melbourne, and most of their timber at the time came from Scandinavia, and of course the wartime stopped that, so

he began then to get timber from mainly up in the Gippsland area, but I think that they also too used to get blackwood, I think, from New Guinea.

Anyway, so (pause) then my next brother, that I spoke to you before, my natural full brother, he was in the Air Force. He was in, I think, mainly stores – I'm not really sure what he did. Then my immediate brother, Wesley, he was in the Air Force doing radar. I was in the Air Training Corps and I was destined also to go into the Air Force, and looking back I think I would have been an ideal person to have become an air gunner, you know. I mean I wasn't responsible enough to be a – I doubt whether or not I would have passed muster to be a pilot. Although I could always heroically see myself in that role, I think probably the best role I would have been would have been an air gunner because I had the sort of natural reflexes. But, as someone said, 'It's probably lucky you weren't – they're the ones we usually hosed out of the aircraft.' Anyway, so when I turned seventeen – again I think restlessness and the fact that the War was terribly, terribly, terribly disturbing to a whole generation of people, particularly living in a home where three of your brothers were in the services and you were waiting – so at seventeen years of age, because you could get into the Navy one year earlier, I enlisted in the Navy. But by the time I enlisted in the Navy – and that was in 1943, then I was called up in 1944 – by the time they posted me overseas – I was posted overseas before the end of the War, well, I received my posting, but in actual fact the closest I got to the War was the ship that took me to New Guinea was part of the surrender at Rabaul, and I was at that time offloaded at a place called Jacquinot Bay in New Britain, which I found quite extraordinary.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A: TAPE 1 SIDE B

[in New Britain, which I found quite extraordinary.] I did see Rabaul at that time and was quite astonished at the beauty of a place that now is no longer beautiful because of the volcanic effect on it. Then I went over to New Guinea, I went to a place called Madang. At Madang I worked there for a while, then I was sent to a port directorate up at Wewak, and then at Wewak it was then – I think the War ended on the 15th August, but it didn't – I think end of hostilities, or the *official* end of the War, was the 29th October, which I remember because it was my birthday. And it was at that time, too, that, after that time, they closed the port directorate and I went back to Madang

and was immediately then sent down to Finschhafen, or a place called Langerbach[?], where the Australian Navy were taking over what had been an American base. So for a while I was in an American base and we took over their base, and I was there until I was then posted to a ship called the *Kanimbla*, which in its earlier days had been an armed merchant cruiser, then it became a landing craft ship. And then – I went onto that, and our first trip was over to Makassar in the Celebes, as they were then called, taking back Dutch women and children mainly that had been sort of brought down to Australia immediately after the War.

That was interesting because it was at that time that the first shots were being fired. The Indonesians were taking over, or striking a blow, to get rid of the Dutch. And I must say that the little I remember from Makassar in those days was that I wouldn't have liked to have been – I think this affected my social conscience – it was the very first instance that I can recall of what it was to see people like the Dutch, the way they treated the local inhabitants. I remember one night we went to a place called the 'Societet des Harmones', it was a Dutch club, and I was appalled to see the Dutch, the way they treated the people who were waiting on the tables. You know, they *were* the – well, they were the overlords, so to speak. And I think it was that, probably, that gave me a social conscience later when I thought, 'Yeah, the same sort of thing would have happened in the early days of Australia,' that you come in with the arrogance of the white person.

Another very important thing I remember back from those days at Makassar – I always used to go off on my own, because I was never interested in going around with – the other blokes on the ship seemed to be interested in different things to what I was interested in, you know, I'd sort of look at shops and I'd – – –. I remember coming back, I'd bought a whole heap of filigree silver. And I was interested to see what they did and how they did it. And I remember one particular time when I was walking up a street – I realise now that they were Muslim clerics – they came out of a building to get into a car, and someone wound the window down and one of the clerics spat in front of me, spat at me. And I didn't take exception because I understood that – it was, again, a realisation that we were the people who were offending, just by our very presence. So again, that sort of added to my social conscience.

But the interesting thing for me about being in the Navy at that time was then we went then onto the Japanese run. We were taking Occupation personnel backwards and forwards to, from Japan. We didn't see a great amount of Japan in those days because the port that we went to was one called Kure, which was known in Japan as 'the secret city', it was the place where they built all their ships. And I can even recall now the fact that it actually was a shipbuilding area, and I remember seeing behind where the shipbuilding yards were that there were – it was quite a mountainous area, and there were these tunnels bored into the mountains. And I remembered that back in the days when I was at Wewak at the port directorate there, that the Japanese had also built tunnels into the sides of mountains, which of course was pretty disastrous for them, because when the Australian troops went there they used to burn them out with what they called 'flamethrowers', you know, just sort of go into the caves with these flamethrowers.

Anyway, so – but I did get across to a place called Miyajima, which was Shrine Island, and that had an enormous impact on me. It was a beautiful island, picturesque, and there were these great ....., these go back to early Shinto days, where these were buried into the sea. And it was just a place of complete beauty to me. And looking back I remember that this is probably where my first interest in – solid interest in pottery began. Although I was brought up in a family where pots were important, and I had on my mother's side there were people who'd collected pottery, it was being in Japan – in fact, I still have a pot, the very first pot I ever bought I got from a shop in Kure. Unusual for a young bloke of nineteen, twenty, to be buying pots, but you know, I looked at the thing and I thought, 'It's a lovely pot.' And it was a *Satsuma*, a little *Satsuma* vase, and it was only later I actually found out where it was made and the fact that the pottery where it was made was still in existence. So Japan became to me very important. We went there I think about three, four times, I can't remember. Just going backwards and forwards.

Another thing, too, that I remember was the fact that we took back Japanese prisoners. A lot of them were going back for the war crimes trials. We also, too, took back some Australian servicemen. And I remember there was one bloke that used to sit on the upper deck on his own, and apparently he used to write poetry. He had in fact been one of those ones that the Japanese had attempted to behead and he'd gone into, fallen into his supposed grave and had later dug himself out. And I

thought then what an impressive sort of person he was, because – I don't know, I never spoke with him, I don't know whether or not he had any malice in him – but he had become a very reflective person and it just struck me at the time that here we were, on a ship, taking back Japanese personnel, and also too taking back at the same time someone who'd been someone that they'd attempted to behead.

Another thing, too, that to my shame I remember from that particular trip was that some of the cooks at the time – perhaps I shouldn't say this – but they had in fact decided that they would cook their rice, but they contaminated their rice and we had a ship full of Japanese soldiers that a lot of them had dysentery, mainly because – – –. You know, it's one of these sort of, when you hear about the sins of people, probably it was not a sin of a major degree, but it was one of those things that people do do. But we all look back on our lives and think, 'God, if I only had that time again I certainly wouldn't have done that.' Anyway – – –.

So your time in the Navy, you just signed on for a particular time?

No, when you went in you had to sign on for three and a half years or the war and six months thereafter. So by the time I'd finished my service it was in '47, and I have absolutely no idea – I see one of your questions was why did I choose to go into broadcasting, which I did.

Just before we – does this have anything to do with the Navy?

No, it's got – – –.

Because I wanted to ask you a question there.

Yes.

Have you ever marched in an Anzac Day march? Have you ever marched on Anzac Day?

Never. Never. Never – mainly because I have an absolute – well, I didn't think that I was entitled to because I wasn't part of a conflict, inasmuch as – yes, of course there was danger. I remember on one of our ships, I think the very first trip that I was going to New Guinea, that there was a mine still in the sea and the ship had to pull up and the gunner had to explode the mine. But, you know, these were incidental things, I was not part of what I'd call a 'conflict'. I'd not been a prisoner of war, I'd not been someone who had sort of slogged through jungles. It was – I don't know, it was

just something that that was three and a half years out of my life, I had – even now I look back and think, 'Well, there are some people who have to do that.' But I have a certain contempt for people who – well, such as our politicians who use it as a photo opportunity and talk about, well, I just see it as the sort of thing politicians will do, or feel they've got to do. But no, I've never marched. Don't feel that I'm entitled to march, have no interest in marching.

Do you have any mates from those days, any friends?

No.

Say from school days, from war time?

Oh, not – no. If I met – – –. No, I don't. They've gone their way, I've gone my way, and I never was a matey sort of person. It was – yes, looking back, I probably have always been someone who was a loner. You know, I've always enjoyed doing what I had to do and I did it properly. But other people aren't central to my life, not individuals. There are people I think back and respect them for perhaps what they were, what they did. But no, the Navy was just something. It became – that was yesterday, turned away, never looked backwards. And broadcasting was my new life, as I say, I've absolutely no idea why on earth – – –. In fact, I even look back with a certain degree of irritation because under the post-war reconstruction scheme you could elect to do certain things. I hadn't achieved the level of education to enable me to go to university. I could have gone back to school, I could have done my Matriculation and could have gone to university, but I felt no, that there was another life, a new life out there, a world that – – –. It never occurred to me. So I took that up, believe it or not, I did both voice production and singing. I'm still mystified why I wasted my time doing that. I think mainly because one of the things that I realised that I *was* good at was singing, but then I also realise that the biggest difficulty for me was the fact that I had this extraordinary shyness, which – – –. But for some odd reason I did it, and then that led to – I was also able to write, and I went to a few of the advertising companies like Lintas and J Walter Thomson's and said that I was, you know, just out of the Navy and I was looking for a job and I thought that – – –. I thought initially I'd do something like copy writing, and then – – –. Again, I don't know what attracted me to that, no idea.

Where did you leave the Navy? Did you leave in Melbourne, or did you leave – – –?

No, I didn't, I took my discharge in Sydney and then I was – my first job that I was offered was up in Brisbane, so I went up to Brisbane and I worked for 4BH, and they said to me, 'We think – – –.' Back in those days you sort of went from country broadcasting to city broadcasting, and so they got me a job down at 2LM Lismore, which is where I met my wife, I met Bette, because almost the first time when I got down there, they said that there was – the local theatrical society wanted someone to act a minor role. And I'm not an actor, never could be an actor, but I sort of felt obliged to go along. But I met Bette, she was the leading lady, and so I met her and then we became engaged.

Sadly, her father died. He was one of those people that went into hospital for a minor operation and these days it would have been the subject of enormous litigation, because his bowel was sewn up and he had a bowel stoppage and, instead of being wise enough to put him in an ambulance and send him up to Brisbane to a major hospital where they would have reoperated and fixed him, he just languished in hospital until he died.

And so then we went down to Sydney, and in those days in Sydney it was very hard to get a job in broadcasting. In Lismore I'd done both – well, you had to do everything up there, copywriting, announcing, the lot. And I was doing that, I think, quite competently, or learning the job. Then down in Sydney I got two jobs. We weren't married then, the entire family – Bette's mother was with us at the time and she had family in Sydney so she wanted to go back to her family, so it was just a matter of – well, I laugh now about the fact that in Lismore I didn't have a name, I was Betty Pestell's bloke, you know. But when we went down to Sydney her mother went to her family, as Bette did too, then I got a job, two jobs, with Whitford's Theatre Advertising. I used to write and record all the theatre advertising. Back in those days it was a very big thing. In Sydney there were two companies, Blank's and Whitford's, and I did the Whitford's. I used to both write them and record them. And apparently I did it quite well because I even – I'm a bit amused at someone who became quite famous later, a bloke called Bob Rogers, I remember him coming along and applying for the job that I was doing and he didn't get it. So I did that in the daytime, and at night-time I worked as a night announcer at 2CH in Sydney. So I

used to leave for work at eight o'clock in the morning, go into the city, work at Whitford's all day, then walk up the street, have a bite to eat and go into 2CH and work there from six o'clock or whatever it was until the station closed at eleven o'clock at night. Which meant I had the weekends off.

So then – – –.

So what was your role there? What were you announcing?

Oh, just doing all the commercial announcing that you used to have to do in those days. I was a night announcer, I was good at my job, I knew how to do it. Then I was offered a job as studio manager down at a country station at Wagga, which was a very big country station called 2WG, and by that time Bette and I had married. And then we went down to Wagga.

Where had you married? Did you have family at the marriage? Had you – – –?

Oh, my mother and father came up, my mother and father came up. And of course most of the people there were Bette's relatives. But yes, we were married and my mother and father, I think, were sort of very pleased at the fact that I'd chosen a sensible girl (laughs) and we went down to see my parents in Melbourne at the family home, later, and I think Bette thought, you know, what a beautiful home it was. It was. My father had, he had both architected it and built it, and as I say it was in one of those leafy avenues in Canterbury. I hate to think what it's worth now.

And anyway, so we had gone down to 2WG in Wagga, and Bette was, having a sort of theatrical background, and she also too, when she was a child, she had done what all country kids do. In fact, she was a New South Wales champion in Scottish dancing, and she also too had done elocution, as a lot of kids do, so she was able to fit into the radio station; she used to work on the women's program. And I used to, was the studio manager, which was fine. Then Bette's mother who, as I say, was newly widowed and she was young and still a person in conflict, amazingly we used to think she was probably an 'older' person, then I realised that she was only in her forties when she lost her husband. So then she wanted to buy a property on the Gold Coast, at Coolangatta, so they went up there and eventually she did buy a property up there, so we decided that we'd all leave Wagga and go up to Brisbane. So we went up to Brisbane and – no job, no nothing – and I just walked in to – – –.

Again, what was interesting: it was the beginning, the early days of the station up there, a labour radio station called 4KQ, and I was quite interested. I knew very little about politics, I'm very interested in politics now, have been for many years, but was not so in those years, and I used to be quite interested in what I call the 'unholy triangle': the station was right opposite the Trades Hall building, but a little bit further down the road was the Roman Catholic cathedral, and I used to call it the 'unholy triangle', you see, people used to go backwards and forwards. And it was interesting because it was back in the days of the QLP[4] and the DLP[5]. And so I worked for all of them. Then I was offered a job back at 4BH, the station where I'd had my very earliest beginnings in broadcasting, as the senior night announcer. So I went back there – not 'the'; 'a' senior night announcer – so I went back there and I found that extremely interesting and worked there, and eventually – – –.

All this time, incidentally, when I'd first gone back to Brisbane, I'd gone back into doing art. I'd gone to the Central Technical College as a part-time student. I didn't study pottery, but I studied painting and drawing.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B: TAPE 2 SIDE A

This is Peter Donovan talking with potter Milton Moon at his home. This is tape number two. (break in recording, pause) Now, Milton, you've just suggested, you've moved to Brisbane – or back to Brisbane, I guess – and you've taken an art course. So this is, I believe, 1949.

Yes, about 1949. I remember – you see, this art business has always been part of me. I remember once – and books were pretty scarce back in those days – I remember once down at Wagga walking up the street and looking in the window, and there was a book on art, Australian art. And whereas perhaps another book I might not have thought about spending the money on, I went in and bought it. And it was a book on the, sort of the artists of the late war years and just immediate post-war years, and – in fact, I've still got it, I think it was a Sydney Ure Smith publication. And then when we went to Brisbane we all – and I was working at 4KQ, I then decided that I wanted to again do drawing and painting. So I went to the Central Technical College and enrolled as a student, and – – –.

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[4] QLP – Queensland Labor Party.

[5] DLP – Democratic Labor Party.

Can I just interrupt you there? While you were in the Navy, you would have had many opportunities just to sit down and sketch and draw. Did you do any of that? Because you said you were pretty good at that.

Yes, I think I just did it. But to me they were not things you did and kept, they were just things that you did. Even now, I look back with some sort of amazement that some people have such a sense of their destiny that they kept all the things that they did back in those days. There are some painters I know, and I think what an extraordinary thing to happen, that you had a notion about your own value or that history was going to want these things. Even now, I scribble, I do lots of drawings on envelopes, throw them away because they're just incidental.

But anyway, I went to the art school and there was a teacher there, I remember, was called Melville Haysom. I did life classes, which I found extremely interesting because we were drawing the human body, which I'd never done before. And then going to painting classes, and learning the skills, the technology of colour, colour technology, and what you did. And then I did paintings. There was a funny sort of progression in this, because I used to get some of these framed, and the bloke that did the framing was the grandson of one of Queensland's pioneer potters. And he was a bloke that had done a post-war reconstruction course or repatriation course at the Sydney Art School, and he had come back to Brisbane. His name was Harry Memmott. He'd come back to Brisbane with his wife and young twin sons, and we fitted in very well. He actually was, had a great social conscience, and back in those days he was probably one of these underground communists. And he used to do, had a silkscreen printing business and he would silkscreen posters and things, which back in those days used to suddenly appear overnight, or he'd silkscreen t-shirts and things. And Harry and I just fitted in because we were both ex-servicemen, and he lived not far from where I was living and we just got on together, and one day he came to me and said, 'My car's off the road, I've got to go and see a bloke called Merv Feeney,' who had taken over as a working partner in the pottery where Harry's grandfather – well, a pottery he started. So I said, 'Yeah, okay, fine,' and we hopped in my car and we went over there. And Merv Feeney was one of these – he's now a very important person – well, he's recently died – and he had this pottery under his house. He had one of those old Queenslanders where the house is stuck up in the air and there's about eight or nine foot of space under the house, and he had pottery

wheels and things like that. And the entire Merv Feeney story is an interesting one. Recently I've written an encomium for one of the pottery magazines about it. And so Merv, noticing my – he was throwing a pot on the wheel at the time and he said, 'Would you like to have a go?' And as soon as I touched it I thought, 'Ah! I understand this.' And it was just very curious. I thought, 'Yeah, plastic material.' And what I did not find satisfying in painting – I perhaps would have, was the fact, though, that you were still once removed: there was you, there was a brush, there was the painted canvas. I understood the process, but it didn't command my total commitment because I suppose I'm a haptic, a person who hands are very important and what you touch you understand. And so I thought, 'Ah, this is interesting.' And so from that moment on I was a committed potter.

Just halt you there for a moment. How good were you as an artist? You might say pottery is an art, too; as a – – –?

I don't think I'm bad at all. Recently I've had an exhibition at a local gallery here and it has been both paintings and pots. It irritates some people who say, 'But you're not a painter, you're a potter,' and I said, 'Well, I was a painter, and I've painted always on my pots.' To me it's no different; you paint on a curved surface or you paint on a flat surface. Had I given as much time to painting as I did to pots, yes, I think I would have been very good. And I'm not saying that in a boastful sort of way, but of course you'd be good. I mean, you do it often enough you become good. But I had the instinct for art, but, as I recently said to someone, painting I find very challenging. There's a marvellous thing about it that I can go to a painting, I can leave it for a week, I can come back and I can see another place where I must put another colour, I can work on it, it's very contemplative and I can work for hours and hours and hours on a painting. I *make* a painting, rather than *paint* a painting. But pottery is exciting. You have a lump of clay, you've prepared your clay, you put it on the wheel or you roll it out, you're doing something. To me there's a very immediate thing about it. Then you have the business of – it's very involved. By the time you've learnt how to make pots, throw pots, you've learnt the clay technology, you've learnt the clay's chemistry, you've put in – there's an abundance of time and knowledge in being a good potter, and I often think now, now that I'm old and I've got osteoarthritis in my hands, if I had to be a painter would I find that satisfying? Yes, of course, but not – there's not that excitement of doing things, putting them into

a kiln, taking them out, doing the artwork, doing the glazes, deciding what to do, putting them back in the kiln, pulling them out. It's just a different thing.

One of the things that does irritate me slightly, and oughtn't do, is the fact that painters who I don't think have any more developed sensibilities or sensitivity to their art than I do can nonetheless command astronomical prices. You know, I mean I know some of my contemporaries who are getting over the hundred thousand dollars, yet I look at them and think it's interesting, because – yes, they're good, they're good at what they're doing, but it's just a matter of one being valued over the other. I think probably it's also curious – and this goes back to Japan: pots are valued in Japanese society. But anyway, I became a potter, I committed myself to pottery, I began building kilns, and back in those early days I didn't have the advantage that young kids have now when they leave art school, where they can apply for grants, they can get – – –. They all expect, you know, beautiful wheels. I remember the first wheel I got. Even the wheel head, the shaft wasn't even straight and the wheel head used to go up and down. But you learn from these things, and I used to say to Merv Feeney, who was one of these marvellous sort of practical potters, and he used to say, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, but, you know, you can overcome that, you put a lump of clay on the top and you turn the clay flat, then you put a batt on top of that so you've got a flat batt on top of a wobbling wheel head. So when you learn those things, you learn that – it's taking you back to the very early days of pottery, where people worked with great difficulty. And I sometimes, someone was saying something to me the other day and I said, 'I remember one of the very earliest pots that came from archaeological digs in Anatolia. And people say, "This is one of the first pots ever made." I said, "No, it wasn't. I can look at that pot and I can tell you there were generations of potters before that person did that." And you look at the sureness of the form and you look at the beautiful – – –.' Back in those days often the decoration was in the form of an animal, and you look at the animal on the side and you think, 'God, the sensitivity of the person that did that is quite extraordinary.' And they only had the oxides of iron which they dug out of the ground, or maybe a red clay which they painted on top, but you knew that *that* pot was, as I say, generations removed from the very earliest potters. Anyway, sorry, I lost my train there.

We're going back to the time you became hooked, you discovered that, yes, you like clay.

Yes. Well, then I became – you see, it was very curious because I then did two jobs. I was working by that time at the ABC[6], I'd gone to the ABC, I was doing part-time announcing, and I was also doing – working in the Talks Department doing interviews and things like that, they had a team of people that they could call upon. Back in those days interviews were far more structured than what they are now. We had Talks programs. Some of the interviews were a bit longer, maybe five, eight, ten minutes, but most of them were about three minutes because they were magazine programs, which meant that they had to be very, very disciplined. You had to know exactly what the person – what you wanted from the person. Whereas these days, I mean, you'll often hear interviews go on and on for half an hour, whereas in those days, you had to – well, it might be, say, someone from, an agriculturalist from Africa, you'd say, the introduction would say, 'This is Professor So-and-so from Such-and-such a place, and he's –' give something of his background. Your first question was, 'Professor So-and-so, why come to Brisbane? What is it about this place that interests you or what is,' you know, whatever. And the whole thing was so structured that it was very pithy but very valuable, and that became a very disciplined way of working. And strangely enough, I was able to work with that sort of discipline.

I must have been relatively good at it because then came television, and I remember all the staff were, we were asked to go before the cameras, you see, and just demonstrate something, anything. So I remember going before the cameras and I had a lump of clay in my hand, I brought a lump of clay in wrapped up. And I went into whatever I was talking about and pointed out it was malleable material, began talking about clay. And apparently the people behind the glass in the auditioning room were quite impressed and they said, 'Ah, well, he's got to work in television.' So I did, I found that I was working for Talks Department, I was doing one-hour documentaries, and back in those days to do a one-hour documentary live, it took an enormous amount of discipline. You might find – I remember one we did at the Postmaster General's Department, as it was in those days, where you recorded interviews with everyone from the oldest postman on the beat to the Postmaster

[6] ABC – Australian Broadcasting Commission (now Corporation).

General himself. And, looking back on that, they asked a hell of a lot of people. You had to be very skilful to have done this thing and to have carried it off.

Then I had my own half-hour television program, and each program took four weeks to produce, so it meant that each week I was working on four different programs, each in a different stage of their production.

So what sort of programs were they?

Oh, they were on anything and everything. History of architecture, early architecture in Queensland. I remember another one was owning a dog. Then there was another one – well, there were just so many. And you had to organise the people that came in, you were working with the production staff, camera people. Then of course they had to go out and take all the films of the houses or whatever that you were going to be talking about, and then you had to tie the whole thing up together. And yes, I did that well. But, strangely enough, I was still doing pottery at that time. I was going and working with my friend Harry Memmott, he had his own – by this time he had developed his own pottery business back on the site where his grandfather had this pioneer pottery, and where Merv Feeney was working.

Merv Feeney, you said he had a pottery under his house.

Sorry, under his house. But he became a working partner in the pottery that had belonged to Harry Memmott's grandfather. It was called Sanderson's Pottery. And it was, most of the potteries went out of business in the war years. Well, in the post-war years a lot of them tried very hard to get back on their feet, but they didn't have the trained staff to do it. The only remaining person at the Sanderson Pottery was Harry Memmott's uncle, and he was just at the point where it was a bit beyond him then. He didn't have the energy or the business skills to then take this another stage forward. See, back in those early days, the early potteries made pots for local social use. They made pioneer pots, water coolers, chimney pots, bricks, flowerpots, all that sort of thing. And to me it was very valuable because that was my learning background. I was no product from an art school where they talked about the Tsung pottery of China or whatever else.

And so Merv Feeney came and he actually mechanised, improved, just did all the sorts of things that a young, energetic person can do, because he was a very interesting person in himself. He was a potter by apprenticeship, he was an engineer

by choice, but he was a chemist by profession, he had also decided to become an industrial chemist. So he had these three skills. So he was a marvellous person for Harry Memmott and me to learn from. And he was *our* master, he was our teacher. And back in those days times were slower and people were more interested in what other people were doing, and Merv Feeney found that these two young ex-servicemen were very interesting people. We were all mates. But Merv was the person who had all the skills and could supply all the answers to all our questions. He taught me how to throw, he would teach you about the rudiments of clay technology. Not so much glaze chemistry because that wasn't something he was greatly interested in.

How did one become a potter? At the moment, you know, sort of people become potters as a hobby, so they go to a – – –.

Ah, well, back in – – –.

Was there an apprenticeship? Can you become a master potter?

Yes, you could, there were apprenticeships, but they weren't apprenticeships as such, ... because there was no apprenticeship course as there was for bricklayers or plasterers or things like that. You did what Merv Feeney did. You went to a pottery and they used you as labour. If you had skills, you developed those skills. And as Merv Feeney used to say – he was learning from a pioneer potter called Jack Ramsay, and he used to see what he did, and when Ramsay used to go to the toilet he'd jump on his wheel and throw himself a pot, and had to get off quickly before his backside was kicked when Ramsay came back. Now, that's the way he learnt. In fact, there are places now where you can still learn like that. Bennett's Pottery here's one. They still take people on and teach them how to do what they want them to do. But they're not the sort of places where you can become a rounded potter because they're not making finer ware, they're usually making coarser ware – although Bennett's now are making some ware that is also glazed, well, have been for years.

But these days, of course – well, not so much these days because all the courses are finishing at the colleges. But back in the days when *I* taught people would come – well, let me go back a little bit. When I was in broadcasting a job came vacant at the Central School in Brisbane: they wanted a pottery instructor. The chief or the senior pottery instructor had left. Now, the bloke who was there was a very able potter who was offsiding him, called Carl McConnell, who was an American. He was destined,

everyone thought, to get the job, but he had fallen foul of the bureaucracy at the time and I only found out later he would not have been given the job under any circumstances, purely because (a) he was an American, he was a bit in those days loud-mouthed, he was a bit contemptuous and showed his contempt, but he was a very, very able potter. He should have got the job. I went and saw him and said that I was going to apply for a job but I expected him to get the senior job, that I would probably get the job as the second in charge. But again, when it came to the interviews, they said, no, he wasn't going to get the job, I was going to get the job. So that was rather unfortunate from one point of view, because he had been at the place, knew all the students, and I was the person who'd usurped his job, you see. So that made it that I started behind ..... But I did get the job and it was just a matter of applying yourself and doing what had to be done.

Then I found that I thought it was a little bit silly, we only had hobby students. Now, those that were serious hobby students, maybe enrolled in two or three classes or just haunted the place, as I would have. And as they picked up their knowledge they began sort of going their own way. But I was then in charge of the course. Now, at that time – – –.

Before we continue there, can we go back to your time – *your* apprenticeship, if you like, because it was several years before you took on this job, I think.

Well, I began doing pottery with Merv Feeney in 1950 – and with Harry Memmott. Harry Memmott wasn't a potter either, when I first knew him, so we both became sort of students really of Mervyn Feeney. But Harry then – he was doing plaster work in those early days, making plaster objects that were – – –. You've got to remember it was also, too, in those post-war years, where we were starved of objects. Almost anything people made, I mean, whether it was woodwork or whatever, all of a sudden there was a burgeoning industry of the what they called 'fancy goods', where people – it was a funny name, 'fancy goods', that they used to call it. Even department stores, people like David Jones, they had 'fancy goods' departments. And anyway, so Harry then graduated from plaster and became a potter, and he was very lucky inasmuch as he had Merv Feeney to help him. But Harry was a highly intelligent person and he had grown up almost in the shadow of a kiln stack, because where he lived was only a few doors away from where his grandpa was working at a pottery, and Harry as a child used to go in and out of the place, so for him pottery was

sort of part of his psyche. And then the fact that I used to go along there, Harry by this time was turning out thousands of objects and selling them around Australia, everything from – a lot of the designs we were doing on them were Aboriginal designs, which of course is a no-no these days, but back in those days it was nothing wrong with it. I mean, Aboriginal designs were just part of our psyche, so to speak. There was another big pottery in Sydney called the Martin Boyd Pottery which the Boyds ran. They were making pots that had more diverse sorts of designs on them because they used to use students from the Art School in Sydney to come and decorate. But Harry decided that what he wanted were these Aboriginal motifs, and so we used to do them, hundreds of them a day. In fact, often Harry would sit down on one side of a box and he would put the basic colour on it and he'd pass it over to me and I'd do the rest of the design. We just worked together doing these things by the thousands. In fact, I even used to sign Harry's name on the back of them when he was busy doing something else. As he used to say, he's glad he didn't have any money in his bank because I could sign his signature as well as he could.

Yes, I'm intrigued – you in fact had an apprenticeship for about nineteen years.

No, no, no, it wasn't nineteen years. Actually I learnt from Merv Feeney in 1950, that was when I began my pottery, round about 1950. I actually got the job at the Central School in 1962, so that was twelve years.

Twelve years. That's a long time.

Well, I was working in broadcasting, you see.

How did you manage the two?

Lots of energy. On my way into the ABC I would stop off at Harry's place, and Harry even said to me one time, 'Why don't you come and work here with me?' and as we said, work with him, not for him. And at one particular time when I had a period free I actually did work there full-time, and it was very enjoyable. But it just wasn't paying enough money. In fact, Harry used to say, he said, 'I'm paying you more money than I'm getting myself,' because he used to pay me by the hour. And then, when there was more work for me to do at the ABC – I was not on the full-time staff – when there was more work to do at the ABC, back in the television days, then I found I could give Harry far less time. But by this time I'd built my own kiln – in

fact, I had my first exhibition, I think, in 1959; I had my first Sydney exhibition in 1963, so I was working sort of very hard. I mean, you knock off work, you come home, you've got your second interest, your hobby or whatever, except I never ever ever allowed anything I did to be called a hobby; to me I was very serious about it. But yes, I lived two lives: one as a broadcaster or television person, and the other I'd come home and do my artwork – I called it my art – or my pottery.

What about – you must have had a third element there. You must have been a family man, a father, a husband?

Oh yes, sure, of course. And –

What was Bette doing this time?

– also another thing too that happened, Bette and her mother started one of the very first craft and art shops in Brisbane. It was a small place, a hole in the wall, but they used to buy and sell very good things. I mean, I remember we had dishes decorated by John Percival. I'm sorry I didn't keep them rather than sell them. And they used to do that together. I used to – also, too, I used to do an enormous amount of pots for them, I used to buy pots from one of the potteries and I used to put even basic paints on them, because back in those days people used to have little cactus pots, you know? And I used to do them by the thousands. And looking back I don't know how I did all those things, but it was just a matter of energy. But Bette and her mother used to do that. And Bette also too used to work at the ABC. She worked, I think, in many departments. She worked in the Sporting Department. Being a married person she couldn't go onto the full-time staff, married people got sacked every year at Christmas time, and then they were re-employed in January. And she worked in the Newsroom – – –.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A: TAPE 2 SIDE B

[Being a married person she couldn't go onto the full-time staff, married people got sacked every year at Christmas time, and then they were re-employed in January. And she worked in the Newsroom] and she, our first, Damon, was born, he was born in 1959, and so it was a matter of – there was plenty of time in your life. I mean, I came home – I worked at the ABC or worked with Harry Memmott, I came home, I had my own kiln and pottery under the house where we lived at the time, and we used to go – back in those days too we were also interested in underwater diving, and we

used to go down and dive on the Gold Coast, go out to sea on wrecks like – there were wrecks off the coast and we used to go diving on those. All that stopped, of course, once Bette became pregnant. But yes, people fitted in a lot. Young people do, don't they? Looking back I'm quite mystified at the things I *did* fit in, because the diving was extraordinarily interesting.

But the diving – see, it all fitted in together. Because a lot of the early things that I did, I mentioned before that having the sort of undisciplined, in one sense, background – no-one organised my teaching. I organised my own learning. I have an objection to people saying they're 'self-taught'. I say, 'No, you're not self-taught, you organise your own learning. But someone teaches you something or you get it from a book, or you rob it or you steal it or you beg it,' you know. 'But you're not self-taught. You organise your own learning.' And that's what I did. But the very fact that – well, back in those early days, too, we had dogs, I used to go walking up in a big forest near where we lived, a place called Toohey's Mountain, which was a place no-one else used to go into, but I used to go in there and I used to take my dogs and then eventually Damon as a young boy, I used to take him up there. And I even used to tell him how – we used to rock climb and put ropes around him and rappelled over rocks and things like that.

But it was that sort of thing, the closeness to nature, that was the big influence in my pottery. In fact, the very first exhibition I had in Sydney, they were mainly sort of geological forms and anthropomorphic forms or – – –. People were angry, they walked around and said, 'But this isn't pottery.' And I'd say, 'Yes, it is, it's *my* pottery.' If you were to see photographs of the early pots that I did, they were, they had nothing to do with the pottery tradition, as such. Where they were part of tradition was that they were made of clay, they were fired in kilns, but the forms owed an enormous amount to – well, also mountains, climbing over mountains, diving under the water. But then again, you know, this is very natural. This becomes your palette, so to speak. It becomes the sort of thing that you feed – you don't feed it into your psyche; it is just there. And I remember making – well, one pot that was exhibited in Japan, I remember that it owed almost everything to barnacle-encrusted rocks under the sea. But I'd added a decoration to it. In fact, one of those barnacle-encrusted pots is now owned by the Art Gallery in Queensland. So there were all these early pots, they were – to me they were important pots, and later, although I

was to become what some people would say I made ‘proper’ pots, those pots to me are still just as ‘proper’ as any pots. You do what in fact the market is demanding of you. Anyway, I mean, that’s – we’re getting away from the story, so to speak.

We want to get to *you*, Milton, rather than just the story. So do you consider yourself to be a bit of a rebel? One doesn’t think of Queensland and Brisbane of the ’50s as a, you know, wealth of, you know, an artistic renaissance.

No, it wasn’t, but there were very good artists up there, purely because they weren’t part of the Establishment. There were painters that did their own thing, they were good painters, but yes, Brisbane was far removed from the Establishment in those days. I remember the very first early exhibitions I had in Sydney, I only found out later that they used to call me ‘the wild boy from the North’, you know, because you were doing pots that weren’t part of the mainstream. But you weren’t a wild boy, I mean, you were a perfectly disciplined person – you had to be disciplined to fit in all the things that you were doing, you had to be disciplined to be doing the jobs that you did in broadcasting, you had to be disciplined to find the time to go down and make pots and organise exhibitions and things like that. The wildness of it was that they weren’t conformist pots. And in fact I used to find it quite strange that these people conformed to such a degree, or that their movements outside their area were so sort of timid. I shouldn’t say that, perhaps. But there were people who were just working within the mainstream. I was not of the mainstream; my mainstream was a place of flowerpots and chimneypots and all that sort of thing, or doing the work that I did with Harry Memmott. But my own work was expressive.

It’s very interesting – and I’ve pondered this a lot. Later, of course – it wasn’t even considered then – there were big discussions about what’s the difference between a craftsman and an artist. And I think I probably – I’ve written a lot on this, and I did cover it a bit in this sort of autobiography of mine, selected memoirs. A craftsman is a person who learns how to do something and does it. He will alter it, but the movements are not large movements, but he can do today what he did yesterday and will do so the same tomorrow. But an artist – the way *I* look at it, becoming more and more and more to not like the word ‘art’, it’s a pretentious word in many respects – the ‘natural’ artist, as I call it – and I do call myself a ‘natural’ artist, or ‘natural’ innovator or whatever else, whatever word you want to do – is that you are all the time going beyond what you know you can do. You’re going into no-

man's-land all the time. And, quite frankly, I find no-man's-land an extraordinarily interesting land. I've been a very successful practical potter, but all the time that I've been doing that I've also been doing this other work, where you, as I call it, go into no-man's-land. You go out, go beyond what you know you can do. In fact, I used to use this as one of my teaching maxims when I used to teach. I used to say to my students – I'd see them throwing on a wheel and I'd say, 'Yeah, yeah, okay, fine. You're throwing a bowl – – –.' Again, I was a very disciplined teacher, they had to do things in a very disciplined way. I said, 'Freedom will come when you know what you're doing.' But a student might be throwing a bowl or a plate. I'd say, 'What do you actually want?' They'd say, 'I really want a bowl, a shallow bowl.' And I used to say, 'Well, you'll never do it that way. What you must do' – and I used to stop them using good clay, they used to have practice clay and I used to call it their five-finger exercises – I used to say, 'Take the bowl to the point where you know you've made it successful, but then I want you then to take it beyond what you know you can do, because it is only when you go beyond what you know you can do and you take it to the point of destruction, that you're postponing that point of destruction, that you're beginning to extend yourself.' Now, this – for me – is one of the maxims in life. If in your mind you must always sort of take yourself beyond what you know you can do. Now, for some people this is sheer lunacy, but for other people this is just a very, it's the way they are, the way they're born, and to me it's just what I do.

So where did you learn that from? Everything you've said so far suggests a very structured type of upbringing, a nice – – –.

Oh, no, back in those days, you see, there was the structure when the parents were structuring you, but there was no television, there was no – all our games, all our games were games of the imagination. If the Wild West was the thing, you'd made guns to fit into holsters on your side and, you know, you lived a wildly rich life in the imagination. And I think that that was one thing that kids had in those days, you had to do it. It was quite amusing, because when we used to live up at Summertown up in the Hills, there was a family of kids down the end that had no television and when I'd come along at night I'd view a little kid from behind a bush and he'd be sort of pointing a stick at me, and I knew exactly what he was doing. He was hiding, I was the enemy, he was going to shoot me, you see. And so I'd sort of go into a great act, say (makes growling sound) and jump aside, you see, and join in the game. And I

knew that they knew how to play. Whereas a lot of kids these days, with video games and things like that, and television, it's all second-hand. But mind you, you can get yourself into an enormous amount of trouble when you're a kid, you know, you climb trees that are too high and you fall off boughs that you should never have been on, and you – yes, you do, you take yourself to the point of destruction, purely because that's enriching. Now, my immediate brother that knew how to make crystal sets and wirelesses and things, he never did that. He never had to do that, because you see the material with which he worked were valves and circuits and things like that, so he worked within that structure. Whereas I had the sort of wilder, more untrammelled mind, so to speak. But yes, just because you know how to do the structure, as I had to do when I worked for the ABC, or that even when I became a teacher, it was very structured. You would teach best if you knew what you were doing, because then the students also knew what *they* were supposed to be doing, and then you can measure the progress, you could see it happening. And then as they – and you, you get better at something – you relax the reins, so to speak. No, to me it is just a very natural thing. We're rather getting away from here because – from the sequence of what one was doing, because having gone from being a broadcaster to a teacher, then wanting to do that better – – –.

One very important thing happened in my life then: I was awarded a Churchill Fellowship. It was a foundation Churchill Fellowship.

We'll take that next time, I think there, Milton, if that's all right.

Okay.

Getting back to, say, that first exhibition of yours, this time even your potting influence must have been fairly circumscribed, you'd only ever done it in Brisbane, so it was the clay and your imagination.

Yes.

Were you aware of any other, say, Australian contemporaries? Were you aware of what people were doing overseas?

No. No. What was happening in those days was pretty – – –. The only pottery book that I'd ever seen was one by Bernard Leach and, strangely enough – how things come home to roost! – my son's doing a PhD at the moment and it's largely based on the writings of Bernard Leach and the effect that that had. But back in those days

you were unaware. Brisbane was a Third World country, and I don't – they'll probably take offence at that, but it was. Back in those days there were – certainly in terms of ceramics – there were three pots, I think, in the Brisbane Art Gallery. I think one was by David Boyd, the other one was by Carl McConnell, and the other one was by me. There were no pots there; there were no sort of marvellous collections that there were in galleries in Sydney or certainly in Melbourne. The potters down there knew what a Tsung pot was. I didn't have a notion. I wasn't concerned, because what was coming out of my own bowels of imagination was enough, you know, you didn't need to know the embarrassing fact that you weren't really part of the world pottery system. You were happy doing what you were doing, and the very fact that I was being exhibited was enough. But no, the only other potter that I knew, apart from Mervyn Feeney and Harry Memmott – they were about the only two people that I knew and had regard for, and they were entirely different – Carl McConnell was a person who did know. I mean, he'd been brought up in Chicago and he'd, as a child, he'd gone to art classes in the Chicago Art Institute and he would have been familiar with those sorts of pots. But he again was not the sort of potter, he had no wildness of imagination, he was a very competent potter. So apart from those I didn't really know what was going on pretty much in the rest of the world. I did become aware, later, of – well, the world opened up for me, of course, as more magazines began to come in or when I went away myself.

Again, we'll take that next time. There was a period of a hard decision when you had to give away the ABC.

I got the job! I got the job at the Central Technical College in charge of the Pottery Department. And the rights and the wrongs with it have certainly been debated by lots of people, because Carl McConnell – he's now dead – he had his friends. And it's a bit difficult, you see, because when you have been a face – I even used to read the news on television at night. Now, when you're sitting up there reading the news – – –. It's almost amusing now, you see, there's a parallel now when people say to me, 'But you're not a painter, you're a potter.' And then when you get a job at an art school like that, they say to me, 'But you're not a potter, you're a broadcaster.' You say, 'Yeah, but I'm both.' It just so happened that that job came up, and I don't know, I don't know; I think had the ABC said to me, 'Look, you know, you've got a terrific future here – – –.' I was not on the full-time staff of the ABC, I was one of

those people that – they employed me to do a lot of things that their other full-time staff could not do, or did not do as well. As I say, I used to do these 'outside broadcasts', as they were called in those days, and I must have done them well. If they had had someone there on staff that could have done them better they would have done them. But I think it was just the fact that – – –.

But also too, you see, apart from doing all these things, I don't think I was a natural broadcaster of the sort that is terribly articulate, that has a 'personality', as such. I was able to do the job I was supposed to do, and I did it properly. To me, I understood how to do a job, I knew that there was a beginning and a middle and an end, and that the whole thing was a structure. It was almost a physical thing that you built, like you build a sculpture or a pot or whatever else. You build the structure and you do it. And I think probably it was some sort of irritation on my part that – well, it's just fate, destiny, isn't it. I mean, had I been put onto the permanent staff I might still be up there reading the news in Brisbane – not now, I mean they don't have old people reading news – but I would have been doing the sorts of things that I was doing. Just doing announcing on the classical station, which was where I mainly announced, or doing things for television.

Bette was quite happy? Here she is with her three year-old son at this stage.

Yes, she – I think Bette found it quite extraordinary, although she didn't find it as extraordinary as other people did, that I gave up – – –. People couldn't understand it. They'd say, 'But you're on television. You don't give up those things.' And sort of I did. Purely because it was a new life. And again, I suppose, I've not been frightened about taking a new direction. So once I left broadcasting, apart from the fact that occasionally I'd go back and do an interview when someone wanted me to – mainly *I* was the person being interviewed then – and I, well, it was certainly so up in Brisbane because if they wanted a comment on something to do with architecture or art or whatever else you just might be one of the pool of people that they pull in off the street and ask their opinion. I remember at the time, at one particular park in Brisbane, there was a fountain put in and there were a lot of people objecting to this fountain. They said they thought it was horrendous and this and this and this, and they got me to go along, and they said, you know, 'You're an artist, what is your opinion of this fountain?' And I said, 'I can't possibly see how anyone can raise any

objection about the fountain whatsoever. If you raise your camera a little bit you will see the hideousness of the skyline.' You know, there were ugly shops and there were millions of electricity lines and things like that, and – they didn't have Stobie poles; whatever they called them – and I said, 'How can you isolate that out to complain about that, and yet ignore that?' And it was just a matter of that was new, that they'd lived with and they habituated with. It was quite odd.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B: TAPE 3 SIDE A

This is Peter Donovan speaking with Milton Moon at his home. Today is the 9th July 2004. This is tape number three. Now, Milton, last week we got up as far as you just having been appointed to the position at the Technical College. Again, another major change in your life. Here now you're being asked to become a teacher. Was that a major challenge to you?

Not really, Peter, because there is a parallel methodology. If you're, as I was doing in broadcasting, doing documentaries and things like that there was a beginning, a middle and an end. I mean, you've got to put it out in some sort of logical sequence. Now, to me, teaching was pretty much the same sort of thing. It's generally accepted that people don't make artists – although I wasn't teaching art, I was teaching pottery – you teach people, you give them the vocabulary of expression, you give them the technical ability to do what they want to do. So you just have to work out in your mind how you're going to go about doing that, and I found it quite easy to form what I called a sequence of learning hand skills and a sequence of learning decorative possibilities. If you've got – well, without going into it, there is a sequence. And so it wasn't a difficult thing.

What I did find a little bit difficult, and different, was the fact that you were dealing with a class full of people. Generally when you were doing a program, such as I was doing at the ABC, you're in charge – well, you're one of the people in charge of it, and you don't have to have terribly many outside personalities to take into account, or you have control over it. But when you have a class full of people and you've got them week after week after week for at least a year, two years, three years or whatever the time that they persist in coming, then – yes, that is slightly different because you've got to take into account the personality of the person, what is it that they want from it, their expectations, how you sort of lead them along. I found it very important not to let people just stay within their expectations, I used to try to extend it, I used to say, 'Well, look, what about this? Can you think about that?

Wouldn't you like to see this?' In other words, put suggestions so that they can go on from that. So in that sense, yes, there is a parallel, but there were differences, and it was just something that you knew you had to take into account.

Now, you followed someone else, so how much did you take on board what your predecessor had done, and how far did you develop it? And was it difficult stepping into this other person's shoes?

Yes, it always is, purely because classes tend to develop loyalties to teachers. And I used to say that, 'Okay, but people are different. Now, you've got what that person gave you, now try and get what I'm suggesting, what I'm going to offer you.' Again, it's a little bit of a psychological thing. I mean, after all – well, as I've always said, no school can be all things to all people, and you've got to point out to the student that if, what is it that they want? I mean, do they want just to have fun, or do they really want to extend themselves? And most people usually say, 'Oh, I want to do as best I can.' So you've got them there, you can then sort of steer them along a certain path. But yes, the personality problem is a bit difficult, and I did run into that. As I think I mentioned in our last conversation, that one person had expected to get the job – and rightfully the job would have been his; I mean, had I been in his position I would have thought, 'Yeah, well, that job's mine,' – but he didn't get it, he would not have got it, purely because he had offended the Establishment. In this particular case it was someone called Carl McConnell. He was a very able person, he was an American. As a child he had been exposed to, say – well, one thing, the Chicago Art Institute, and I think he had a certain amount of derision, if not contempt, for the inadequacies of the Art School in Queensland at that time. Mind you, rightfully so. But when you express those things – – –. And I don't think from – I think, being fair, he was not the sort of teacher that was able to extend people the way perhaps an education department might have wanted. But it was a personality thing. Yes, there were difficulties, but he and I ended up we worked together quite well.

Milton, well, you've now become a teacher. How much did you put into, how much did the course change because you were in charge?

Well, I think it did change a lot because whereas the previous person in charge – well, there were two people: one was Hatton Beck, who was in charge. Hatton Beck was married to Lucy Boyd, one of the Boyd family. And Hatton, he ran it pretty much as a hobby course and I, on different occasions when I used to go to the Art School, go

down to the Pottery Department, I used to observe the fact that poor old Hatton never never never finished a sentence. He was not able to because he had this gaggle of women around him, and every time someone asked him a question or asked him for something, as soon as he'd almost finished with that another woman would turn him around and say, 'Mr Beck, what about this and this and this,' you see. And so he was pretty much, he was pretty much a resource rather than – he taught, of course, but he was still a resource for the expectations, for the fulfilment of the expectations of the people that were in the class, and they'd been there for years and years and years and years and, frankly, quite a lot of them were bullies. Because the attitude was at the Art School at the time that a lot of those courses were hobby courses, but they were regarded, quite rudely, as a means where people could be given time to 'fill in' – as I used to joke, I used to say, 'Keep them out of the pubs and off the streets.' (laughs) It was a hobby class. Now, that was certainly not what I wanted to do.

Carl McConnell, on the other hand, he was a good teacher, he had lots and lots and lots of skills, but he wasn't a consistent teacher. He would decide to do something and then he wouldn't follow it through, he was just a different sort of teacher. Whereas I think, because of my background – I mean, you can't do that if you're doing, say, work on a television program. You start it and you finish it. And to me that was what I had to do. As I said, I designed the course so that it fulfilled – well, it gave the student a vocabulary of expression, and it also gave them the technicalities or the techniques that they would need to do what they wanted to do. So if they wanted to go out of the school, buy themselves a kiln and a wheel, they could do at home precisely what they were doing in the classroom and be able to become potters. And I of course almost, in the early days, began wanting to alter it, to get it off the hobby level to become a certificate course, which I thought was very important. But that was not to be in Queensland.

But then again, there was a break in what I was doing, inasmuch as that the Churchill Fellowships came into existence and the very first Fellowship applications were called in 1965. And I can't really tell you what it was that spurred me to do it, but I did make an application. And back in those days it wasn't a great deal of money from the Fellowships, it was more the honour of having sort of got it. But I spent a lot of time working on my application, saying exactly where I was going to go, how long I was going to be in these places, what I expected to get from it, and again I

think probably this might have been one of the reasons why I got it, because it was a foundation Churchill Fellowship, awarded in 1965 and which I took up in 1966. I think that if you leave the people who go over these applications in no doubt that *you* know what you want to do, it makes it easy for them. They can sit back and say, 'Oh, well,' you know, 'he knows what he wants to do and he knows where he wants to go, and it's all there.' And I had outlined the fact that I wanted to go to America and I wanted to go down to South America, to Mexico, then over to England and then to Europe and to come back *via* Iran and also Hong Kong. Now, I was very fortunate inasmuch as that the people that I got to become my referees, there were two academics in Queensland, and one was Bernard Schaeffer, who was a professor of government and he was also someone who was very active in the art movements in Queensland, he was at the Queensland University; and the other one was also at Queensland University and his wife happened to be a student of mine, and that was Dennis Pryor, and he was a classics scholar. And anyway, so on top of that, though, I had the good fortune to meet with Joern Utzon, who said that he would write on my behalf, which he did. So again it was very fortunate, because not only having put an application in and exhibited, well, an absolute knowledge of what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go, I was then able to proffer this letter from Joern Utzon, saying that he had advised me that if I was interested in architectural ceramics – which I was because I was because I was doing a certain amount of that work – that he thought that I should go down to Mexico and that I should also go to Iran to see the marvellous ceramics, historical ceramics, particularly at a place called Isfahan. Anyway, so all things came together and I was one of the lucky people to be given a Fellowship. So we scraped and saved all the money we could, and I went to America on my own and met Bette in England, Bette and Damon in England, and then we went through Europe together. We often laugh and say it was very heady having been given this, but we were pretty poor. I remember we both had insurance policies which we cashed in. But anyway, it was certainly a worthwhile experience.

America to me was an absolute eye-opener, because coming from a place – as I've often said since, Queensland at that time was almost a Third World country when it came to art schools, and particularly ceramic departments. Going to America – well, first I went to Honolulu and from there I went across to San Francisco, and to me it was just almost an embarrassment to go to a place like the Worcester College of

Environmental Ceramics at the California campus, and just see exactly the – well, even thinking back now, I mean my mind boggles at what they in fact had to offer. It was something that I just couldn't conceive of ever ever ever happening in Australia, and it was at the height of the art movements, post-war art movements in America – this was in 1966. And it was quite astounding. It wasn't my own work that I felt lacked, it was just the fact that the educational facilities, the educational – just the attitude, and I realised that in America people could choose to go to an art school and do ceramics, and it was almost as valid as if you said you were going to do medicine or law or something like that. I mean, a person could go home to their parents and say, 'I'm going to university, Mum, and I'm going to do art,' and it sort of had that importance to it that no parent would think that their son had chosen some sort of alternative thing that was going to lead nowhere.

I gather from your autobiography that America was quite different from the rest of your trip in terms of your experience and what you saw and whom you met.

Oh, totally!

What impression did it leave with you? Because one – no, I won't ask the next question. But what impression, did it influence you at all, did you take anything on board?

I suppose I took on board the attitudes. I wasn't embarrassed by what I was doing, because I realised that I had the freedom of mind to do exactly the sorts of things that they were able to do, but I was living in a culture that wouldn't have permitted this, it just wasn't conceivable. For example, in San Francisco I met people of the importance of Peter Voulkos, who was in charge of the Ceramics Department in California, in San Francisco, and I thought, 'I can understand you, but you live in a world that is so totally different to the one I live in. You can – – –.' In other words, being accepted gives you an enormous amount of freedom. I mean, you can think these things and you can do this sort of work, but when – – –. I remember, I've often recalled that a Welsh potter, when I asked him about why he lived in Japan rather than England, he said, 'If you were a singer and you lived in a country where everyone was tone deaf, you know, that'd be pretty crook.' And so all of a sudden I just saw a big, open world in America. So I went from San Francisco, I went down to Los Angeles, I went to one particular university in Los Angeles where they have a sculpture symposium in which they invite people from all over the world. The only

thing they expect of them is that they do something that they've always wanted to do, but never had the facilities or the money to be able to do it, and the university supplied them with the possibilities. And again I thought, 'This could never, never happen.' I thought of the sort of closed shop and the miserable sort of attitudes at the Central School of Art in Queensland at that time: it was just – I mean, I'm not blaming them, but that was just the way they thought.

In terms of the art, though, was there anything particularly 'American' about the art?

Oh yes, it was, some of it you could see that there was sensitivity in that there was subtlety. But generally it was hyper-extravagant. I think what was interesting about it was that they were breaking new ground technically. As I remember saying to one potter down in Los Angeles, his name was John Mason, and he took me to his workshop, and he used to do large-scale architectural work for big buildings, certainly in Los Angeles, and he even used to have a forklift to get the work into the kiln, you see, and I said to him, 'How on earth would you get something like that into the kiln?' And it was just the, sort of the technological advances. And as he said to me, 'Oh,' he said, 'no, no American potter of any sort of self-respect would admit that you never had a forklift'! (laughs) And to me this was totally – well, it was out here. People would have kilns that would have four or five burners and perhaps one person could perhaps, if they climbed into it, would be able to sit in that kiln. But over there you'd have kilns with forty or fifty burners, and not only did individuals have them, but colleges had them. And I remember seeing colleges where every single student had their own kiln that had been supplied. And I thought about this and I thought, you know, the good parts of it and the bad parts of it. I thought, as eventually I – and I think I'm right in this – getting students to work together to share facilities is sometimes very good. Whereas if you have got a school where every single person has their own wheel and their own kiln and they go their own way doing their own thing, that's an entirely different approach. Most people don't want teachers really, they only want resources, you know, they want to go out and touch a button and say, 'How do I do this?' 'How do I do that?' And I realised that no matter what America did for opening *my* eyes, I knew that this could never be the way in our education system. We'd never have the money, for one thing. And I don't actually think that it was a desirable way of going about it. And it had an effect

on my teaching, you know. I had to sort out who's right. Is the American way right, or is this idea that I've got in my mind right? And it was taking the middle path, of course. Anyway, so America, yes, it was a big shock.

Another good thing happened, inasmuch as after going down to Los Angeles I went to Mexico and from Mexico, which was very exciting, then I went back up to Chicago and I was able to see places like the Chicago Art Institute and look at the collections of ceramics that – – –. And all the American museums had work that – in one little room there was more work than there was at that time, I think, in the collected galleries of Australia, and it was interesting to see that. And so it was just an opening of the world to me, seeing not only what they had, but it's the sort of thing that feeds into your own sort of sensibilities, and it does alter you. It makes you grow up.

Anyway, so from Chicago then I went over and – if you could just stop the tape for a moment. (break in recording)

So I'll just ask you again, Milton, so we don't need a travelogue –

No.

– the high points and what was it that grabbed you? Because this was your first time out of Australia, and it was –

Yes.

– your first exposure to the larger world, the real exposure.

Well, it wasn't my first time out of Australia, it was my first time out of Australia as a person within a profession. And to me probably the big highlight in New York was meeting Mrs Vanderbilt Webb, who was the leader of the World Crafts Council, and she in fact asked me would I be one of the speakers at a World Craft Congress in Switzerland – would I be there, and could I alter my travel plans so that I could represent Australia at that – which I did. So that was something that was quite exciting. Then I went over to England and from England, meeting all the ceramists over there, and then going to Europe, going across to France and up to Denmark, a place where one of my forebears came from, and then going up through Norway, Sweden. And then – – –.

Were any of these places as exciting as America?

They were different, they were different. I remember even in London I was invited to show the slides that I'd taken at the Royal College of Art, and I was thinking about these rather wild, free, uninhibited Americans, and the students at the Royal College at that time were mainly people who were dressed in very nice, clean, white coats with pencils in their top pocket, and they were designing ceramics for the ceramic industry. If there was much hands-on work it certainly wasn't obvious there. (break in recording)

So righto, Milton, we're in Britain and you're giving this slide show to these young designers.

Yes, well, they sat up in sort of polite incredulity, looking at this extravagant work, you see. Because what was being done in America had very little to do with pottery. Pottery became, most of the Americans were wanting to become artists in clay, and so it was not pottery, as such, it was an amalgam of – well, it was ceramic sculpture. And a lot of the work that they were doing was extravagant of form. I think the bewildering part of it was that, in trying to do what they were doing, it was like abstract expressionism taken almost to the most extravagant degree. And, you know, certainly if they're living in a culture that can accept that – – –. And it just amazed me to think that, one, they could afford the clay to do it, they could afford the fuel to fire this work, that they could even amass enough money to build kilns enough to put this work in. But, you know, this was just American, it was – I suppose it was like the American army, you know, if they're going to go somewhere there's everything there, you know, and it was just everything. So from that point of view I was – well, the word is incredulous, I looked at this work and thought, 'It's quite astonishing.' But I knew it was not what I could do within my society, nor did I think it was what I wanted to do within my society. I can imagine that yes, you can do some sort of ceramic sculptures, which I think even the Boyds have done in the past, yes, there is a place for it; but certainly not the way the Americans were doing it. And it was an absolute contrast.

In one way England probably was a bit of a let-down after the extravagance of America. Here I was, showing all these slides and having these people sort of look at it as if to say, 'This work's not for real.' And it's not for real. It's American.

But anyway, after having sort of settled down and come back to the world of pottery, then – – –. That whole trip was a formative trip, it was consolidating in my

mind what it is I could do and what it is that I should teach. Now there were those two points: what I could do, and what I should teach. So when, eventually, I did come back to Australia and I went back to the School of Art, the first thing I wanted to do was to make the courses, alter them from being just hobby courses. I knew that there was no way we would get full-time students in those days, back in 1966, but what I thought we could do was to organise the classes so that they did offer at least some sort of qualification. And I remember at the time putting forth an argument that we should at least offer a certificate course, which was rejected, so that I went through the Department of Statistical Returns and I got all the figures together to show that Australia at that time was spending an enormous amount of money importing ceramics. So – – –.

END OF TAPE 3 SIDE A: TAPE 3 SIDE B

– – – , but when it came to me to organise the time in which I would be on leave from the school to do it, they then became quite ridiculous by saying that they would put me on a bond, that I'd have to sign a bond that I would come back to the school, and that they would pay me a small amount of money to cover the period while I was away. Now, I said that I couldn't accept this because this was against the outline of the Churchill Fellowships. And eventually I had to write down to the Commonwealth Office of Education and say, 'Look, I'm having a few problems, please could you come to my assistance and explain to the Department of Education in Queensland that under the terms of the Churchill Fellowship I can't do this?' Anyway, which they did. But the thing is, I think it irritated them at the time. So I don't think anything I was going to do when I came back was going to be approved of by the Department of Technical Education. So it was that that probably made me realise – much and all as we didn't particularly want to leave Queensland, but I still had, there was a lot of things I wanted to do, and here I was sort of being told that 'You're teaching hobby ceramics, and that's what it's going to be for the rest of your time,' that 'this is what the Department does,' whereas I wanted to put it onto a footing that it had some reality to it.

Anyway, it so happened that there was a conference on that had been organised by art schools around Australia, to be held in Melbourne, called 'The Training of the Professional Artist' or 'The Professional Training of the Artist' – no-one was really

sure what the title of the conference was. Anyway, I was one of the people who was a delegate and, because I'd just come back from America, it was of interest to them to hear firsthand – see, not very many Australian artists at that time, and particularly from the education departments, had been to America to see exactly what was being done. And when I made the point that here was something being done in almost every college in America that was totally unheard of, that staff were even coming back at night-time, they were firing kilns overnight, or – you know, there was just this enormous freedom that they had been allowed in America, and they'd been given the facilities and the freedom. And shortly after that, when I came back to Brisbane, it was drawn to my attention or I saw it in the paper that there was an advertisement at the South Australian School of Art that they wanted someone as the head of the department. And I thought at the time it was just a query. I sent a letter down and said, 'Am I the sort of person you would like an application from?' And I'd met Doug Roberts, who was the Principal of the School at that time, I'd met him at the conference, 'The Professional Training of the Artist' or the whatever, and I immediately got, there was a telegram back the same day saying, 'You've been appointed' and I had to ring him up – – –. Oh, he said, 'Not only have you been appointed,' but they had also sent a letter to the Department of Education asking for them to facilitate my release. And I said, 'Hang on, this is going too fast.' You know, 'It was only a query, and here it is, I've been given the job on a query.' And I thought at the time I must have impressed Doug Roberts, although they were finding it, to get someone to take charge of the department, applications were fairly thin on the ground. Anyway, so I also knew that this had to be handled in a fairly careful way. Anyway, the long and the short of it was, yes, I did get the job and we did shift from Queensland down to South Australia, which was not entirely – you know, it was suddenly a bit of a shock to come from a place like Queensland to a place like South Australia. Certainly South Australia was almost, in those days, light years ahead of Queensland in its attitude. The School of Art down in South Australia was a college, had been granted the status of a college of advanced education, it had a small number of students who were enrolled at the school. Generally they were full-time students and it, to me, was everything that – and in those days – everything that the Queensland Art School was not.

Can I just – we'll get back onto this in a moment. You went to Queensland, I gather, largely because of Bette and her mother moving up there. Was Bette's mother still alive at this stage?

She came down to South Australia with us, and she'd only been here a year when she had a stroke and she died. And, as I explained, she'd been widowed very young, and she'd come down to Wagga with us and then she'd wanted to return up to the – well, she was a Lismore lady and she wanted to return up to that area, and she also too wanted to buy property, and I think she wanted to create a life of her own. And so we went to Queensland and so that's why we were in Queensland for twenty years.

But no, it's one of those things, a job comes up and I got the job. And so as soon as I came down here I set about doing the sorts of things that I was not permitted to do in Queensland. We were able to establish a diploma course, we had full-time students, but we also too had part-time students. We did have the night-time part-time students, but again they were on a different level and they could get the qualification of a certificate if they attended for the requisite time. So certainly down in South Australia I was given the chance to do the sorts of things that I was not able to do in Queensland. The part-time students had a formal course, and of course we had the daytime students, the full-time students, and we also too taught teaching students and the Ceramics Department also taught the ceramics component of the Sculpture Department. So it was a very fulfilling school to go to at that time.

Were you able just to step into this, or did you have to ramp it up a little?

Oh, well, I think I had the advantage inasmuch as that the attitude was different.

So the structure in ceramics and pottery was already in place?

No, it wasn't, it wasn't in place, it was mainly part-time classes, but then we just altered the whole framework of it so that the daytime classes, there were certificate courses and there were diploma courses. And it then became – well, there were formal courses. And the students that were doing the diploma course, their first year was spent in what they called a common course, and for the next three years they were with me. And bit by bit by bit by bit we organised the course, I got people in to teach clay technology and glaze chemistry and do those things that would be done better by someone else who was perhaps, say, more professionally knowledgeable in those areas than I was. So it became absolutely a worthwhile course. And again, I

decided that the approach I would take was not to have a maximum of equipment but only that equipment that the students themselves would be able to afford once they left the school.

You see, ceramics can be done on many levels. I mean, you can do it in the American way, where you've got your equipment everywhere, then when the student leaves the school they say, 'Well, I haven't got this equipment.' But that's only one way of doing ceramics. Ceramics can be done pretty much with the minimum of equipment. And so I sort of chose the middle path, again. And again I organised it so that the students were taught all those things that they would need themselves; all they had to do was to go, once they finished the school, was to take their skills outside, get themselves a kiln and a wheel and they could become fully-professional potters, which of course a lot of them did do.

Now, the school – that probably would have gone on quite happily, except for the fact that another spanner was thrown in the wheel, and that was the fact that I saw an application in the paper for a Myer Foundation Geijutsu Fellowship, which was open to people all over Australia, to spend one year in Japan. And it was almost like turning the full circle. I'd bought my very first pot in Japan, and here was a – and I'd not been to Japan on my Churchill Fellowship, and I'm not really sure why it was that I hadn't included Japan in the number of countries I was visiting, but I think in any case I was almost over-extended on the Churchill Fellowship fitting in something like seventeen countries in six months. And I think wisely I didn't include Japan, because I would have only been there for a fortnight or whatever, and that sort of fingertip taste is fairly useless in a country like Japan. So here was an application in the paper, or an advertisement in the paper, calling for applications for a Myer Foundation Geijutsu Fellowship. The word *geijutsu* means 'beauty' or 'art'. And it was open to people all over Australia, to architects, writers, musicians, whatever, and there was only one being offered and I applied for it and, much to my excitement but amazement, I got it. And so one of the requirements – – –.

There was also too an advantage. For some odd reason, and I can't really be sure why I'd done this, I had elected to start part-time courses in Japanese language. Now, one of the requirements of the Fellowship was that I go to Canberra and do a six-week intensive Japanese course. I also had written to someone up in Japan who said to me, 'Yes, I can even offer you a house, or an apartment in a house,' and this person

was Barry Gazzard who was a painter and who'd lived in Japan for a long, long time. I happened to know his brother and sister-in-law: his sister-in-law was Maria Gazzard, who was a ceramist in Sydney, and her husband was Don Gazzard, who was an architect, and they'd suggested that I write to Barry, who said, 'Look, rather than go to the ANU[7]' – and he was wrong from this point of view – 'why not do your language up in Japan?', because there is a very good language school in Kyoto within walking distance of where he lived, and he said, 'And you can do your language course there.' I said it was wrong mainly because I think that it is probably better for someone who is not a native speaker to teach you the language, and certainly the ANU had an extremely good Japanese language course, whereas in Japan, although you have the advantage that you go to school in the morning then you come out of the school and you're speaking Japanese – you've got to do your shopping, you've got to get on buses and trams and things – and so from one point of view I can see that there was supposedly an advantage in learning the language in Japan, but I still think that the method of teaching would have been better at the ANU, and I do have some regrets in that.

As it is, I've got to point out that I'm not a linguist. I think if I was to live in Japan several years – not that it is possible now – but yes, I'd end up being a fluent Japanese speaker. But at that particular time I think that I was travelling too much and there wasn't – I think, to learn the language properly, you've got to spend a long time just consolidating that language.

Anyway, so Japan for me answered all the sorts of questions I had about how a potter should operate – totally, totally, totally different from what was being done in America; not that far different from what was being done in parts of England. But Japan is a country where pottery just wasn't some sort of pursuit that was outside culture, it was actually a very important part of Japanese culture. Now, there are very many reasons why this is so, but one's got to remember that Japan had a history of ceramics right back from very early days, and pots in Japan are regarded as an important part of their cultural expression. This has got to do with, culturally, the tea ceremony, because the tea ceremony is a very important part of Japanese culture. And again it's very difficult to explain this briefly, but the tea ceremony is, to the

[7] ANU – Australian National University.

average Western person, it can't seem to be an important cultural pursuit, but it's every bit as important as we would regard, say, music or the visual arts. The tea ceremony in Japan was just a cultural expression that the only that is not part of it *is* music. It's to do with philosophy, it's to do with art, it's to do with manners, clothing, everything. And it just seems probably unreal to a Western person to think that the simple taking of a cup of tea is culturally important. Certainly it has got no relationship to what we call a cup of tea. And anyway, but to go to Japan – pots are everywhere. And also too the way that the potters up there lived their lives to me was something that I found very important. And I knew that on my return to Australia that as soon as I possibly could I was going to live the life, not of someone *teaching* pottery, but I was going to practise what I taught.

And so after returning to Australia after a year, I resigned, and we had a building up in the Hills in Summertown, and we had our own gallery. And so for twenty years – well, from 1975 on – I was one of the few potters in Australia that actually ran a business, we sold pots from the home, we were turning out pots, supplying the local social need. And at one particular time we probably had more people from interstate coming to our gallery, or as many people from interstate coming to our gallery and workshop, as there were local people going up there. And to me, looking back, it is something that I think was quite an achievement, to be able to run a business. I was very fortunate, inasmuch as Bette was extremely good and she was able to run the gallery, and she's a very good business person. So I had this very large workshop, where I made all the pots – and I worked very hard. Looking back now I can't possibly, well, I'm still amazed that I did what I did do to turn out all those pots. And in the beginning it was a fairly primitive sort of affair; we even made flowerpots. In this day and age I mean there are flowerpots everywhere, coming from Thailand, Cambodia, whatever, but there were not in those days. And I turned out, again, the pots for local social need.

Then I began turning out things like dinner plates and teapots and, you know, all the sorts of things that potters do make. And I also, though, split myself into half inasmuch as I did the work for the gallery, but I also had exhibitions. And it was like, say, treading two different paths. And there was also this important part in my mind that, although most of the pots we sold in our gallery did reflect, to a degree, a certain Japanese sensibility, inasmuch as I was fairly good at decorating – and again this

probably goes back to my early days when Harry Memmott and I used to sit down on our boxes and we used to decorate hundreds and hundreds of pots a day – I was able to do that, so there was a demand for those sorts of things – and in fact it was quite interesting: people would come in and they'd say, 'Oh, I can see *you've* been to Japan,' *et cetera*, *et cetera* – but there was that side to the work; then it was also in my mind, though, that a potter should always, or should, reflect the culture in which he lives. But I found it very important that I should be able to turn out pots as though they had been nurtured by the trace elements of the land in which *I* lived.

Can I just hold you there for a moment?

Yes.

I'll let you – give you your head in a moment or two, but we're running out of tape and we'll – – –. Just want to [ask] one little question there: did you feel it was a bit of a leap in the dark, resigning from the School of Art?

Yes, it was.

Prior to that you'd always had a wage or a salary, here you were going to be totally dependent on what you could make from yourself.

I think we had – we worked it out, we said we had a certain amount of money and we should be able to do it. If we couldn't do it within a year then we'd be in trouble and I'd have to rethink the whole thing. But I think I felt fairly confident. I knew that – you see, again, my feet were fairly on the ground. I had been taught how to throw by someone like Mervyn Feeney, who was a very earthbound person, he knew exactly – well, I knew the limits of what I could do and what I could aim to do, and the very fact that Harry Memmott and I had worked together, I'd known – – –. The thought of having to turn out hundreds and hundreds of pots didn't alarm me at all because there was a certain logic about it. And again, it's quite odd, but it's not so much different, really, from saying, 'Right, I've got to set about doing a television program.' There's a logic to that, you've got to assemble things then you've got to put them into some sort of order. The same sort of thing was when it came to being a potter, that you had to get it right, you had to assemble all the components then you had to put the components together. And it's just like putting a jigsaw together. So I didn't find it difficult, I wasn't dismayed by it at all. I just knew that I could do it. And in any case, I mean I'd been teaching students how to make dinner plates, how to make tea

bowls, how to make *everything*. So it wasn't so much a leap in the dark. All I had to do was do it.

END OF TAPE 3 SIDE B: TAPE 4 SIDE A

This is Peter Donovan speaking with Milton Moon, the date is the 9th July 2004. This is tape number four. Now, Milton, just going back to where you were, just before you get into your Australian period –

Yes.

– you said you came back from Japan, wanted to work as the Japanese did. Were there many potters making their living totally out of their creativeness rather than as teachers, as you had been prior to this time?

Not many, no. I didn't know of any – well, yes, of course, there were those people who were running businesses, but I think actually I was probably one of the very first. I can't think of terribly many people who were running their own business, getting all their income – – –. There were certainly potters who were teaching, who were doing other things, but I didn't. I think that there was also too an important thing about it, that not only – – –. You see, life goes through stages: I didn't want to be in a teaching situation forever, and it came to me that I didn't want to be the sort of person that became, you know, the old teacher that everyone sort of looked up to. It is not really my personality anyway; I'm more a loner. I think I did it because I knew how to do it and I did do it. I think I'm more comfortable, I felt more comfortable, working on my own, and I realised that my own destiny is something that I've got to work out. But I didn't want to go to work every day and find that there were people coming in and you're developing them, you don't know where they're going to go, you've only got (telephone rings) control over their lives for a certain period – that'll stop in a minute – and then – – –. It was just a change, it was a change, you'd come to the end of a street and you had to take a right hand or a left hand turn, and I knew it was right to do it.

Did you have any – I'll say 'students', but almost in a master-disciple fashion, as an apprentice-type thing, sort of, perhaps, just working in your workshop at Summertown?

No, the only – I think that I can say that I've turned out a lot of people that have become good potters. Now, I won't mention their names because usually – I mean, I don't want to be taking credit for people that I've taught, it is up to them to say

whether or not they credit a lot of their learning to me. I know that there are some people – – –. It's odd. There are some people who – maybe it's just the natural competition of life, you know – but they sort of almost want to deny the fact that you were that important in their life, that they learnt almost by osmosis, you know, or they were born with it, it was a sort of a birth gift to them. But others have said to me many times that they are very glad that they learnt from me, because what I gave them was something that they in fact needed at that particular time. I gave them freedom. Certainly the thing that I was terribly determined about is that students must be emancipated, that they've got to learn to do it themselves, that you start off the process – you teach them, you have very tight control. In fact, my students were very tightly controlled in the early part of their training. In fact, I could even tell you that I knew every hour for the first year of the course what they were supposed to be doing. Then in the second year they're beginning to extend themselves and in the third year they have a lot of freedom. They refer back to me and say, 'What do you think of this, what do you think of that?' And I think that they way I taught was good. But I think *I* tired of being the teacher. I knew that there were things that I wanted to do, that I don't want to do things *through* students, that there were things that – – –. I can understand people who do in fact want to be teachers, that it offers them all they want in life. But not me, I'm – my own salvation is something that *I've* got to work out and *I've* got to do, and so to me it was terribly important. And also too teaching, to a certain extent, does exhaust you. I was never one of those teachers that – I remember once a friend of mine, I was complaining about certain inhibitions that were being put upon us as the Department of Education changes in its directions, and he said, 'Ah,' he said, 'just stick out your hand, take your money.' And I thought, 'Well, I can't do that.'

Anyway, so actually I never regret the fact that I gave up teaching. As I say, some students have been kind enough to say that they were glad, that they think that they were fortunate, inasmuch as I gave them what they needed, and in fact if I found that there were some students who really wanted to rely on you too much that you virtually made them, or taught them, how to rely on themselves. You gave them their own autonomy, and that to me is a very important thing.

Well, now, moving on a bit more –

Yes, okay.

– this possibly last phase in your life, I think it's in 1994 you got this Australian Artists Creative Fellowship.

Yes.

It seems to be another major feature of your life, you've spoken about this need to grasp this 'Australianness' in your art.

Yes.

Seems strange it should happen so late in your career, almost in the twilight of it.

Well, it doesn't really matter. Now, strangely enough, people say that. I would say that at the time I got that, although it appears as though it's in the later part of your life, I don't think I was in a more strongly creative, had been in a more strongly creative position ever. When you're young you do things because there's drive, there's enthusiasm, and I remember one particular year, 1963, which someone described – I think it was Denys Pryor – as an *annus mirabilis*, you know, it was one of those sorts of years that you had the energy and you just turned out work almost without thinking about it. Of course, there was always a thought process. But then I remember once Malcolm Fraser saying, and I thought how right it was, he said that he thought that, although they talked about the need for helping young people, young artists, in their lives, but he thought it was almost more important to give assistance to mature age artists, purely because they've got it all, they've got it there. Artists don't get very much money. In fact, a lot of people would be horrified if they realised just how little money – – –. I mean, you see the prices of paintings at Sotheby's and all the Christie's, the other galleries, but that's actually a false thing; people are buying rare postage stamps or rare coins or something, you see. The art has then a life of its own. But usually when the artist did that work – well, only recently I see that Brett Whiteley got paid something like – well, he didn't get paid, but one of his paintings, his Lavender Bay paintings, sold for one point one nine million. I remember once, back when I could have bought a Brett Whiteley Lavender Bay painting I think for something like seven thousand dollars. So although certainly there are some artists who do get a fair whack of money, generally you don't. The ones that do I think it's marvellous that they did. I mean, people like Fred Williams, I think that he was earning enough money to give him a good way of life, I think people like John Olsen

– but even I think John Olsen's had those times in his life when he's turned out paintings and has not been able to sell them. John Olsen, in fact, the very year that I got a Creative Fellowship, he got one too. We got it for five years. And I made a conscious decision then that, okay, this is my big chance. There were things that I wanted to do, there were things I wanted to say, you can't serve two masters. It was then that we decided we would close the gallery.

Now, we were giving away all the income that I was able to make from the gallery, so the doors were closed, none of that, we had no more work to sell, and I was to exist on the amount of money that the Creative Fellowship was offering. It was I think at the time sixty thousand dollars a year, but it was taxable, which meant that you ended up with, you know, less than forty thousand dollars, which was not a great amount of money. If you had exhibitions – well, for example, recently I've had an exhibition and I don't mind saying it, it sold close to forty thousand dollars' worth of work. I got little over twenty thousand dollars out of it, my expenses would have taken a fair whack out of that too, so you don't end up getting that awful, you don't get an awful large amount of money for the work that you do put in. And as someone said to me once, said to me recently over this exhibition, 'Oh, I thought the work was a little bit expensive,' and I explained to him, as I've just to you, I said, 'Okay, we've sold close to forty thousand dollars' worth, I would have ended up with a little more than twenty thousand dollars' worth and that about eighteen months' work. What do *you* get paid a year?' And there was silence, you see. So you do it purely because you have this obsession or this compulsion, or you do it because you know how to do it, you've always done it, there's a rightness to doing it.

But yes, to me it was important that the pots that I should do should express the land in which I lived. Now, it just so happens that the land in which I live can be expressed in different ways. You get a painter like Ken Done, who expresses the rather gaudy coastal part of Australia, you know, Sydney Harbour, bright lights, Kings Cross, all that sort of thing. But the part of Australia that I was choosing to express was an area that I know well, and that's up the Flinders Ranges, and even not as dramatically beautiful as the Flinders Ranges but a little further to the east of that, the Olary Uplands, where there's been a living presence there for about forty thousand years. In fact, in the Olary Uplands, they've dated some of the Aboriginal petroglyphs there as being close to forty thousand years old. And that was the sort of

country that I used to go to. And I used to look at the tones of the flowers, the rock formations and the variations of ochre and things like that, and it was what I found important to do. But I must say that very few people shared my – and it wasn't even, 'enthusiasm' is the wrong sort of word; it's a reflective sort of thing, that you go to these places, you see this, you express it, it's almost as though there's an echo of a timeless past, that there is beauty in it, that you're trying to express this beauty. And again you are surprised when people say, 'Oh, I find it interesting but, you know, I really liked those Japanese things you did.' And I remember once going to a party, I suppose it was, and this doctor came up to me and said, 'Oh,' he said – I might have told you this – he said, 'I've got a pot from every one of your periods,' he said, 'but not this last lot,' he said, 'don't like them.' And I thought, 'Oh well, never mind,' you know.

Why would he not have liked them?

Well, purely because they weren't – see, people generally buy what pleases them. Now, in our society – it's a horrid thing to say – but it is not a cultured society. It is just that a lot of our culture is, you know, people go to the theatre and there are those people who will go to Musica Viva, there are people who will go to opera, but it's a very small percentage of the population and generally those people will choose what it is that they want to go to, and usually it's something for which there is general approval. Now, this has always been the problem of the artist, and this is the difference between a craftsman and an artist: a craftsman does what he knows he can do, what he did yesterday he can do tomorrow because it depends upon hand skills, measurement, value, all this sort of thing; an artist goes out into no-man's-land, he goes out there, his senses and sensibilities and sensitivity, they're honed to certain influences, then he tries to express that. And you can do this successfully, but you can find people don't even notice it, you know. Occasionally you get this glimpse where someone, occasionally you go to a place and they've got something, bought something that you've done, and you look at it and you say, 'Ah, it was nice, I'm glad you saw that, glad you saw what *I* see in it,' but it is pretty rare.

And it's not really a – someone said to me the other day, an interviewer said that he'd been to this particular place, and he said, 'You'd be surprised at how full of rage that house was. The man was raging about the fact that he was old, he was raging

about the fact that he had been forgotten and overlooked and no-one listened to him, and he was sort of raging against the fact that the world was what he thought it ought not be.' Now, there's no point in being an artist and raging, you just have to accept the fact that you will do certain things and if people don't share your vision that doesn't mean that they're wrong or that you're wrong, it just means that they're different.

I know that, you know, I love this country in which I live, I love the high points of this culture, and I am able to look at art and I can see now, with these aging sensibilities, I can see where someone has used devices or techniques to make something look nice, and others have really penetrated into an area that has gone beyond, to use an expression I like, 'calculation or intention'; in other words, that the work that they've done is a proper reflection of their artistic sensibilities. And it is difficult. You see, I think the making of art – it might sound corny, but I think it is a very spiritual thing. I think you began, in the early part of these interviews, by saying did I see myself as a spiritual person. I see myself as a person that sees very little profit out of not developing some of what one would call your spirituality, because it is this that lifts you above just ordinary, everyday life, except ordinary, everyday life can also be very spiritual. But yes, I see art as something that is terribly important.

And I think I also too got this, this was honed a bit sharp in Japan, because that started me on a quest trying to – well, I think I told you, when I went to Japan one of the things that I wanted to study was the supposed actual or claimed relationship between Zen Buddhism and Japanese culture, it's something I've been interested in for a long, long time. A lot of what has been claimed is absolute bull, you know, it is not. It is more claimed than actual. But I did immerse myself in the writings of people like Daisetz Suzuki or Soetsu Yanagi or the Japanese philosophical movement and the art theorists and art philosophers, and I do understand a lot about that. But that again is a very wide subject. But, having immersed myself in that, now in my older, my later years, I feel no diminishment of creativity; in fact, it is even heightened. What probably has diminished is you realise that there's very little importance in doing it. You can do it and you will do it, and I will do work, but I know that a lot of the things that I would care to do, there's no real point in doing it.

Perhaps we might tease that out a little bit. But how much are you working as a potter at the moment?

I work every day. Because I know that – see, again you've got this physical business of it is becoming now terribly expensive to send your work away. I just sent over recently a couple of boxes of work, not large boxes of work, to Sydney and it cost hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of dollars just to send them. And I've also been doing painting, mainly because I can keep myself creatively working, I can go out to a painting and look at it and do some work and come back the next day and I can work on that one painting for months and months, and it's only one painting, whereas pottery is a rather physical output, there's only so much time that you can put into one pot. I would probably work very fully as a potter if there was demand for my work, but there's not the demand. Now, if I wanted to and set – now, this is the difference where age does come into it – it is just the physical business of assembling an exhibition, because not only is it the making of the work, getting it made, getting it glazed, getting it put into the kilns and out of the kilns – and even that, I mean, that sounds easy but it's not, it's hard work – if you do that, then you've got to send it away, then you've got to get the unsold pots sent back to you, if there was this demand for your work.

And this is where you *know* whether or not there is any sort of – the way I measure culture, I see people going to exhibitions, and they walk into an exhibition, they'll grab a glass and they'll turn around with their back to the work and they'll be talking to people, you see, this happens all the time. I remember recently going to an exhibition and just watching people. I'd looked at all the work, each piece I'd looked at carefully, and then I was just watching the people, and I thought how very little time, how little time was spent by those people in looking at the work. It was a social gathering. And I remember going past one person, he grabbed me by the sleeve and said, 'What do you think of this stuff?' And I almost burst out and said, 'You haven't looked at the stuff!' Because he hadn't. He'd gone in, got a general impression, you know, got a bellyful of booze, (laughs) and then had gone home. But no, that is one way you measure culture, whether or not there is any real interest in what people do, and is there any real regard. See, it's a funny thing, with the visual arts you have got to make the commitment to go and look at it. With music, the music can command your presence – you listen to a symphony, I mean, you might waft off somewhere but you're sitting in a seat and you're captured, and that symphony might go for half an hour or whatever but you are there as captive audience. But with the visual arts it's

not. I mean, people will walk in and they'll decide to give it six seconds or sixty seconds. If they give it more than that it's a long day.

But no, it's just one of those things, the diminishment of one's creativity, there *is* no diminishment of creativity. There is a diminishment of the enthusiasm or the will to do it. I mean, I heard the other day where some – one of my ex-students, in fact, sends his work to New Zealand and sends it up to Singapore and I say, well, good luck to him, I'm glad he did! (laughs) If someone said to me, 'Would you exhibit in New Zealand or in Singapore or wherever?' I'd say, 'Yeah, I probably wouldn't mind if someone came in and they packed all the work and they went through all this arduous business and if I knew that there was going to be some likelihood of it selling.' And that is one of the problems for the artist, and this is where younger artists, who are ambitious, they have to do these things and want to do these things, whereas for an older person, he just wants to get it right, he wants to capture what it is that he wants to express. The selling of it is secondary. It's odd, isn't it?

Getting back a little bit to this Australianness – a pretty basic question, I suppose, they often get lots of good answers, though – how did you embody this Australianness in your – – –? Because an artist can go out there, a painter can go out to the Flinders, like a Heysen, and sit there and sketch, and possibly go back to his studio and, you know, paint it.

Sure.

But how did you bring the Australianness back?

Well, to me there is a sort of a – okay, on a particular dish, for example, there are certain colours, there are certain sort of forms. You bring it down almost to a blurred pattern, but there are – – –.

Do you sketch, do you photograph things?

Sometimes I photograph things, sometimes I sketch things. But you've got to remember that pottery is at the one time one of the most abstract of the arts, and I tend to understand abstraction. You're not painting a scene as such, it is rather you're capturing something more fragile than that, it's a relationship of colours and tones, of marks. See, our landscape has its own language. If you go out to the Olary Uplands, I can think of them, you look at the ground and there is a pattern there. Strangely enough, I've got, out in my workshop I've got a branch of a tree, and people say to

me, ‘Oh, that’s beautifully marked. That’s Aboriginal, is it?’ And eventually I tell them and say, ‘No, no, God did that.’

END OF TAPE 4 SIDE A: TAPE 4 SIDE B

– – – have just taken that as their vocabulary, their artistic vocabulary. Now, if I was to do that exactly people would say to me, ‘Oh, but you’re doing something that’s Aboriginal.’ I’d say, ‘No, no, no, the Aboriginals were doing something that was there, they were expressing it.’ Now, in their more formalised way they have turned that into a language, but the marks, the circles, a lot of the other things, the tonal things, were there on that bit of stick that I’ve got in my workshop, untouched by anyone, but it looks as though it had been painted. And so I think that yes, there is – I try not to even think of what the Aboriginals do. I remember meeting Rover Thomas up at Kununurra, and I think Rover Thomas was a marvellous, marvellous Aboriginal painter, and I took a photograph and I laughed about it later, I said, ‘There was a little old black man and a little old pink man together.’ We were both born in the same year. But he paints tones, but then he has an instinct for pattern. This is something that’s quite extraordinary, I think the Aboriginal artists have this incredible, uncanny instinct for patterning, and I think that that has only come about because it’s built into their DNA, they look at what is there. I mean, I took a photograph the other day, just when I was going round on a walk with my dog, and I looked at the stones on the ground. Now, if I was to put a circumference on many of those parts on that ground where all those pebbles are it is the most beautiful pattern, and I could in fact turn out dishes with that, that sort of patterning. In fact, it looked not unlike the sort of dots that you’d find in an Emily Kngwarreye painting. It is not a painting, they’re just rocks on the ground. No-one put them there, they were there. But you saw them, and then if you wanted to take them out of that and put them onto a surface – – –.

See, a lot of people think that a ceramist is not an artist. I find this sometimes a little irritating, in fact I don’t even bother correcting people any more, but you know, there is a flat surface, a curved surface, concave or convex surfaces, and what you put on them is entirely up to you. Whether or not people think they’re art, that’s their problem. But, you know, I know that sometimes what I do involves me in the same sort of mind things that any other painter has to involve himself in to do what he’s got to do – who paints the sort of same way. I mean, as you were saying before there are

people who go out and they can take sketches, they can draw a tree and a landscape and whatever, that's one way of expressing the landscape, and the other way is to go out and to isolate even smaller landscapes, which is what I do.

Are you still evolving?

Yes. Of course. Mainly because – Picasso once said, 'Copy anyone but never yourself,' and I think that what you did yesterday informs what you're doing today and will inform what you do tomorrow. Sometimes I do work and I look at it and I think, 'Yeah, it passes muster but that's not art.' You know, I've worked within myself. That is what I call design. It is, again, only when you step outside of that and you go into the sort of world of feeling and sensing that you are then going to turn out something that could rightfully be called the art process. But, you know, 'art' is a word, as I think I said earlier, it's a word I don't particularly like, it doesn't really mean much.

I'll refer to this thing again: Bernard Leach used to say, 'The pot is the man.'

Yes, well – – –.

In words, how would you describe the pot that is Milton Moon at the moment?

Oh, well, the pot is the man, the man is many things. I think Bernard Leach was meaning that the pot can be just an expression of a person's skill or it can be an expression of their deceptiveness, it can be an expression of many, many, many, many things. It's the way of working, and I think probably what he was meaning is that if a pot is an honest reflection of you – again, this is the sort of subject that you could extend for a long, long time. I would hope that the very best of my pots are still almost on the edges of what *I* even understand, purely because you've done something that you've given a reality to, but you don't really fully understand what you've done. I mean, okay, you've made a pot, you put a decoration on it, but you can go beyond that a little bit, you can – well, you can give it mystery. No, you can't *give* it mystery, something you have done has *got* mystery. Now, I know I've seen art and I look at it and I can crack the code in one minute, the person has been fairly knowing in what they've done. They've assembled things and they've made it into something, okay, that's an assemblage, and they've done it well. But it's almost as though it's a device. There are other people that have done work and that you look at

that and you think, 'Ah, yes, he was working outside himself, this work has got something that it's still a mystery,' the work *is* a mystery, you can't crack the code. There is something there, it is not yet finished, it leads you further, but it is not a trick, you know – do you understand what I mean?

In a fashion.

In a fashion.

Keep talking.

Well, it's getting really near the knuckle when you talk about this sort of thing. Sometimes I look at a painter's work and I know that they're knowing, they're clever, they're pretty good, they're going to get a lot of money for it, but also too you could look at it and say, 'It's a bit slick,' or 'I can see through it, I can understand it.' No, it takes an enormous amount of – well, Clement Greenberg, the American critic: someone once said to him, 'How do I know whether my work is good or not?' And he gave a very good answer. He said, 'You look and you look and you look and you look.' Strangely enough, when you do keep looking, it is the unresolved parts that command your attention after a while, it is not the part that you're supposed to see, it is the unresolved parts, or it is the parts that have been resolved with a trick. It's a very funny thing we've got in us, if we are able to go with it we have within us an ability to penetrate something very, very deeply. But most people don't penetrate things deeply at all. They look at it, it's an instant grab, it's there, it's done, and it's 'Wham, bam, thank you ma'am,' (laughs) in other words something else has got – there's a depth to it, there's a mystery to it. If I find that in a painting I can crack the code completely the painting ceases to have any value for me, but if I look at it and I think, 'Ah, there's something there that takes you out of the painting,' there is a pulse of life in the painting but there is a pulse of life outside the painting of which you are aware, and they're the paintings or to me the parts that live.

But yes, that's a long, long journey and probably this is the sort of thing that I might be concerned about for the rest of my life, just turning out something that I look at it and say, 'Yeah, I don't really know what that's all about.' But you're not wanting to bring it back into your vocabulary of expression. It has informed your vocabulary of expression, but to me, as I said before, the best art is something that goes beyond even the word 'art'. I can't say much more than that.

We might leave it there, because I haven't run out of questions but the others seem so banal after that that it just falls flat. So thank you, Milton, that's been terrific.

Well, I realise that – there is a marvellous ...., 'You can talk about it and about it, but it's not *it*.' And it's the same with art. You can do things on a performance level – people, when they say to me about art, I say, 'Well, look, what do you really mean?' You take a composer, now, he's searching for something that he wants to express. He puts it into a form where it's going to be playable, hopefully it's going to – well, I don't even think the best of composers think about this – but it's going to be something that people can relate with. Then you have the performer. Now, the performer is again a strange sort of artist, they're trying to do their personal best. But even sometimes they even transcend their personal best and they might say, 'Well, I did that well today, that was a high point,' but they could also say, 'Well, I don't know that I can do that again ever,' because what happened was that there was some sort of – something happened. There was something there that just took it beyond what could be humanly expected. Then you could say that that was a high, rare point in performance art or performing art. And the same sort of thing happens with the visual artists: you've got those ones that are performing artists and those ones who are composing artists. You see, I had a lot of respect for a painter called Ian Fairweather who lived on Bribie Island. I met him, and it was quite an amusing meeting. But I look at his paintings sometimes and I think, 'Yeah, that painting, you'd finished it but there was something missing, so then you began adding things to it.' He was taking the painting to the point of destruction, almost, because it is only beyond that point was he then going to extend himself or give the painting something else. And that is what I call a true artist, that he is a person who is not tricky-dicky, you know, a bit of this and a bit of that and some ticky-tacky glue and you've got it all put together. But he was – well, there are other artists who are like him, but he's certainly one that I can talk about. And, as I say, he pushed himself beyond what he knew he could do, and I think that that's probably not a bad definition of what I think the artist is all about, the proper, what I call a proper artist.

But then again, that goes back to Bernard Leach's thing, 'the potter's the man,' you know – where do you stop? I mean, religion's full of all this. There's people who almost took themselves to the point of lunacy (laughs) because they were searching for some sort of – – –. It's a search for spirituality in one way, and it sounds silly to

say that, but I think that's what it is. But again, I always remember too the English painter, Alan Davie – I might have mentioned this before – when someone asked him to explain what he was doing, he was an abstract expressionist, he said, 'I don't want to know too much about it.' (laughs) He just did it.

Anyway, well, I'm sorry for whoever's got to transcribe this, if they ever bother getting round to do it, because one finds that you then get into the area of rambling, you know.

Ah, but the rambles are good, and I think they will enjoy it.

Mm, very hard to be concise about this mysterious thing called 'art'.

But thank you there, Milton.

END OF INTERVIEW.