

Transcript of an oral history interview with William (Bill) R. Gaines (1927–2013), conducted by Lee Viverette, Fine Arts Reference/Rare Books Librarian, at Gaines' home in Port Canaveral, Florida on March 12, 2008.

Gaines was a staff member at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts for almost 35 years. He began by teaching children's art classes in 1948 before joining the museum full-time in 1952 as the Registrar. He eventually became the head of the Programs Division in 1962, a position he held until he retired in 1982. As Gaines recounts in his interview, he actually held many other official and non-official positions during his long tenure at the museum.

LV: All right, we are testing again, and I think we're working because the lights are on. This is Lee Viverette, speaking with William R. Gaines in Port Canaveral, Florida, on March 12, 2008 at approximately 11:05 a.m. Mr. Gaines...

WG: Please call me Bill.

LV: Okay, sure. Bill, can you tell me something about your personal background, where you were born, etcetera.

WG: Be glad to. I am, I was born in Madison County, Virginia, on the Hoover Road. President Hoover was President during – it was about 1925-27. And he had his retreat in Madison County. Because he wanted to get there easily, he had a special road built from [route] 29, across near Banco, going to Vere's [Rapidan?] Camp. I was born and lived on that road most of my life, in Madison County, VA, and...

LV: What about your siblings, your family situation?

WG: No, I'm single. I was never married. I've one sister, one real sister, whose name is Ethel. She married John Burton in West Point, VA, where she went to teach after she finished school in James Madison University – it was James Madison College then...

LV: I also attended James Madison University.

WG: Did you?

LV: But a little later.

WG: Long, much later.

LV: After it was a teacher's college.

WG: Ethel, we graduated from Criglersville High School. Criglersville is in Madison County, and we're the last graduating class because the school burned down. But after that, the elementary students went to the CCC Camp, which President Hoover also was instrumental in



building, which was north, more toward the mountain from Criglersville, towards Syria. And the high school students were bused to Madison after the school burned in 1940...let's see, we graduated in '44. It would have burned in '45.

LV: And what education did you have?

WG: I did my undergraduate at what was then RPI, Richmond Professional Institute. It's now part of Virginia Commonwealth University. And then I went directly to Columbia for my Master's. Both degrees were in Fine Arts and Fine Arts education. And...

LV: After you left Columbia, did you come directly to work at the Virginia Museum?

WG: I came back to the Museum. I had been there. I started to work there in 1948. My immediate boss was Muriel Christison, who says she was hired before [Director] Leslie Cheek. He was at his farm in Lake Lure, North Carolina, but he, he worked as Director of the Museum. Mrs. Christison went to Theresa Pollak and asked her to recommend a student to teach children. Theresa recommended me, and so I began working at the Museum in the summer of 1948, teaching children's classes. I became, after that, I became Registrar, and then I became Librarian. At one point, I was Librarian, Registrar, and Instructor, all three.

LV: [Laughter]

WG: For a salary of under \$3,000.

LV: Wow.

WG: Mr. Cheek came to New York and interviewed me and offered me a job, and I took it. I was also at the time studying contemporary dance with Margarita and Emmet Franco. And they offered me to tour with them as well, but I said no, I think I'll go back to Virginia, and I'm glad that I did.

LV: [Laughter]

WG: Because, I'd been there, I stayed there until 1982. Mrs. Christison left to go take another job, leaving the job open. And a man was hired who was a friend of Mr. Cheek's from Charlottesville. His name was William B. O'Neal. Mr. O'Neal stayed one year and went back to academic life in Charlottesville, leaving the job open again. So, Mr. Cheek offered me the job. I was then, what was I? I had taken a job. I was Director of Education.

LV: Okay.

WG: So I went from Director of Education to being Program Director, and I immediately began to build a staff; which I did, to almost thirty people at one point.

LV: Wow.



WG: Mr. Cheek had the vision of it as a state institution, which it was. You probably don't know we're one of three state art institutions in the country. Did you know that?

LV: I knew we one of few, but I didn't know it was...

WG: Three.

LV: It was only three.

WG: North Carolina has one, modeled after us, and the other one is – you'd never guess where.

LV: Please don't say Dayton. [Laughter]

WG: It's Florida.

LV: Okay, good.

WG: The Ringling Museum in Florida is state-owned.

LV: Okay.

WG: The Ringling. Mr. Ringling gave it to the state, and they had not functioned as a state institution but for just a short time when their Director of Education worked with us to learn how a state museum should function.

LV: So we were really the prototype.

WG: We were the prototype, really. We're not only a prototype for state museums, we're a prototype for the federal government, which started giving money to states, every state in the Union. The first, we received the money, and then people objected to the fact that we received it and gave a lot of it to ourselves, and so the Arts Commission came into being.

LV: Oh, that's very interesting.

WG: But the federal government's legislation to give money to states to further the arts was built, was modeled after us.

LV: Hmm.

WG: Is Peggy Baggett still around? She headed the Arts Commission for years, and I served on it as a reviewer for much longer than anyone should have served.

LV: [Laughter] How long was that, do you think?

WG: I think I served 7 years.

LV: What did you have to do as a reviewer?



WG: What did you say?

LV: What did you do? Just review the application or did you have to do site visits...

WG: Review the application and decide who got the money.

LV: Okay.

WG: The ballet and the symphony were automatic because the Commission knew they needed money. And they were funded automatically, and we gave them the rest of the money. There were people on the Committee from Charlottesville, from Richmond, from other places around the state. Because of my knowledge of the state operation, I probably served longer than I should have.

LV: Okay, so that is really interesting, that we were the prototype. That's how the money started flowing to all the different organizations around the state. So it wasn't just Richmond, obviously. What about Abingdon? Do they, did they have an art center then?

WG: Well, the, [Robert] Bob Porterfield started the Abingdon Theatre.

LV: Okay.

WG: And we've never had a chapter. We had a chapter in Bristol.

LV: Okay.

WG: And we have a chapter in – it was not Norton, but Wise. And believe it or not, there was a lady named – what was her name – her name was [Daisy] Portuondo. Her husband taught Spanish at the college in Wise, and we had a chapter, and she wanted to establish a ballet school in Wise. It never happened.

LV: [Laughter] It's very unlikely a place for ballet school.

WG: Well, she had studied with Alicia Alonso who was a very famous ballet dancer from Cuba.

LV: Okay.

WG: And Alicia is in this country, but Mrs. Portuondo had studied with Alicia Alonso and thought that we should have more ballet in this country. It never happened in Wise. But we did have a very successful chapter there, even though there were still rattlesnake worshippers, even though it was outlawed.

LV: Okay.

WG: There were still...Wise is way up there.



LV: Speaking in tongues, yeah, I'm familiar with Wise. So, they did the speaking in tongues, religious rattlesnakes.

WG: Well, I never knew any of those people, but we had a chapter there, and so I went to Wise frequently. And I went there with the Artmobile as well.

LV: That's what I wanted to hear a little bit about, your experience with the Artmobile. Because apparently you were [Laughter] the sole, you know, driver, planner.

WG: Well, I was called the driver-curator.

LV: Okay.

WG: And after me, they had circuit drivers, because they could not find anyone to curate and drive.

LV: That's, that's a diverse skill set there. So, you had to be a driver...

WG: Well...

LV: ...and a curator.

WG: I couldn't drive when I started either. And Mr. Cheek said we'll send you to truck driver's school. That never happened either.

LV: So you never went to truck driving school?

WG: No, I had to learn by doing.

LV: Okay.

WG: And, fortunately, I never had a wreck.

LV: Don't you have to have a special license to drive that kind of vehicle?

WG: You may now. I didn't then.

LV: Okay.

WG: Well, I went the day before I was set to go. I said I need to know how to drive this thing and he said, well, go, go learn. So I went over to Brook's Transfer in Richmond, and I said to them, I need to learn to drive a truck. And they said, this is the clutch, this is the brake, this is the steering wheel. I said, no, you don't understand, I need to learn to drive. They said okay, this truck is going to Baltimore tonight, do you want to go with it? I had worked all day at the Museum on the Artmobile, writing education material and that kind of thing with Mrs. Christison. And I said, well, I have no choice, I need to learn to drive it, because tomorrow I need to take a truck to Fredericksburg. So I went with the driver, and I drove from Richmond to



Fredericksburg, which is a straight road, on route, on old Route One. We got to Fredericksburg, and we stopped to get something to eat. He said do you want to drive some more? So I drove until we got to Washington, also a straight road, no hills, no shifting, no nothing, no backing.

LV: Right.

WG: [And that was my] instruction.

LV: You must have made it. You must have made it the next day to Fredericksburg?

WG: Well, I made it. In Fredericksburg, we offered it for a week. I taught children, adults. I was so tired I would get – I literally couldn't sleep for a minute at a time – and wake and go back to work.

LV: That doesn't sound so great.

WG: Well, it wasn't. But I was the only person with the unit, so I had to...

LV: So you were by yourself, you didn't have anybody else with you?

WG: No, I was by myself.

LV: You would park the Artmobile in a designated spot, I mean, they knew you were coming? Right?

WG: The designated spot in Fredericksburg was beside a school upon the grounds.

LV: Okay.

WG: And when I got ready to leave a week later, no one told me there was going to be a dog show. Fredericksburg was big on dog shows, and there were cars everywhere, including where I need to back off. So I said to a policeman, I need to have these cars moved. He said, how many? I said, well, I need to back that truck out of, off the school grounds. He said I'll move two. He moved two. I had never backed the unit before in my life. But I backed it off between those two cars, out onto the street, where I passed Mary Washington College, onto Route One; went down Route One through Richmond to Chester, where I'd never been before. I had to go around the corner from Broad Street onto Belvidere. I never knew, well no...

LV: Well, there's both, I don't know, I'm...

WG: It's the street that goes across the Lee Bridge.

LV: Okay.

WG: I had seen big trucks when I was a student at RPI. I've seen big trucks go around that corner. I thought, "Oh, my God," I've got to go around that corner. I made it and got to Chester,



and they said park it up there. It was a space about as wide as the vehicle. I said, I can't do that. They said, yes you can. So from then on, I parked it in incredible places.

LV: So you've had a crash course in driving.

WG: Had a crash course in driving and parking.

LV: I'm surprised you didn't have an accident; no accident?

WG: No accidents ever. Sometimes I had to go on the wrong side of the bridge because the bridge was too narrow to hit it. I had an accident once.

LV: Okay.

WG: It was not my fault. I got on the ferry. The Bridge Tunnel hadn't been built then.

LV: Where is this?

WG: Going from Norfolk to the Eastern Shore.

LV: Okay. Wow, so you went all the way to the Eastern Shore.

WG: I went to, I can't remember the name of the town now. I went to two towns, Onancock and a town at the very tip end of the Eastern Shore.

LV: Cape Charles, Exmoor.

WG: Cape Charles, maybe.

LV: Okay.

WG: And I got on the ferry with no problem. I realized the water would change when I got to the Eastern Shore. I couldn't get off because I was the first vehicle on. Every vehicle behind me waited for me to get off. So I couldn't, I had no choice, I had to pull off. It damaged the sign around the top of the vehicle.

LV: Okay, well.

WG: When I was, we then had a police escort, so the police were there to watch me damage the top. But I had no choice, because everybody behind me wanted to get off.

LV: Right, so it was just the sign, though, anyway.

WG: Just the sign. It said, "Virginia Museum Artmobile" around the top.

LV: Why did you have the police escort?

WG: Because it was a big vehicle.



LV: Okay.

WG: And I, sometimes we went places where trucks didn't go.

LV: So it was always, you had this escort?

WG: Well, I was supposed to have. After a while they forgot about it. I was also...

LV: You would just take off without your escort?

WG: Also, I was supposed to have an electrician hook me up everywhere I went. They forgot about it, too. So after a while I hooked it up.

LV: So you became an electrician.

WG: So I became an electrician.

LV: And a truck driver.

WG: And a truck driver.

LV: And a curator.

WG: And a little bit of everything and still am.

LV: Okay.

WG: When the article about me – as VCU did one – because I had given them money, and I give them some more when I am no longer here – when I am deceased.

LV: Okay.

WG: But it said that I was a Renaissance man because I knew how to do everything. I could wire, I could plumb. When you live in Deltaville, Dunnsville, you have to learn to do those things.

LV: It makes sense. Yeah, that's true. You need to be a good plumber.

WG: And when I went to build, add onto my house down there, and I couldn't find anybody to build it. So I said I'll build it myself. So I hired a young man to help me. He told me later, he was high most of the time.

LV: Oh, great!

WG: That's what I thought. He jumped on top, three stories high. He jumped on the scaffolding. I said, Randy, you're gonna fall. No...

LV: [Laughter]



WG: He never fell. And one day we were putting up a beam, a very heavy beam, where the scaffolding...and the scaffolding broke. He put the beam on his shoulder, and he went up the ladder and put the beam on the thing. When we were taking the scaffolding down, he got hit on the leg with a sledgehammer. And I said I'll take you to the hospital. He said no. I learned later, he didn't remember anything about it.

LV: That's comforting, that's great. What year was that house built? What year did you build it?

WG: In about '85, '82.

LV: Okay, that was, that was long after the Artmobile.

WG: Oh yeah.

LV: Yeah.

WG: The Artmobile was '54, '55.

LV: That's when it started, and how old were you then, when you first started driving, do you remember?

WG: Born in '27, so you have to add it up.

LV: All right, okay, young.

WG: Young.

LV: So you were, you were willing to take risks.

WG: Any experience...

LV: Risks, yeah, right.

WG: I would...Mimi Rose was a Trustee, Mrs. Charles Rose. She's Mrs. John Glenn now, not the astronaut John Glenn.

LV: Right.

WG: She said – she went on a couple of trips with me to Europe. She said I would do anything, and I would. And she said when we had a Goya show, she said, "I want you to wear this treader's jacket," so I did. One time we had an exhibition called *Southern Exposures*. It was photographs taken during the Civil War and a little later. And he – one of the guests to the exhibition to be photographed – so he said, "Bill, I want you to be a photographer." So I was. I pretended to take a picture of the people with the old camera, and then I'd take it back to have it developed. There was a Polaroid hidden in the wall. The Polaroid took a picture of the people



which we gave to them – in their costumes, with their pull-on hat or scarf or something, to look like they were from the period – like we did later at ski resorts.

LV: Wow. Well, you did just do about everything. What other...do you remember...

WG: Whatever he [Cheek] would say do, I would do.

LV: Do you remember any other unusual jobs that you had?

WG: You mean, like drive a truck?

LV, WG: [Laughter]

WG: Teach children.

LV: Teach children.

WG: You name it; he said do it, I did it.

LV: Well, you liked working with him.

WG: Oh, I loved it. He was like a father to me. I was the only person asked to come to his house when his, his son died. He had three children, a daughter and three sons. One son died young. When he was buried in Hollywood, the body was at Mr. Cheek's house. I was the only person, other than family, asked to come to the house, to make it look like nobody had been there. So when they came back from the funeral, it would look like the house. And I was invited to lunch. I was also invited to his daughter's coming-out party at the Rotunda Club downtown. And he – I was invited for a purpose – to, to look after the orchestra, which was Lester Lanin, of course. So I said, "Mr. Lanin, Mr. Cheek wants you to play 'Good Night, Ladies,' out on the balcony in the cold." He said, "No way." The musicians won't play in the cold, and the instruments won't go in the cold. So they didn't do it. So I sang 'Good Night, Ladies' from the balcony, and the people laughed.

LV: See, there's another job, you're a singer.

WG: Well, in my resume, it says that I was in Gian Carlo Menotti's opera, *The Medium*, twice. People think I sing. I played the part of a mute.

LV: [Laughter] Okay.

WG: So I acted. One person who went to RPI at the same time I did said I acted with my stomach.

LV: Okay.

WG: It was very emotional, and at the end of *The Medium*, I'm shot by the Medium, who thinks she really hears things. She does, so she shoots Toby, who she thinks is the voice she's hearing. It wasn't me, but I was dead at the end.

LV: [Laughter] What year would that have been, do you remember?

WG: No, I don't remember.

LV: When you did that?

WG: I was at the Museum.

LV: Okay.

WG: I did a lot of drama. One of the questions is – you were going to ask me what was unique about my contribution. I think what was unique about my contribution is that I participated in civic things.

LV: Okay.

WG: In Richmond, in the Southeast, and in the nation. At the time, I was the only staff member who was active in the American Association of Museums, which is our umbrella organization. I was the only staff member who was on the Council of the Southeastern Museums Conference, SEMC. And I was the only staff member who participated in Richmond in the Virginia museum association. That changed when [Director] Jim Brown came, because he was President of the American Association [of Museums]. Just why, I don't know, because he didn't like to do public things. I liked working for Jim. He was very different than Mr. Cheek, he was very tolerant. And unlike [Director] Peter [Mooz], he didn't change things around.

LV: Right. How long did you work under him?

WG: Probably about three years.

LV: So you went Cheek, and then Brown, and then Mooz?

WG: And then Mooz.

LV: So you've been through quite a few Directors.

WG: Three.

LV: Okay.

WG: There was a time when I was with Pinkney Near and Bob Telford. The, we had three divisions at the Museum: the Collections Division, my division, which we called the Programs

Division, and the Administrative Division. And we served as the Director for a short period of time while they looked for a Museum Director.

LV: Okay.

WG: It was after, I can't remember who it was after – whether it was after Cheek and before Jim, or after Jim and before Charlie Reed who was President of the Board and acted as Museum Director for a while.

LV: Interim Director, okay.

WG: And he left. He did it because there was no Director. So, so the three of us must have been director after Cheek and before Jim Brown.

LV: So you shared the responsibilities while there...

WG: Shared the responsibilities.

LV: Okay. So there were three departments at the time.

WG: Collections, Administration, I guess there were four.

LV: Okay.

WG: Because divisions...Administration, Theatre, Collections and my Programs.

LV: I guess we forgot Theatre, yeah.

WG: I did everything that had to do with people, and Pinkney did everything that had to do with the art. Theatre speaks for itself. Administration speaks for itself.

LV: As far as your department was concerned, how many staff would you say that you had at the time?

WG: Well, at the end, I had approximately thirty.

LV: Okay.

WG: When Dr. Mooz came, Peter, he drew a circle around half the charts of each division. He drew circles around people and moved them. He moved my entire Education Department, including Fred Brandt, to the Collections Division, or to where he could keep a more careful eye on them. He thought I had too much power.

LV: Okay, well, that's interesting.

WG: He thought I was a threat. I'm just saying this.



LV: Right. You just had more experience.

WG: He thought I was a threat to him as Director cause I had such a large staff. I was not. I never wanted to be Director, never. I was happy doing what I did.

LV: Right. And you were getting all the media attention at that time.

WG: Well, I was, because I was doing public programming: lectures, things for the public. The newspaper would be interested.

LV: You were more in the public eye.

WG: Plus, I, I called myself a junior electronics expert. Take your tape recorder. When we first had one, I never knew how to work one, but I learned very quickly.

LV: So you're an audio technician, too.

WG: So, I became an audio technician very quickly, cause we were doing the orientation theatres which were written by Fred Brandt.

LV: And the orientation theatres, like you said before, were when you had an exhibition. You would have an orientation program for that exhibit, and people would come and listen about the exhibit.

WG: Not just the exhibits.

LV: Okay.

WG: Every gallery.

LV: Every gallery had one?

WG: For instance, the Dutch Gallery had a fifteen-minute tape.

LV: Okay.

WG: We determined fifteen minutes was the maximum length of time that people could listen to anything because they wanted, had come to see the art. So we would do the orientation, which had six seats. You pushed a button, and you heard automatic talk, which my division had written, engineered, recorded. And later on, I had an A.V. person on my staff. He's deceased now, too. His name is John Dworak. Did you know John?

LV: No, I didn't.

WG: John was great because we did a program – we did an exhibition once called *The Treasures of Chatsworth* – the Chatsworth home in England. So we sent a photographer, Bill Rasmussen to write it, and John to put it together, to edit [?] it with the talk. They were to fly together, but



Katherine Wetzel, who was a well-known photographer, got separated. So she had to take all the equipment, and the car and drive it around another street, in England by herself, while the men went to the hotel in a taxi.

LV: Without any encumbrances.

WG: Without any help.

LV: Well, that sounds like a...

WG: And Katherine is still at the Museum and...

LV: She is still at the Museum.

WG: And she takes...

LV: She is Head of the Photography Department.

WG: She takes wonderful pictures.

LV: She does. We're in the situation of expanding and changing a lot around that department to digital photography.

WG: Well, for a year we had a photographer and assistant photographer on the staff. One of them flew and jumped out of airplanes. And he would take pictures, aerial photographs.

LV: Who was this, do you remember?

WG: I don't remember his name.

LV: We don't have anyone who jumps out of airplanes now.

WG: We don't have him either. You had, we had a full-time photographer who did photo murals for the exhibitions occasionally. When Peter came, Dr. Mooz, he established me not as Head of the Programs Division – but that's another title – but Head of Education. So even though he or Fred, who had been my assistant, or Peter himself would do the exhibition, he would turn to me to do the educational component's part of it.

LV: Okay.

WG: Sometimes I knew nothing about the subject matter. Sometimes for a permanent gallery, he would say, "Bill, I want a talk in this gallery, do it." So we'd do a talk about the gallery, but I knew nothing about the art. And I remember particularly a Pre-Colombian Gallery that needed a talk. So I did the talk, but I would use books and other people's material to get the information to write the talk.

LV: So there comes in, you're a researcher.



WG: I'm a researcher, then. Well, 'Renaissance man' fits me I think very well.

LV: Okay, and you mentioned Phyllis Houser as part of your staff.

WG: Okay, I had two assistants.

LV: Okay.

WG: Fred was my assistant for, we called it, headquarters, which was anything that took place in the building. And Phyllis Houser, who had been a McIlhenny before she married Aubrey Houser, was my assistant for anything that had to do with the state. So she looked after state Chapters, and the Artmobiles, and things like that. But I tried to, to pass it around because people liked doing exhibitions. So I'd say sometimes to Phyllis, "I need an exhibition for an Artmobile." "I need an exhibition for so and so." When Fred was my assistant, we did exhibitions in Robinson House for Virginia artists. We did exhibitions in the Theatre Gallery, and we did the main loan exhibitions, usually. In the time I was at the Museum, I only did one exhibition, and we did a quadrennial exhibition of American Art. The first was done by James Johnson Sweeney, who was a national authority on American paintings. And then the second person to do it was Grace McCann Morley from San Francisco who is in art. I said, I know as much as they do. So I applied for a grant to the National Endowment and got the grant and did an exhibition which is called *I2*. And they said, "Why do you call it *I2*?" It was called *I2* because I had twelve American painters. And originally, we were going to call it *Twelve American Painters*.

LV: Okay.

WG: And Ray Geary was our designer then for catalogues, and he said, "Why don't we just call it *I2*?" So we, we just called it *I2*. I, I think I've taken my copy, which I just had one copy, to the studio which we also have at Cape Canaveral.

LV: Right.

WG: So I don't have it here...

LV: Right.

WG: ...to show you.

LV: So you have a lot of art work in your studio because you're an artist as well.

WG: I have things here, too, which I should be glad to show you, after we finish this. What I started to say was that I was involved with the community. I painted and had a dual career as both a painter and a museum person. On one of my passports I said that I was a museologist.

LV: [Laughter]



WG: People said what instrument do you play? I said I didn't say a musicologist instead of museologist. And I was, because I feel that I, for years, I was a Senior Accreditor for the American Association of Museums. I would go visit a museum and accredit them for the American Association. And the furthest one I ever did was Kalamazoo, Michigan.

LV: Oh.

WG: And they called me one day and said, "Bill, would you fly to Michigan to do an accreditation, because they are very anxious to have it done immediately." And I would say yes, because to them, a Senior Accreditor did it as one person. Before that, we did it as a committee of three people and then later, as two people, and then later, as one person.

LV: So you could just go alone because you were, okay.

WG: I, I did one in Florida with Dr. Mooz, with Peter, who – I'd retired, he called me, and I was working on the house in Dunnsville. He said, "Bill, I want you to do an accreditation with me." I was shocked, but we did Vizcaya, a museum in Miami.

LV: Okay.

WG: And during the process of the accreditation, the Conservator at Vizcaya was Italian, and I did the interview in Italian, which I speak. And Peter said, "You speak Italian?" And I worked for him all those years, and he didn't know that I spoke Italian.

LV: I was thinking maybe that was why he got you to do it.

WG: No.

LV: He knew you could communicate. Well, that's impressive.

WG: I learned to speak Italian when I lived in Italy and studied painting in Italy, because I worked with an Italian painter who only spoke Italian. He knew one word in English: "Beautiful."

LV: [Laughter]

WG: That's the only word he knew. I don't think he ever used it with me.

LV: [Laughter]

WG: He said to me - his name was Renato Guttuso – he said, "Bill, I'm not your teacher, you already know how to paint, but you can share my studio if you want." I was the only person who ever worked in his studio, Italian or any other country.

LV: What was the name of the artist?



WG: Renato Guttuso. G-U-T-T-U-S-O.

LV: Okay.

WG: He was internationally famous, and I said to him I saw an exhibition of his downtown in Rome. And I said to the gallery girl, I want to work with this man, because the person I thought I wanted to work with when I went to Italy had moved to Florence, to France, so I couldn't work with him. So I was looking for someone to work with, and I saw Guttuso's exhibition. I loved his work. And I said to the gallery girl, "Does he teach?" She said no. I said, "Well, I want to work with him." She said, "Well, you won't be able to work with him because he doesn't teach." I said, "Ask him." So she asked him. I went away to ski, and when I came back, she said, "He'll see you." So I worked on my best little speech. My name is Guglielmo Roberto Gaines in Italian. And I said, "I want to work with you." He said, "Come tomorrow." I was so shocked, I didn't know what to do. So I worked with him for the remainder of my time in Italy, until summer came when he left the studio. When he left, so did I.

LV: So you were there for...

WG: The better part of a year.

LV: Okay.

WG: The latter part of 1956 and 1957.

LV: And why were you not at the Museum? Did you have a sabbatical or did you just...

WG: No, I had a grant from the Museum.

LV: Okay.

WG: Well, actually from the Catherwood Foundation.

LV: Okay.

WG: There were – there was a group of jewels made by – which were based on designs from Salvador Dalí.

LV: Right, *The Beating Heart* and all, that exhibition. And they were owned by that corporation.

WG: The Catherwood, in every state that they were shown in, they gave a fellowship to one person to study in Europe.

LV: Okay.

WG: I applied for it and didn't get it.

LV: Okay.



WG: Because the Museum didn't feel it was right to give it to a staff member. So they gave it to somebody else who hasn't been heard from since, that I know of.

LV: [Laughter]

WG: So I was in my studio painting with a girl that I dated then, and I said, "Anne, help me get ready real quick. The Museum said that if I get up there right now, they may be able to find some money to send me to Europe." So I'm not sure whether I went on Catherwood Foundation money or Museum money, but anyway...

LV: Somebody's money.

WG: I went on a fellowship, didn't pay much. But I was able to live, and Guttuso didn't charge me anything to work in the studio. I lived in a pensione, and I paid sixty dollars a month for a room, a nice room, and three meals a day, for forty thousand lire. You multiply one and a half, and you get sixty thousand lire, so I had extra money to do things.

LV: That's wonderful.

WG: It was wonderful.

LV: A great experience, I'm sure.

WG: Well, I had a roommate named Carlos. Carlos was Mexican. He, he was there on a fellowship also. He had been sent to Europe to study architecture to be a contemporary architect in Mexico. And this is a funny story. The Museum administrator [said] we're having an Elihu Vedder show. Elihu Vedder was an American painter, the latter part of the 18th century, early part of the 19th. And he said he thought we were having an Olivetti show.

LV: [Laughter]

WG: Because Olivetti was an Italian firm that made typewriters. And I would think he would know about it. So one time, he said something about this Olivetti show. We're not having an Olivetti show, we're having an Elihu Vedder show. He said, oh. He hadn't seen it written, he had just heard it.

LV: Right.

WG: So he thought it was Olivetti – sounds very much like Elihu Vedder.

LV: Right.

WG: But it was an Elihu Vedder show, and it was when I was doing exhibitions, and I was glad to do it. We also did an Inigo Jones show, which is a name you wouldn't know.

LV: Right.



WG: He was an English architect, painter, designer, also at the end of the 16th century, early part of the 17th, I-N-I-G-O, and people mispronounce it...

LV/WG: Indigo.

LV: Right.

WG: But it was...

LV/WG: Inigo.

WG: INIGO Jones. He did part of St. Paul's Church. Sir Christopher, Sir Christopher Wren sat in on [?] that I think, I'm not sure of that.

LV: We can look it up.

WG: Well, I've forgotten a lot of things, never mind. I left the Museum in '82. It was necessary [for] the Program Director to know a lot about a lot of things because you did things for the public, and you need to know dance, drama, painting, sculpture, architecture, anything that had to do that people might be interested in. I needed to know about those things. And so I felt perfectly suited to be a Program Director, not a Director, because I really know, even though I paint, I know very little art history. I can learn very quickly, and I can write it very quickly, but I didn't know it at the time.

LV: Okay.

WG: I depended on what, what scholars had written.

LV: To make your talks and everything.

WG: Well...

LV: If you're called upon to do Pre-Colombian talks...

WG: Well, one time we did an exhibition called *Greek Gold*. It was a cooperative effort between the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Brooklyn Museum of Fine Arts, and us. We did the exhibition – we designed it – and we did the interpretation. Brooklyn had a woman on staff who knew how to do the reproduction jewelry. She could do jewelry like the Greeks had done it. And I can't remember – I was trying to think what, would Boston have made a contribution. I can't remember what it was. But at one point - what I was going to tell you, I've forgotten now.

LV: And the reproduction jewelry, did we sell that in the shop or anything?

WG: No.

LV: Oh, we didn't on the cart or whatever we had at that time?



WG: Well, we started with the carts, and then they gradually became the Museum Shop, which is very successful. Now it has a paid staff manager, and they give money to the Museum. It's a principal source of money, probably for the Museum, from the Shop.

LV: Yeah, they do make some money from the shop and they adapt designs from the collection.

WG: It's actually run by the Museum, by the Council.

LV: Right, it used to be the requirement.

WG: The Council we haven't spoken about. When I left the Museum, the Council numbered about seven hundred members, all women. I never had a problem at all with any of them. I was...the President from Laila Pearsall on through until the last President I dealt with was – oh, I can't remember her name now. Anyway, recently the Council celebrated their 50th anniversary. And I, until recently, had a home in Virginia, in Madison County. And I was in Virginia at the time, and they invited me as they do all the luncheons, to come down. So I went, and it was great being there with Mimi Rose and Laila and Sue Crowell, Mrs. Robert Crowell, and past Presidents that I had worked with all those years. You know whom I'm missing was the lady who was from New Zealand.

LV: Okay.

WG: Who was Jackie Viener.

LV: Right.

WG: Mrs. Saul Viener, and she was in New Zealand at the time, so she wasn't there. Most of the others were, including Kitten Clarke, Mrs. William Clarke, Mrs. Bruce Gottwald, Nancy. It was great to be with them.

LV: To see them all. You hadn't seen them for a while, I guess.

WG: Hadn't seen them since I left in '82. One of my retirement parties was given by Nancy for some Council ladies at her house. It was a hat party. They liked dressing up in hats, and so each of the ladies came with a hat, all the past Presidents and a few of the ladies that were special, special friends of mine.

LV: I wonder if they were Sara Sue hats?

WG: Hmm?

LV: Sara Sue hats made in Richmond; a lot of umm, they've been having Sara Sue hat parties in Richmond.

WG: Well, there was a lady at Miller & Rhoads for years who made hats.



LV: That's Sara Sue, yeah.

WG: Sara Sue, right.

LV: So when they had these vintage hat parties, a lot of the ladies show up in those hats.

WG: Sara Sue hats.

LV: Right, right, and umm, we haven't talked about the Institute of Contemporary Art.

WG: Well, Peter had complained that he was not getting good press. One of the reasons he wasn't getting good press, because he wanted the Virginia Museum to be like a traditional museum. And a traditional museum doesn't show work by untried people. Galleries do that and other places, museums do not. Museums will only show work by...

LV: Established...

WG: Established people. So with Richmond being a painter's town with VCU, he was highly criticized, because he discontinued the Virginia artists' exhibition, which was a bi-annual exhibition. He discontinued anything that had to do with...

LV: Regional...

WG: With regional shows. So, he wanted to find a way to do those shows, and, and to escape any criticism. So he asked me if I would be the Director of the Institute, and I said yes, because I said yes to everything.

LV: [Laughter] Apparently.

WG: Well, there had been staff members who were asked that same question, who said no. I didn't know you could say no. Fortunately, I had two good ladies, Julia Boyd and Anne Chenoweth. [The phone rings.] She's answering the phone.

LV: Okay, I will stop the tape.

LV: Contemporary art...

WG: Which we called ICA. There are two very famous ones in the country. One is in Boston. One is in Chicago, and I was familiar with them. And I made a point, when I was in Boston the last time, in going by the ICA to make sure I knew what they did. And they have a great luncheon facility, so I had lunch. And, and they are primarily exactly what it says. They are institutes of contemporary art. I was able to do a number of exhibitions, and I started to say that I had two good ladies who were already part of my staff: Julia Boyd, who ran the Loan/Own Art Service, and her assistant, Anne Chenoweth.

LV: Oh.



WG: Okay, so we incorporated the Loan/Own Art Service, which was in Robinson House, and moved to the second floor, where the Library used to be.

LV: Okay, so the Loan to Own service became part of the Institute?

WG: Yes.

LV: Okay.

WG: We built a circular stairway between what used to be the luncheon facility for the Museum, [and] downstairs became the main gallery for the ICA. I commissioned two Virginia artists to build the stairway: one to do the iron, and one to do the wood. Peter said people won't use it. So I learned that it's safer. A circular staircase is safer than a regular staircase, because people are careful. They hang onto the railing, and they watch where they put their feet. There are less falls with a circular staircase than there are on a regular staircase. So Julia Boyd and Anne Chenoweth became my assistants for the ICA. They also ran the Loan/Own Service. Well, your listener may not be familiar with a Loan/Own Service. In the Loan/Own Service, you could borrow a painter, a painting by a Virginia artist...

LV: [Laughter]

WG: ...live with it for a while, and if you decided you wanted to buy it, you could own it, or you brought it back and got something else. And to get in the Service, you had to be approved by me or a member of my headquarter staff – Fred, usually, me or Fred. And we would go to artists' studios that were new in town or who have been in a Virginia art juried art exhibition. You were allowed to put things in the Loan/Own. So that way we kept – and we actually took the Loan/Own – Mr. Cheek was really very interested in making the Museum as statewide as possible. So at one point, we actually took the Loan/Own on the road.

LV: Okay.

WG: We had metal racks which hooked together, and we had paintings which went on those racks, and we would take them to – I think in that book there's a photograph of us in Northern Virginia, someplace, at a historic house. And we set up the racks, and people could look at the paintings. And if they wanted to buy them, they could buy them. We actually had a driver who drove the van and set up the exhibition and took the money for the loan and went back a month later to collect the paintings the people didn't want to buy. So we, we did everything, everything we did at headquarters, we tried to make an extension of Statewide, lectures, you name it.

LV: The emphasis is on that again, actually, with our new Director. He's putting quite a big emphasis on, on statewide.

WG: That's good to hear because we are a state institution.

LV: Right, it's one of his main focuses, and he's elevated that department.



WG: At one point, we had thirty branch organizations. We called them Chapters or Affiliates. An Affiliate was an organization that already existed that became affiliated with us. The Chapter was one that usually I went out and started. And I would give a lecture and say, okay, we can start a Chapter now if I have a show of hands of people who want to join it. And of course, almost everybody showed their hand and said we need to elect officers now. So we would actually have an election right then and there. So we assigned a Chapter, and I did ones in different towns, doing up to thirty when I left.

LV: That's great. Was there any restriction for the type of art that traveled to the towns? You know, on the Artmobile?

WG: At first there was not, later there was...

LV: Okay.

WG: ...which caused the demise of the Artmobile program. We decided we would send anything, Rembrandts, you name it, Bruegels, any art that was in the Museum could go out on the Artmobile. Later, the Museum Directors felt that the art should not travel. It was not good for the art. So they began to cut back. So it didn't make any sense to spend that amount of money on a curator, a driver operating the vehicle, to send posters out, or work by Virginia artists. It didn't make any sense, so gradually, the Museum program declined. One [Artmobile] was made into a children's gallery on the grounds of the Museum – which was one of my projects – funded by the Junior League of Richmond.

LV: Wait, how many Artmobiles were there then?

WG: Four.

LV: There were four, and one of them was put stationary on the grounds for the children.

WG: No, we had two.

LV: Okay.

WG: Because there was not a successful design. They had awnings that went out. The original one had walls that came down to cover up the wheels, and we hung panels on the walls, and then the walls went out to form a canopy.

LV: And who oversaw the design of this? How did you come...

WG: Mr. Cheek designed them.

LV: Mr. Cheek designed them?

WG: Yes.



LV: Okay, I should have known that, I guess.

WG: And he designed the second one, which was not successful. So the third and fourth, we went back to the original design of having walls that came down, and walls that swung out. And we hung panels on the side of it that talked about the exhibition. So if you had a school group waiting in line to get in, they had something to read ... [Tape changes sides] ... as the people left, they could read about the Museum and about other things that were of interest to them. But the Museum was very conscious of orienting the public to the art they were seeing, so that's why we had the orientation theatres in the galleries, and that's why we had the orientation theatres to special exhibitions. So no matter what we did, we made sure that there was something that talked about the, the work they were seeing. Sometimes there was just one panel for this exhibition. Sometimes there were lots of panels. When we did *Greek Gold*, the first panel was written by Fred. In those days, Mr. Cheek approved all the panels. He didn't like it, so he, and his favorite thing to say was, "Try again." So he sent it back and said try again.

LV: [Laughter]

WG: So I typed one out and sent it over. He liked it. So I said, Fred, the rest of the panel will look like this one. So Fred wrote the rest of the panel.

LV: In the same style?

WG: The same style.

LV: Umm, did you find out... did you, did you find that the people where you took the Artmobiles, the towns, were the people very receptive to it? Were they happy to see you?

WG: Yes.

LV: Did you get a lot of attention?

WG: Yes.

LV: Okay.

WG: I did school children in the morning, and then I would run out and get something to eat, and then adults in the afternoon and adults in the evening. It was well attended, particularly by school children. I had fifteen students every fifteen minutes, and there was a tape that you listened to. But they didn't like the tape, so I would usually talk to the students. Mrs. Christison had written the tape, and it was a very good tape. And I learned a lot from her and from it. The, the need for information was always there. We had a typewriter called a jumbo typewriter, and it typed big type, big type.

LV: Mmm hmm.



WG: And we would set things up on the regular typewriter first. And then Mr. Cheek liked complete justification, so that the left margin and the right margin both had to line up. So we would go through and mark where he would leave an extra space or where you would, would consolidate the space. So when we typed on the jumbo, we would get it right. And frequently, the paper was painted to match the wall, so you couldn't make a mistake because you were typing on painted paper.

LV: Okay.

WG: So you're typing on a jumbo typewriter, on painted paper – no mistakes.

LV: Who did the typing?

WG: Sometimes I did, sometimes other people did. Sometimes Mrs. Christison's secretary did, but sometimes I did. I'm a good typist, too.

LV: A typist, we'll add that to the list.

WG: Well, I learned in school and then in the Army. I was, I went into the regular Army. Okay, I had a very checkered career Army-wise. I was in the Army specialist training program and was sent to Pennsylvania Military College in Chester, Pennsylvania, to study engineering first. And then I went from there into the regular Army. So I got my GI Bill to cover my undergraduate school. I did graduate school on a grant. I went to Italy on a grant. So I paid for my entire education myself, and I have worked to support myself since I was fifteen.

LV: That's impressive!

WG: Thank you. When I was fifteen, I had – my father had a sister, my Aunt Rebecca, who worked for the hotel in Luray, Virginia, which is across the Blue Ridge Mountains in the valley. And Aunt Becca arranged for me to be a desk clerk at the hotel between my junior and senior year in high school. And then I went back there cause they liked me, too. I went back there after I graduated and stayed until I went into, went to military school in Chester, Pennsylvania, on the train which I had never been on before, out of Culpeper, Culpeper is next to Madison. It's a town, and now it's a city. My mother's family is from Culpeper. And she was one time said to be the prettiest woman in Culpeper County, and I can believe that. Okay, you need to ask me something.

LV: All right, I've got just a few more things to ask you. I was interested in...I know you've received a lot of honors and awards, and we have a listing of them. But I was just curious what you felt was your most significant or proudest moment.

WG: Well, probably from the Southeastern Museums Conference. I was given the first award, named after Jim Short who had been head of education at Colonial Williamsburg. So I was the first recipient of the James Short Award, and they enumerated why they gave it to me. They



gave it to me because of my work on the Council of the Southeastern Museums Conference and because of my work at the Museum with exhibitions and children, the education in general. My other thing that I am proud of is my work with the American Association of Museums. I was on the Education Committee, and I was reviewer for at least three of the national awards. And I'm, and I'm very proud of my work as an accreditor for the American Association of Museums. I'm very proud of the work that I did to bring whatever knowledge I have of how a museum functions to the Southeast, to the nation, to Virginia, to anyone that would listen to me talk.

LV: [Laughter]

WG: But various other things, I had grants to go to Europe to study. I had grants to do my work. But I am most proud of the honors that were given by my peers too, like: the American Association of Museums, the Southeastern Museums, S.E.M.C., Southeastern Museums Conference.

LV: Okay, just before we close, is there anything that you'd like to say about how the Museum has changed or your perception of the current Museum?

WG: Well, I knew you were going to ask me that, and I thought about my answer. My answer is: I think you need to ask the people in Richmond and in the state how they perceive the Museum now. I have no idea how it's perceived now. You have had, what, at least three Museum Directors since I was there.

LV: Right.

WG: And each one did it a different way. The only one I enjoyed working with, Jim Brown. And I enjoyed working with Mr. Cheek. I did not enjoy working with Dr. Mooz, and I will say that to anyone who wants to hear it.

LV: [Laughter]

WG: Because he was not kind to me. He eventually became kind to me. But at the end, he was, when he moved all of those people out of my division, he devastated me.

LV: Right, you had built up a camaraderie and a working...

WG: And, and I said to him, I said, "Peter, there's another way to do this. Why don't you wait a while and see if it functions like, like you." He said, "I don't work that way." He said – my, the way I work is I'll do it my way, and if it doesn't function properly, I'll change it. But he said, I won't let it be like it is and see if it functions. So he went ahead anyway. You probably didn't know Lisa Hummel Hancock...

LV: Yes.

WG: ...was my Registrar.



LV: Really?

WG: For exhibitions.

LV: Okay.

WG: I had Elizabeth LeSueur back in the Museum then. Betty LeSueur, she was in that department. Sarah Cooke was in that department, whose last name is Marion and lives in New York now. Fred, of course, was my assistant for exhibitions and headquarters in general, and I had built that department so it functioned really well.

LV: Right.

WG: I had enough stuff coming and going that I needed my own Registrar, and she needed help. So when he moved, he moved Fred and Lisa and everybody up to the Collections Division. And Lisa, I am glad to say, has now become the Museum Registrar.

LV: Right.

WG: She's a very special person.

LV: She's still there.

WG: I'm also proud of the fact that I had the only black person in my division. Ron Epps, who's still there...

LV: He's still there.

WG: ...was the only intellectual black person on the Museum staff. We had guards and other people who worked who were black, but Ron was the only intellectual black. And he's still there, and I'm still friendly with him. And I'm very fond of him, and I'm glad he's still there.

LV: Yeah, we are, too. All right, well, we thank you very much for sharing the history of you...

WG: If you need any more talk...

LV: [Laughter]

WG: ...which I'm good at, give me a call.

LV: I will if we need to fill in some gaps, but...

WG: I will be glad to give you material that I have. And I have much of the photographs that I have in my biography, are photographs, that, that some of it... there's very little information on the Museum. But there's stuff in here about me in general and the Council.

LV: Well, that will be very helpful because, as you know, we have a file on you.



WG: And my old girlfriends...

LV: Okay, you've got all kinds of stuff.

WG: ...is in here, too.

LV: All right, well, thank you again, we really appreciate your willingness to participate.

WG: Well, I'm glad you were here to come to Florida, and I hope you enjoy your stay.

LV: Thank you.

