

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERTA T. GRIFFIN

CONDUCTED BY DEDE YOW and THOMAS A. SCOTT

EDITED AND INDEXED BY JAN HEIDRICH-RICE

for the

KSU ORAL HISTORY SERIES, NO. 30

TUESDAY, 1 MARCH 2005

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Tuesday, 1 March 2005
Location: CIE/CETL House at Kennesaw State University

TS: Roberta, why don't you just start by telling us when you were born, where you were born, and just a little bit about your background, if you would.

RG: All right. I was born at home in Newark, New Jersey, at the height of a terrible snow storm where my dad almost couldn't get out to get the silver nitrate you used to put in babies' eyes. The doctor delivered me [at home] because my mother had had a very bad experience in Irvington General Hospital with my older sister and she said she was never going to go back to the hospital to have another baby. Her comment was that unlike my sister, who was crying and unhappy, I just simply rolled out and was rosy and happy from the minute I was born. [chuckle]

DY: Somehow that doesn't surprise me, Roberta.

RG: I just remember very much of my early childhood because that always makes a big impression on everybody, I'm sure. My sister was very artistic; she was four and a half years older, and I'm sure I followed her around until I almost drove her crazy! But that was her job to look after me. So I learned a lot that way, hanging out with her and her friends and going places and doing things. When we moved and bought a house, we lived on the edge of a beautiful park—woods—and we spent summers there, literally. We disappeared from early morning till late at night, and I think that gave me my eternal love of nature, beauty, and just the idea that you can enjoy solitude. I don't get to enjoy much of that now, but it was a good basis for a lot of other things. When I was ten, my family moved to Miami, Florida, which seemed [unusual] to our relatives, because people in New Jersey, especially in my mother's Irish-Catholic family, [were] very clannish and never moved. In fact, fewer people move from New Jersey, I found out, than any other place.

TS: Really?

RG: And again, my father's family, which was English, stayed there. When they moved, it was just to another city in New Jersey. So we were the adventuresome ones.

TS: What year would that have been?

RG: That was in 1944.

TS: That you moved to Miami?

RG: That we moved to Miami. And it was the most exotic place in the world. I remember, my sister was fifteen and in high school, and she hated it because she had to move away from her friends. I kind of missed the woods. I missed the seasons; I love that in Atlanta. But I was very aware that I had landed in this exotic experience, and I loved it! [chuckle] I think that's where I developed my Mediterranean soul, really and truly.

DY: It is so evident in your art. When I went to your Web site today, I was clicking on those pictures, and it just brought back your wonderful, wonderful art.

RG: I've got a good many more pictures, and they're a revelation. These are things that I guess for awhile I was afraid to show because they're very symbolic nudes. There's one that's called *Keepers of the Dream*, and I hesitated, but it's now in the school arts center, and it's gotten a lot of comments. It's a big ten-foot painting, a triptych in three panels. I keep referencing back to memories, poetry, and my paintings. I think one of the things that I realize is that as one grows older and you do so many things because you know they're good, but then you also realize you have to do some things just because they're good for you. I think that's what helps people move toward retirement. They know all the things they have not done yet. They're very proud of the things they've done, how they built the programs, and how they've taught thousands of students, but you need that renewal, that kind of rediscovery of who you are. I'm looking forward to that.

DY: It's a whole new area of creativity.

RG: Yes. And I've always had my whole life—my memories, my experiences, my family are all very closely intertwined, and they're in my painting; they're in everything that I do. Yet, for many years I kept my family, which is very large—six children—separate from my work simply because when I started teaching high school, actually principals had the nerve to ask, “Well, you have four children [at the time], Mrs. Griffin. Are you going to get pregnant again?” [laughter] I tell this story to my female students now, and they cannot believe it! I was almost denied my scholarship for my senior year at the University of Miami, even though I had a 3.8 average, because the academic vice president found out that not only was I a mother, but I was expecting my third child. He thought it was highly unusual, and he had to talk to my husband! [laughter]

So Ted had to take off work and go to the University of Miami to the academic vice president's office—good old A. Franklin Williams, a very prim and proper Yalie—and explain that it was perfectly fine with him that his wife was going to school! I didn't tell that story for years because I think in some ways it made me angry, but it was before women's lib. I don't know why, I've always just felt from the time I was ten or twelve I was going to do what I wanted to do. I have to give my dad credit for that because he told my sister, Pat, and I: “You girls can

do whatever you want to do. You're capable; you're smart; you make good grades in school. Whatever you make up your mind to do, I'm sure it'll be good."

DY: Oh, what a wonderful gift.

RG: It was a wonderful gift because I'm not sure many parents were saying that. Actually, my mother was more traditional. "My God, Bobby, I don't know why you keep going to school. Why don't you just stay home and watch your babies like other women do?" [laughter] But she was very proud of me when I finished.

TS: That's what your family always called you, Bobby?

RG: Yes, yes. They still do—cousins and all of that. But when I hit high school that was it. I never told anybody my nickname was Bobby, and I was always known as Roberta. That's kind of a declaration of your independence and being considered more adult.

DY: It's also an elegant name.

RG: Roberta is a beautiful name, but not many people have it any more. I don't know why. So I'm glad that my parents named me Roberta.

TS: Did you get married right out of high school?

RG: No. After we both went to the University of Miami on scholarships, Ted and I married in August after our freshman year. I was eighteen and he was nineteen. But people got married younger then, and I think our parents could see that we were very happy and well suited to one another. So you know, why prevent it? I mean, we got the stern thing: "Now that you're adults, don't ever come to us. Don't ask us for money. You're on your own; you must be independent." That kind of thing. It was good for us. But we wanted to be [independent] anyway. We wanted to prove ourselves.

TS: I was going to say, you were almost a nontraditional student by the standards of the time.

RG: I was totally nontraditional. This is a joke my husband and I share . . . I walked by some male students one day—I guess that was right before I was almost denied my scholarship—and one young guy turned to the other. I was about eight and a half months pregnant, and he said, "She'll never make it!" [laughter] When I related this to my husband, he said, "You were probably the only legitimate pregnancy on campus!"

So it was fun. It was fun. And his mom was real supportive. She would take off from work to help, or she would baby sit in the evenings—because my parents lived farther away in Miami, and she lived right near the University of Miami. Even though she worked, she was supportive. And because she was an independent woman and a single mother at the time, and she trusted Ted. I can't

explain that. We always had a great bond, and I think he liked strong women. He knew what he had.

DY: He married a woman like his mother?

RG: No, I'm not like Grace at all. But the idea that you do things, and you're independent, and, also, she was a wonderful, avid reader, which I am, so we would read books and talk about them. And she loved to cook and I love to cook, so there were lots of things that we shared in common. She's living now in an independent living nursing home, but with some care, and she just celebrated her ninety-first birthday. She was a big supporter of me going back to graduate school as well because she had just retired early. She just was a great help reading papers and all. Ted was very proud of me. I got a fellowship to go to graduate school, too. So all my academic higher learning was free. Not really, because you had to maintain an average and do some work study. But I really very much believe in paying one's own way. That's just part of the independence of my family, I think, as well.

TS: Let me ask you about your first degree. You got a bachelor's of education in '58 at the University of Miami, but also there's something about a diploma in collegiate . . . ?

RG: Oh, yes. Right. That got me in some trouble, but I've never regretted having it.

TS: Explain what that was.

RG: Well, I got a master's in art education at the University of Miami, but there was an HEW [Health, Education, and Welfare] fellowship that was available that a professor had told me about. He had seen my records from undergraduate, even though they were a long time ago, and somehow read this in the University paper when I was just taking post-baccalaureate courses in painting. I went to see him; he was very, very enthusiastic. His name was Dr. Ritchie; he'd been the president of a small college in Pennsylvania (Haverford). We sat and talked, and he said, "You're very mature. You've taught high school, elementary school, art. I've talked to your professors at University of Miami who recommended you for graduate school, and there's this wonderful opportunity. If you will extend your program in art education for another year, you can get a Diplomat in Collegiate Teaching, and that can also lead eventually to a doctor of arts."

A lot of people just go on and get a Ph.D. in education. But the nice thing is that instead of just having a few education courses that concentrate on studio courses which you do in your master's degree, he said I would actually get to choose two other areas of concentration. This would pay for the next year, and I'd get a two hundred dollar-a-month fellowship as well. This was very highly selective, and other people applied for this. The wonderful thing about it is that I've always been a generalist. I loved doing stage productions with my high school students, and I loved art history. So I was able to concentrate primarily on print-making and

painting in my master's degree in the art department. But then I also took an additional—well, it's supposed to be twelve credits in art history and twelve graduate credits in stage design—but I wound up taking eighteen credits in stage design because they wanted me to help design some sets and supervise the students. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience.

The purpose of this degree, I think, makes a great deal of sense and I think they ought to reinstitute something like it again. Many people eventually went on and got Ph.D.s. It was an unconventional degree. A lot of people didn't understand what it was. For me, it was exactly what I wanted. I got to design several award-winning stage designs for the Ring Theatre, which was a very good theater. I got to learn a lot about art history with a specialty in 20th century art. I also took a couple of extra art history courses in African art. So it was just wonderful for me to be able to do that.

DY: Well, it made you very well-rounded. I mean, it's as if you could teach anything now.

RG: Yes, well, in the arts. This was in the early '70s. They were turning out so many highly specialized Ph.D.s. In the meantime, [with] the expansion of the community college and general undergraduate colleges all over the country, so many young people [were] coming into college at that point. That was the early curve of the baby boomers. What they found is that these professors that they had to teach these other courses were not prepared. Half the time they really didn't want to do them because they didn't feel prepared. So I got a job immediately. [chuckle] Most of my colleagues in the art department and studio had to wait three or four years and teach part time because they just had one specialty. It really helped me, I think.

I began teaching at Miami-Dade Community College, which at that point was the largest community college in the United States. It was full of vibrant people, very much a kind of on-the-move kind of place, and so I enjoyed it. But actually, the south campus had been there for about twenty years at that point, and it was getting a little bit stuffy, okay? A little bit too sure of itself. They opened a new campus; it was an award-winning beautiful campus in downtown Miami called the Mitchell Wolfson Campus. [Wolfson] had donated a lot of money. He owned movie theaters and television stations. We had been talking [before the interview began] about Jewish philanthropy [the theme of a symposium at Kennesaw the previous week], and that's exactly the kind of thing that he did. He donated a lot of money, of course, to the school, and they named the campus after him.

But it was beautiful; it was a vertical campus six stories high with elevators and escalators centered around a sky lit atrium and a wonderful group of students from every walk of life. There were young Cuban and Cuban-American students from southwest Miami whom we had some problems with because they spoke Spanglish. We had to institute a lot of teaching across the curriculum programs, which I still believe in. Everybody on that campus, whatever they taught, took

these workshops on reading across the curriculum. You were expected, no matter what course you had, to have at least two well-written papers from each student. You had to send them to the learning lab if they couldn't write well, a lot of them, because of their background. We also had [students] from Overtown, or downtown Miami—which was the toughest African-American area in Miami; right next to the campus there had been riots—and we had some wonderful students from there as well. Then we had very wealthy Columbians and Venezuelans from the high-rise condos along the bay. And then old, retired Jewish people living in tiny apartments in South Beach who still wanted to come and be educated. Plus your usual assortment of, your ordinary students. But a lot of women returning to college who lived maybe close in Miami . . . but that was an ideal place for them.

TS: You all knew what diversity was on a college campus.

RG: Oh, I knew what diversity was. In fact, that was a shock, Tom, when I came to Kennesaw State, quite frankly.

TS: Lack of diversity?

RG: Lack of diversity. But there were reasons for leaving Miami. We had two daughters up here already. One had just had our first grandchild—kind of followed in her mother's footsteps—in her second year of law school. That was Valerie; she married her high school sweetheart, Tom, and they're still married and have been married for twenty-eight years.

TS: What's Tom's . . .

RG: Tobin. He comes from a very interesting family. He is Jewish by background but really more kind of all-American. They were never very much practicing Jews but observed the holidays, so [it's] kind of fun because we have all of that. When I met his mom when they were first engaged, I just fell in love with her right away. She was the most outspoken, outrageous, funny, intelligent woman. It was just a big loss a year ago when she passed away because we had kept up our friendship. But it's funny how your life changes, and you have experiences. I think if you plan it too well, it's probably not a good idea because a lot of the things that I didn't plan turned out better.

DY: Now, you came in 1983.

RG: Yes, I came in 1983 from Miami.

DY: You came the year after I did. I remember vividly.

RG: Yes. And you know, this was 4,400 students [then]. I came from this huge community college; there were about 11,000 even on the downtown campus, and there was such diversity and everything. It was like all these kids were the first ones—I remember the surveys—the first ones in the family to have graduated

from college. They were almost all southern, from northern Georgia. I can't say that was bad though, because I think all young people are hungry for ideas. There was a kind of thrilling aspect to me about that, because just as I had started out at the new campus [in Miami] when they built it, and there were a lot of women there, and people would say, "Oh, why are you moving to downtown? Why are you teaching in downtown Miami . . . all that crime?" We loved it. And this was kind of the opposite. It's totally bucolic. Totally suburban. [laughter] There was a spirit under that.

DY: Why did you come here?

RG: Well, there were several things: Number one, Ted had an offer of a very good job. We had frequently gone to Atlanta from the time Tom and Val moved here in 1980 after he graduated from law school and then she started law school at Emory. And the kids—my young son was very close to Tom and Val. And then my oldest daughter, Ivy, was working at Hilton Head. She said, "Mom, why are you staying in Miami? Why don't you come up? You love Atlanta." We had lived in Atlanta for four years in the '60s, so it's not like a new thing. We love the seasons and all that. I think the clincher was when I held my first granddaughter in my arms. Jessica. That made us do it. Ted got a good job; I searched around for a job. I interviewed a lot of other places before I came to Kennesaw. But we had done our homework; the demographics and just the growth of northern Atlanta indicated this would pretty soon be a big university.

DY: And it has.

RG: And it really has become that. So I've been part of that growth, and I love being part of a start of a growth situation. I'm not sure I do very well when it gets all settled and too organized. [chuckle]

TS: Let's just fill in a few gaps before we start talking too much about Kennesaw. You got your bachelor's in '58, and I guess that was in art education. Then you started teaching in high school.

RG: Right. Well, my first full-time job after doing student teaching was at Pensacola High School. That's where the principal asked me, since I had four children, was I going to get pregnant again? [laughter]

TS: And then you all came to Atlanta in the '60s.

RG: Right. My husband—well, we had also lived in Pittsburgh and in the New York area, New Jersey, while he worked in New York, which I loved.

TS: So his job moved him around.

RG: He worked with Eastern Airlines, and the way you got promoted in those years was to be willing to move. So it was an adventure for us. I've heard a lot of women complain about moving, but I think our kids are very sophisticated in

some ways from moving so many times. They made friends easily; we always made it an adventure. As soon as we moved some place new, we took them to all the interesting places. We had a ritual that when you move, the very first night—because Eastern would pack everything including your garbage so it wasn't so hard and it was all labeled—I would always fix a very nice dinner with a tablecloth and flowers and candles the first night in our houses. And I think the children remembered that. It wasn't like we were complaining: “Oh, it's so dirty” or “I'm hot and sweaty” or “Go out and get some McDonald's or something.” It was more that this was our new home, and it was going to be as good as the one before. And I believe in that: I believe in ritual; I believe in ceremony; I believe in giving your children something to remember. So that was part of the fun.

And I loved New York. I taught at this wonderful, comprehensive high school—it only had 1,700 students—called East Brunswick High School. It was only forty-five minutes from New York. We had an art club, and once a month on Thursday evening when the galleries and museums were open, we loaded all the kids on a yellow school bus—there were in the club about thirty of them or so—and went over to New York. And my little kids, the four young ones—I had two later when we lived in Atlanta in the '60s—Rob and Dan. But we went over to New York. We saw all the museums and all the openings at the galleries. It was very exciting at that time because that was in 1964 to '66. We hardly ever lived any place longer than two years, but sometimes when I think of all we did it seemed longer. I remember the thrill of taking the kids to New York because they had grown up in Miami, then Pensacola, and then Pittsburgh—we were only there six months. We went to see all of the windows at Christmastime, and we took them to The New York City Ballet to *The Nutcracker*. I mean, it was like a dream; they still remember it.

DY: It is like a fairyland, isn't it?

RG: The problem with that is it finished you off. We took the granddaughters to *The Nutcracker* in Atlanta; one of them even danced in the chorus. I kept trying to bite my tongue and not say, “But it isn't The New York City Ballet *Nutcracker*!” Although the one in Atlanta is pretty good . . . So we went to that a lot with my grandchildren, my granddaughters. But I knew right then—and I knew it also for myself because I hardly saw any real art growing up in Miami. There weren't any museums, and I went to the University of Miami . . .

TS: No museums in Miami?

RG: No art museums in Miami when I was growing up. And just a struggling University of Miami symphony that Ted's mom ardently supported. And then the New York Metropolitan Opera. But when I went to the University of Miami, they had a very fine small museum called the Lowe Art Museum. And they had the Kress Collection, donated to small museums who requested art from the collection in the early '50s. It was a fabulous [sampling] of Samuel Kress's

Collection—mainly because he had been turned down by the Metropolitan. It was a very unfortunate and really a prejudiced thing because he was Jewish. He had moved from Russia or wherever and started all the Kress five-and-tens. He collected this fabulous art all during the '20s and '30s when they were practically giving it away because Italy was so impoverished at that time. So he had warehouses full of art and he wanted to be a member of the Metropolitan Museum, but the old guard would not let him in. So he just kept collecting art, and what happened is his largess has gone to over fifty medium-sized museums all over the United States. That makes a difference because I remember seeing beautiful Renaissance and baroque art in a little museum in Miami when I was in school.

TS: How could anybody have an appreciation of the arts and have that kind of a prejudice?

RG: Well, I don't know.

TS: Or maybe they didn't have a real appreciation of the arts.

RG: Well, I think they had an appreciation of the arts, but I think that there were things in our country that have changed for the better, obviously, over time. But out of that came something very good because probably half of it would have wound up in the basement of the Metropolitan. And then I also was able to see a fabulous show of fifty-nine paintings by Vincent Van Gogh, and his nephew came and talked at the Lowe Museum. They couldn't afford to do something like that. I remember getting up this close to those paintings and thinking, "Oh, wow!" At that moment, after I began to teach in college, I knew what a difference it had made to me—what a difference it made when I was able to go to New York and see museums when I was teaching high school.

DY: To see art.

RG: I made up my mind when I started first running the gallery at Miami-Dade downtown that I would bring the finest shows of the highest quality and a variety from contemporary through traditional through ethnic through whatever: sculpture, paintings, ceramics, drawings. When the students were at my institution, they would get to see a rich selection of things but at a really high level because it makes a difference. That's been my goal ever since, and I think I've done it. I did it at Miami-Dade, and I think I've done it at Kennesaw.

TS: So you got your master's in '73 and started immediately at Miami-Dade and stayed there . . . ?

RG: No, I got the master's, and then I got the Diplomate in Collegiate Teaching.

TS: Oh, that came later.

RG: Actually, not really. I think I graduated in '75. I had done all the course work for the master of arts, but then I just went on and did two years. I really only needed to do about a year and a half, but I just threw in all those extra courses. I started in '72 and graduated in 1975.

TS: So you're teaching high school while you're doing that?

RG: Oh, no. They had very strict rules, and I wish we could do it here. When you got accepted for a scholarship at the University of Miami, Department of Visual Arts, in the graduate school, you were not allowed to work at anything else. You had to go full time from morning until evening. You could be a teaching assistant, or you could clean the studios, but if they found out that you had another job . . . My studio mate, Jeannie, was a wonderful painter and got in trouble because she was making money painting gorgeous orchids and things all over people's swimming pools. One day, one of the professors went to a party at one of the houses, and somebody had said that Jeannie Welch had painted this. She almost lost her scholarship because they believe you have to totally concentrate on art alone. It made a difference in my life, I think, because I think trying to do too many things at once is hard. In colleges you see students doing this, and you certainly see this even with our art majors. You can see the potential there, you can see even the creation of what they've done, but it's such a struggle because they're trying to balance so many things in their lives at the same time.

DY: Yes, focusing energy. There's something to be said for that.

RG: I understood that, I think, because when I went back to graduate school, I was pretty mature. I knew how hard it was going to be to meet all the requirements. My husband at that point was the president of a new fledgling airline named Air Florida that he helped to start. He and I understood that I would do the major things as he was preoccupied, too. But we had teenage kids plus two little boys who were three and five. The teenage kids would help with the little boys after school. Valerie would go in the car and pick up Dan from kindergarten, and then I had Rob in a very nice Methodist nursery school attached to the University of Miami. I would get home usually about five o'clock at night and cook a big dinner for everybody. The girls would help with things. Ted would help somewhat reluctantly because he was playing football. A little bit of a chauvinist, he still is now—"Women do those things"—that's my oldest son. And Ivy by that time was in her first year of college at Florida State, so they knew the drill. They came to my openings and all that, but I would read to them, do homework with the older ones, read stories to Rob and Dan. Ted goes to bed a little earlier than I do, and during the weekdays, sometimes he couldn't get home till eight, so I'd feed the kids early.

But at least three nights a week I would cook dinner for twelve to sixteen people. It was our eight, plus Ted's mom, who would come to dinner and help out with the kitchen; she had just recently retired a couple of miles from us. Then the teenage kids could all bring their friends to eat dinner at our house so they

wouldn't feel that Mother going off to college would be something that would deprive them. There were five women and five men who were admitted into the program every year—didn't have to pay . . . scholarships . . . whatever; they just had certain requirements. But of all of them, none of the younger women managed to stay married. I had to do a lot of counseling with the three older women who were in their thirties who went back to graduate school. They all got divorced from their husbands because it was just too much of a strain. Most of them had older teenage kids whereas I had two little kids besides. But Ted understood. He was always proud of me, and we had a good relationship. It was fun.

DY: That's a wonderful story.

RG: It is. I don't think we ever compared ourselves with other people. We just did what we wanted to do and were very supportive of one another. At one time, we had four kids in college at the same time. [laughter] That's when I started teaching summer school while I was teaching up here. I just didn't want them burdened with a lot of student loans, and we didn't want to be burdened with a lot of student loans, although there were quite a few of them, too. But when you teach, you really begin to understand a lot more about your own children. I think they took it for granted that my studio was full of art. They took it for granted that art was really important in my life, and their father was passionate about music, and we believed in all these things. I mean, they pooh-poohed culture a lot because that's the style of teens, you know. But they still love it, and they still have interest.

The most important thing, though, for me was teaching and having a big family gave me a balance because I have a lot of energy. Sometimes some of the things that would happen in my work that weren't too good . . . teaching offered problems, but families have problems, too. It was a different kind of thing; there were problems, but there were fun things, too. It also gave me a perspective of what's important. And actually, when I've had some problems with my family—not really big problems, but just the fact that you've got a lot of burdens with your children or someone goes through a divorce, you know what I'm talking about—somehow teaching gives you a very positive focus. So I like that balance. I've always had that balance all my life, I realize, and I don't know what I'd do without it. I think you can bring that into the classroom.

For years, I never talked about my family just simply because of growing up and having my scholarship and all of that in a time when women weren't supposed to do those things. It was like I had to keep them separate. So I learned to do that very well. But it was like a nice secret; I had a family. [chuckle] And then I gradually talked to students and told them about it, or they'd see a picture of a grandchild. For my kids, that was also my secret life because I wasn't just Mommy. I mean, they knew I did something different, and they knew I was a college professor, but it's like you know if somebody has some passionate

purpose in their life, I think it helps you, too. They didn't always like it; my kids didn't. [chuckle]

DY: Well, you modeled for them, Roberta.

RG: Yes, I guess I did. But I think if there's one regret I have it's that I've not done enough painting, and I haven't written enough poems. One of the things that's happens in a big college like this where you have so much work to do—and I create a lot of my own work, let's face it, because I see ideas, and I want them to be done, and I take on more than I should, that's just my nature. Then I get a little mad because the administration and my bosses don't understand. "Don't they understand all I'm doing? Why can't they give me a twenty-hour-a week, half-time person—" which I've been asking and asking for for years. And I did; I got a half-time and then a full-time gallery curator, Suzanne Talbott, both times I went to Betty [L. Siegel] and threatened to leave and just retire, just go back to the classroom. I think they realized that. I think now it's more the fact that I can do so many things well because I've done them for so long. Sometimes I don't leave enough time for myself because I know about the things that I want to do.

DY: It's hard to factor that in when you work as much as you do.

RG: It's very, very hard to factor it in. And you know, when you do that—and I know I got the Service Award in 2001, and I've been nominated and actually got one when it was probably less important before in 1991, and I've been nominated several times for Teacher of the Year—but I keep thinking that that's great, but maybe I should be doing more painting. [chuckle] I think we all make choices in life. I know I've been a good teacher, though. I always have the students over to my house at the end of the semester, and they say, "Gosh, we didn't know you painted." If I was teaching an art history class they wouldn't know, and then they're surprised. But I haven't been teaching the painting for five years now. Now we have such a big department, you see, and I began to get release time for classes. I've really enjoyed developing new courses for the year; I've been very involved in that. I developed two new courses for the Year of Mexico, and I was a co-chair. I developed two new courses for the Year of Spain, and I was a co-chair. This time I decided for the Year of France I wasn't going to be the co-chair. But I've been very active with the committee, and I developed a course this semester which is on 20th century French art. I love it because I know a lot about it. I've been to France three times. I taught there for a month, and for twelve days I took students there. Then Ted and I went on our own, and I loved that.

So developing courses is a lot more work than just teaching the same course over and over again, but guess what? I'd rather have more work and have it more interesting because that's just my nature. It's work where you're searching for really good resources, you're trying to take the best slides, you're trying to think about how you get across the key ideas in this course so that your students understand and grasp them. Your reward is when they do, and you get these great written comments. We're all so sensitive, and we also get the bad ones, too, and

we think, “Oh, gosh!” But I think you take that with more balance as you get older and you’ve taught a long time. And this is the appeal of Kennesaw State, quite frankly, that emphasis on quality of teaching. I recall I made an acquaintance with a young woman—very smart, very proud of her discipline in teaching—but I noticed there’s a kind of flatness there, because if it’s outside her specialty, she’ll act like she knows something. You know what I’m talking about. But she really doesn’t, and this is a professor that I knew as a friend actually. But it’s funny because it’s like she doesn’t want to admit what she doesn’t know, where as for me, that’s the fun of it! I don’t know this, and tell me more about it! I think it’s because she graduated with a Ph.D. from a very prestigious university. There’s a kind of lockstep by which you achieve things by presenting papers, writing in journals; there’s a way that you climb the ladder in academe that I’ve never had the least interest in. I came in through the back door and got in in an independent way in the first place, and that’s just who I am. But one day I was sitting and listening to her, and I thought—and I never would say this to anybody other than to close friends—but I thought, “This person is a manufactured intellectual, a product of graduate school.”

I never wanted to be that. I wanted to admit what I didn’t know, ask questions so I knew more, and be kind of humble. Let’s face it, I didn’t go to New York University’s fabulous art history program; I didn’t go to Yale to their MFA program to be a painter. I went to the University of Miami, which was good, and I’m glad because it was very diverse. I really think their program, because they wanted to make it better, was probably one of the better programs by not letting you work and only admitting five men and five women. Plus, my fellowship and all those things helped. But I fell into those things. I would have gone to graduate school somewhere else except we moved back to Miami from Atlanta. I might not have ever had this broad-based Diplomate in Collegiate Teaching if I didn’t kind of find out about it because of another professor telling me about it, [my] going to talk to Dr. Ritchie, [and his] saying this is great. It paid for Rob’s nursery school, and it paid for me to buy a lot of supplies and materials, but it was also a kind of affirmation that even at thirty-nine, I could do something competitive. Those are things that happen to you without you directing yourself.

DY: Lockstepping.

RG: Lockstepping, right. So I’m not saying it’s better for everybody, but it’s better for me.

DY: I tell people who come new to this campus that we have the art, we have the galleries because of you. You have worked so hard and done such tremendous things. I’m thinking about what you’re saying about creativity and energy and how you make this manifest and how it all plays into your teaching. So you have had to make connections along those lines yourself, which is really important. You don’t manufacture that; that comes out of the individual. You have also clearly had to have very good connections within the community to be able to get what you needed to create the galleries that you have created here for us.

RG: Well, I knew nobody in the community, really, when I moved back. And before that, I had really just stayed home and had two little babies. They were born in Atlanta, Rob and Dan. I loved it. It was really bucolic; it was kind of a quiet, special time for me to enjoy just that, and the four older kids loving what they did, and just being a mommy for awhile. I'd been pretty busy before that. There were a few connections I made back here in Atlanta that were left over from when I'd lived here in the '60s—'66 through 1970. But by the time I moved back in '83, most of those people were older, and I was not that involved even then in the art community. I had been going to museums and concerts, but I got intensely involved in Miami-Dade and made so many friends there and so many connections. I realized the only way I would get the [KSU] art gallery program going was, in fact, to go out into the greater Atlanta community and bring those people up. Tom [Thomson] Salter was a wonderful inspiration, too, and still is a great friend; he would say such droll things when I first came on campus. And of course, Pat Taylor—we're still friends and I love him—he was a great chair of the department; he had visions, too, to do things. We started the art major together. It was so much fun. But I remember I'd only been here about a month, and Tom Salter says rather drolly, "Well, Roberta, you're going to find out that you love modern art, but Marietta hasn't even moved into the 20th century yet!" [laughter] And he was right. He was a modernist; he studied at the University of Georgia under Lamar Dodd, who was a wonderful man. Through [Tom], I got to meet Lamar Dodd and curate a great show and see what a difference one man can make. That's what Dodd did at the University of Georgia. And how this lasted for decades.

DY: And his legacy.

RG: And his legacy. And Tom's legacy was all of the art in the KSU Permanent Collection. In his very quiet way, he very graciously accepted all this art work donations of wonderful 19th century art from Fred [D.] Bentley, [J.] Alan Sellars, Noah [P.] Meadows, and some other people. So we had this great base of 19th century paintings. I've always loved 19th century landscape painting. Even though I'm a modernist, my paintings tend to be very much involved with landscape. And so from that, we were able to build other things. For instance, Ruth Zuckerman, the gift of Bernie [Bernard] Zuckerman to the college. I had planned this wonderful show of Ruth's work in 1994, I guess.

TS: That far back?

RG: Yes. I had a show of work. Because I've always loved sculpture, I curated this show for eight Atlanta sculptors. I called it "The Spirit in the Stone," and I invited Ruth as one of those artists to come and participate. I'd seen her work in galleries and thought it was beautiful, very reminiscent of Henry Moore, very graceful. I was thinking of her more than anyone else when I thought of the "Spirit in the Stone" because she did this *taille direct* carving.

TS: This is Ruth Zuckerman?

RG: Yes. *Taille direct* is the term for looking at the stone as Michelangelo did; you see the form in the stone already. She surprised me when I was talking to her because she would always go to Pietra Santa for the summer. I'm not sure Bernie was so happy. I found this out later when I got to know Ruth better. But she just said, "I'm going; I'm going for a month. I have to do this." She waited until her two beautiful daughters, Laurel and Rowann, were in high school before she really went back to school. They lived right in New York. She was becoming known—was getting a reputation for herself in New York—when Bernie took it upon himself to start a business that has been very successful in north Georgia. They lived in Buckhead. Ruth started teaching, inspiring other artists, some of whom are friends of mine. So when I saw that show and then went to her house, which was like a museum full of sculpture, I said, "Ruth, I've got to have a one-person show of yours." She was so happy about that. We started planning that, and then she died suddenly. She had liver cancer. But she was a fascinating woman, very quiet, very elegant. She cooked wonderful meals—she was a gourmet cook—and she taught sculpture in her studio. While Bernie was being this very successful businessman and making millions, she was quietly going her own way because the children were already raised. They were very proud of her; they would go to openings—that's where I met both of them.

But it was a revelation to me to really get to know another woman artist at that level. Although she was ten years older than me, I could see the same trajectory of how she put things off . . . how women's lives develop along different lines from men's, especially if they have children, especially if they're married and if they're involved with their families. They learn to balance the creation of their work, whether it's poetry or literature or art. I also realize the struggles that many of my contemporaries at the University of Miami went through trying to have that balance, so I greatly admired [Ruth] from the beginning. She had achieved that balance at a time when it was probably even more difficult to do than when I did it a decade later. So, as I say, we became very good friends, so her death was a shock. She and Bernie had celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary; they had gone on a number of cruises, and everything seemed fine. Then we had talked about her show, and she said, "Well, I'm going to be very busy. I'm going to Sarasota, and we're going to go travel in Europe. I'll get back to you when I return."

Well, getting back . . . I opened the paper one day, and there it was that she had died. It was just horrible to me. I went to her funeral, and Rowann gave the most moving eulogy. She's a beautiful woman. She's a writer and had been an editor of a New York magazine. I was so moved by that. I knew Ruth was a good cook; I'd gone to her house and all. But then I found out all the little details of some of the things that she had done; she had been a very complete woman. It became very important for me to honor her in some way, not just with a retrospective of the last fifteen years of work. So I went ahead and asked a couple, Dick and Judy Marks; I had been in their house, seen their work, and we were planning an exhibition—and I asked if we could switch dates. I needed another year to work

on Ruth's catalog, to work on finding out who she was, and to borrow work from eighteen collectors, just to make it something very special.

So I really began to relate to her on that basis, even more than when she was alive, because she was a very busy woman—she traveled a lot with her husband as they got older—and so I began to understand her on a different basis. I realized how many wonderful artists there are whose work may be recognized during their lifetime and may be celebrated, may be collected. But unless you get to the top of the leading art magazines like *Art in America* or *Art News*, or [you have a] show in the Museum of Modern Art, you can be forgotten within two decades. It happens all the time, quite frankly. I began to do some research into a lot of these artists, not just Ruth. It made me aware that I felt a certain vulnerability of my own being an artist who really put off a lot of the things I did for the sake of my job and for helping other people. So I had tried to give her the most beautiful show I possibly could as a way of honoring her and because I loved her work. I think Bernie and his daughters were very moved by that, and he made the decision to give her entire archive of work, all those things that were in this beautiful, big, modern living room that were not in galleries already.

I also have gotten promises from other people who will eventually give their work. The problem was that we wanted to build a museum, and this was in 1999. You know what happened in 2000; first it was the dot-com bust, and there was not a lot of money, and then, of course, 2001. One of the things that made me feel better about it, because I had talked about a museum for years, but every time I mentioned it to the president or anybody, [I was told], “Oh, we’ve got to have a concert hall first.” That was really Betty’s obsession for many years. She loves music, and certainly I love music, and I can understand that as something to attract attention to Kennesaw State. So I guess I was willing to patiently wait my turn in line, you might say. But we were moving ahead. There was a very wonderful director of development who came—I guess it was in 1998—named Kathleen Neitzel, and she was the first person who saw what I had done. She said, “Roberta, we’ve got to do something with this.” I thought, “Oh, my God, finally, somebody realizes what . . . “

DY: Kathleen was a class act.

RG: She was. Absolutely. What happened is that we really began to move ahead then. I was energized. Her assistant helped me to write a ten thousand dollar-grant for the preliminary studies for the museum. In the meantime, I had been working with Dick and Judy Marks, and they started to give part of their collection beginning in 2000, [with more following] in 2001 and 2002. The Ruth Zuckerman Collection was appraised at almost a million dollars, and the Dick and Judy Marks Collection in three separate gifts is about \$840,000. [Those prices are reflective of] five or six years ago; I’m sure they’ve gone up in value since. But the problem is where to put all of this stuff. It was fortunate that they were building Kennesaw Hall at the time. On the fifth floor, there was already going to be this nice, big wide hallway with side offices off the president’s suite. So we

worked with designers of that suite and the building to put in these wonderful marble ledges. We put a great deal of Ruth's work there and in the big conference room, and I think that made a difference.

But now the time has come to build a museum. So we did get a million dollar donation from the Woodruff Foundation, and that was almost by accident. A fairly young man, a teacher of history and geography at Wheeler High School who, in fact, taught my granddaughter, Ali, wrote a lovely letter to Emory Museum, to the University of Georgia Museum, and to Kennesaw State. He got his undergraduate degree in the '80s at Kennesaw State in history, and he remembers you, Tom.

TS: This is Russ Clayton that we're talking about.

RG: Russ Clayton. You probably remember him. He got his master's degree at Georgia State. He's collected all this Athos Menaboni work. He was a famous Italian artist who moved in the '20s after World War I to Atlanta because he married an Atlanta woman who had been in the war, involved in something in Italy. He met her there, they moved, and then he really began to paint a lot of work for Robert Woodruff—Christmas cards and so forth. So that was the connection. But the interesting thing was, [Russ] said we could come and select the works that we wanted.

Well, Suzanne and I went to see the collection with Wesley [K.] Wicker. We were so impressed. This was a simple home in Marietta right off Dallas Highway. It was filled from floor to ceiling practically with work. It contained drawers full of memorabilia of Menaboni, plus signed Presidential Christmas cards. I mean, Russ Clayton is a true collector in that he is driven to collect the highest quality things. He became interested in Menaboni—somehow he saw a Christmas card from the Woodruff plantation, he corresponded with Mr. Woodruff about it when he was eighteen, and Woodruff corresponded back with him very graciously.

So when [Suzanne and I] got back from that trip, we talked about it, and Suzanne wrote a letter. I said, "You know, we don't want to just have a couple of these pieces. It's more important, just like with Ruth Zuckerman's work or with the work from Dick and Judy Marks, that we have a big collection that represents something." We talked about it and said, "Well, let's write a letter that proposes that he give the entire collection to us. It can be an archive, and we can take care of it. It'll be lots more valuable for study and all than if it just gets split among universities." Basically, others just wanted to pick and choose what they wanted. That's probably good in a way because maybe you get to cherry-pick the best things. But in another way, it's not good because then you don't see the full development of the artist. So he liked it. He liked the letter Suzanne wrote, and from there on things went very well. We planned two exhibitions. Wes Wicker had been in the Atlanta community as a fundraiser, Director of Fundraising for the United Fund. He already knew all those people in Atlanta, and his idea was, in

fact, to go to the Woodruffs. So we got a million dollars to build a Menaboni gallery as well as an additional gallery.

TS: And storage space, I assume, for all this stuff.

RG: We kind of got carried away with the idea of a 27,000-square foot gallery. Wes Wicker was very excited about it, and I still am, but it's going to have to be a step-by-step thing. One of the problems with the Woodruff grant is they expect us to break ground by January, 2006. The only way to do that is to tie it in with the new concert hall, which we were planning to do anyway, but to build it in phases. But you can do that if you design it from the beginning to know that one gallery will lead to the next. So there will be a Menaboni gallery, a gallery for the permanent collection, finally, and then a sculpture gallery like a pavilion with Ruth's work. We can also have rotating sculpture shows. The same with the other galleries; we'll be able to do that. That will be approximately 10,000 square feet, which isn't big enough, but actually that was our plan when we started thinking about it years ago. It was going to be about 10,000 [square feet], and then we got carried away with all the gifts of art.

But I've learned patience. It doesn't happen overnight. It happens through your connections to other people; it also happens because you've done a good job and people know this. I've been very active with the Latino community because, quite frankly, when I moved to Atlanta with my Mediterranean soul, it just seemed so dry here. It just seemed so nice and quiet and polite. I loved all that, and I loved a lot of my faculty colleagues, but I needed that contact with people from other cultures. I needed that kind of vibrancy that only Latin-American culture has. I taught with a lot of [Latin-American] professors in Miami. Even growing up in elementary school, I always had some Cuban friends because that was a big exchange then. I didn't think about how it affected me, but it did. I talk more with my hands; I tend to be more animated. What I'm amazed about is this kind of animation and my passion for art even moved George [H.] Beggs. Do you know we have become such good friends? He was worried so much about that gallery at the beginning, he said, "Now, Mrs. Griffin, we're giving you that gallery. There's no money!" You know, because Tom [Salter] was getting ready to retire. But the interesting thing is—and I should have mentioned it to begin with—Betty had always had this idea of a huge, integrated Center for the Arts. I was originally brought to Kennesaw State University because of my success doing this at Miami-Dade—the downtown campus—and working with architects. So it only took them about a year to figure out that they got cold feet on that.

And what did KSU do with me? Fortunately, I said I always wanted to be a professor of art, and I talked with George very seriously about that. He said, "Well, I really like to teach, too. Would you want an administrative position?" I said, "I'd like an administrative title, but I want to be in a tenure-track faculty position." I think that was wise on my part because what would they have done with me after they decided to ditch the concept of the Center for the Arts?

- TS: I didn't realize that.
- RG: Oh, yes. And they really went gung-ho then into developing the business college, which was a very big disappointment to me. But I went back to the classroom, and I built the gallery at the same time. It was certainly at a much lower level. George even said, "Mrs. Griffin"—he never called me by my first name—"you've done more in one year than we expected you to do in five years." I had this grand five-year plan. I did all of the readings. I had gone to workshops; I had this vision of how we would step-by-step build the Center for the Arts. It would have worked, honestly. I know it would have worked because Atlanta in the early '80s was the most vibrant town, full of money. But they got cold feet. I brought in one of the leading architecture firms in Atlanta that also had offices all over Europe, and they did *pro bono* work for me. I was still getting phone calls for two or three years [asking], "When are you going to build the Arts Center?" And it was painful in some ways, really. But I said, "My sons are settled in high school; they're happy, I have granddaughters here that I love. Ted's happy in his job. It's not a good time to move." Although I did look at a lot of ads, quite frankly, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for about three or four years.
- TS: So our administration was saying they didn't want you to raise the money because we wanted it to be raised for other purposes?
- RG: Yes. And why would you even bring people to the table who were interested in an art museum? This went on for a number of years. I was told, "No, you can't touch those people because we're going to ask them for money for the concert hall, and we're going to do this and that." So there's nothing you can do about it. When Kathleen Neitzel came, my heart was like—you know, [here was] this wonderful, vibrant woman with creative ideas and elegance who really saw what I had been trying to do.
- TS: In terms of art galleries, I guess the first was in the basement of the library that we've still got down there, right?
- RG: Don't call it the basement of the library! That is a knife in my heart!
- TS: Well, the first floor of the . . . that does sound awful, doesn't it?
- RG: The lower level or the ground floor. [laughter]
- TS: It sounds like the roof ought to leak, or it ought to be damp down there, doesn't it?
- RG: Right. But actually, it's a very good gallery. It's better than anything at Georgia State. Then, of course, we have the second gallery, too, but Tom helped to design the Library Gallery with the architect.
- TS: Who did?

RG: Tom Salter. It has nice high ceilings; it's got security. It has a lot of good things.

TS: I guess with that one plus the one that's in the Wilson Building near the Stillwell Theater, that's 5,000 square feet now maybe?

RG: Yes.

TS: And so what you're talking about is going to be a whole lot grander, even if it's not as big as it could have been.

RG: Oh, right, exactly. It'll be at least twice as big as that. You know, eventually I think we'll do the rest. A lot depends on how this is promoted. They have never gone public with this gift other than through *KSU Access*. I've had a lot of people calling me, especially in the Latino community, and I've gotten more or less approval and understanding from Wes Wicker and from [Dean] Joe [Joseph D.] Meeks that we ought to have a Latin-American gallery. There's money out there for that; there's wonderful art out there. I have all the connection that I've built up over twenty years.

TS: I think Wes is real proud of that, with Russ and the Menaboni. I mean, he told me about it.

RG: Oh, yes. But he's a little bit too concentrated on that and not seeing the big picture. That is important. I think it's wonderful that he's done this, but I also know that Suzanne and I were the ones who suggested that we have the whole collection because we saw the reason for that. I would quite frankly like a little more support for the Latin-American gallery because I'm very confident we can raise a million dollars at least for that. But this is where you're kind of freewheeling when you come in. There's nobody to say "no." All George Beggs would say is, "Well, now, Mrs. Griffin, if you get in trouble with your budget or if you have a problem, I'll help you out. But you've got to come to me first." [chuckle] And he was wonderful because he always helped out. Pat Taylor was a miracle worker. He always found ways to raise the budget. He actually made the music and theater departments envious because he found a way to get that five million dollars to build the visual arts building. It just about killed him, though. He was so tired from working so hard on that. I never have felt that he got proper credit for that.

DY: I haven't either, Roberta.

RG: You know, when people say something like "Pat didn't do that," or "He didn't do this," I say, "You look at what he did. You would not be in this building without him. There would not be an art major without him." And without me, too. But I mean, we went to visit warehouses to find more space for the art program Anytime he had an exciting idea, he wanted to share it with somebody, and I was for that. He was young; he was full of energy; he had these great ideas. He understood how to hang out with the good old boys in the cafeteria, like [Vice President for Business and Finance] Roger Hopkins and Bill [William E.] Durrett

[the Director of Business Services]. Dr. Edwin Rugg got the money together because Pat figured out how to do it. That's what you have to do sometimes. We used to joke about being guerillas for art. Nobody wanted that art major; nobody wanted to give us any money. We just called ourselves the guerillas for art. Sometimes I even think now—and maybe that's why I don't fit in with the big bureaucracy—I sometimes feel the only way you can get things done after a certain point is to fly under the radar screen, do you know? [chuckle]

TS: Exactly.

RG: That's how people get things done, by being fearless and by not worrying, "Can I get everybody's approval for everything?" It never happens. I learned something, too, from Judy [Julia L.] Perkins. We became friends when I took Rob and Dan canoeing and she was kayaking. They used to have these wonderful canoe trips and lessons. We had so much fun with that one spring and summer. We would sit in the cafeteria and talk, and I'd say, "Judy, you've done such a wonderful job with the nursing school. How did you do all this?" She says, "Roberta, I found out a long time ago, it's easier to ask for forgiveness than to get permission. If you really believe in something, just go ahead and do it." So I've done that, by and large. [chuckle]

TS: Let me ask a kind of a general question. Your website talks about eighty major exhibitions that you've brought to campus . . .

RG: I think it was more than that. I've got to update it!

TS: Okay, well, I didn't know what the date was when this was written. At any rate, I guess my question is—you describe all of the work that you do with each exhibition. I mean, it's something you take for granted, but the general public is not aware of that in terms of scholarship. Would you talk about what it takes to put on one major exhibition, let alone eighty?

RG: Well, sometimes it takes years. For instance, I was always interested in Latin-American art, but I never really knew that much about Mexican art. I first started teaching in the studies abroad program in Oaxaca, Mexico in 1996, and I fell in love with it. I already had very good Mexican friends. I'd had a year of Mexico study and became friends with many people and also visited. I also had a Mexican artist who was part of the official Cultural Olympiad in 1993. So I already knew how the in-depth culture of Mexico was. But then when I went to Oaxaca, I said, "Here's a little colonial city 300 miles south of Mexico City, and 60 percent of the people are an indigenous population. Most of the artists are a mixture of indigenous and Creole, and this place, it has 250,000 people. That's greater Oaxaca. Compare that to how many people [are] in Atlanta. Oaxaca had dozens and dozens of galleries; it had four major museums; it had all of these wonderful colonial churches dating from the early 16th century up through the 19th century. It had been named by UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] as a world heritage site. It had been totally down in

the heels thirty years ago, and then with the infusion of about forty million dollars, they were able to restore many of these churches.

So I began to go to the galleries to hang out with some of the artists, and I knew that I had to have a show. But see, I was there in '96; I was there in '97 and in '98 in the summers. And then I took another trip down there, and I organized an exhibition called *La Tierra Mexica*, which was eleven contemporary Oaxacan painters, and it was very successful. We had a wonderful catalog. It was an important milestone for me. I had done other catalogs before, and I really think I've gotten not only broad general knowledge of art, but I have a lot of in-depth knowledge, because once I hone into this you have—to curate a good show—know more than the surface of things.

One of the easy things to do is to have a traveling exhibition that somebody else has curated and planned everything. I've had wonderful traveling exhibitions, but I try to curate at least two shows a year that are unique. Basically, some of these shows should be in the [Atlanta] High Museum [of Art], and I know what I've tackled by doing this. It's like the stages of things I talked about earlier on, the idea you're so excited about it, and then you say, "Oh, my God, what did I get myself into?" And then about three quarters of the way, you think, "Oh, I never should have done this! This is so much work, and it's all these problems." And then finally there is the opening and there's the music and there's the people coming. The work is perfectly lit, and it looks beautiful. And you know you've accomplished something. It's probably a detriment to my own painting because it's a form of creativity, but it is so gratifying. Plus, I'm having thousands of students and other visitors seeing this work who would never have seen it without me. And the catalog or the nice brochure is an example of something you keep. It's a record of that, and the students take it and read it. It's important.

I brought one of the Mexican artists up, Fileman Santiago. He was so wonderful. He was a great artist, but also he had lived in Chicago for fourteen years as a young Mexican artist, and he understood our culture. He wore himself out talking to people. He gave fourteen gallery talks. It was like in an eight-day period when he was here. We had the best time. I found out how energetic Mexicans are. It is like, there's a kind of work ethic that I discovered. And this is something you learn in depth, too, that I make reference to in the essay for the Rodolfo Morales exhibition. The Zapotec, Maya, Mixteca Indians, Aztecs—all of those ancient cultures—all had this idea about the world, and that was that work was sacred; it held up the supports of the world. If you stopped working as part of your sacred obligation, whatever level you were at, the world would collapse. And it is really true, if you think of it. There's a very mystic spiritual level, something I've always understood. I mean, you can't have four kids in five years and only be twenty-four years old and not realize you better like what you're doing. You'd better understand that this work that you're doing is important, or what is your life about?

But at a much deeper level of the multi-levels of gods, there's still always the over-reaching God. And yes, there were horrible human sacrifices, because that was at a different level because they honestly believed that by sacrificing these warriors from these power wars, that the blood of the victims watered the earth and kept the earth going, too. So it was a very cosmic, very complex cosmology. I understood.

Rodolfo Morales was the great visionary; he was the father. He was almost pure Zapotec Indian. He grew up in a very poor little town thirty miles outside of central Oaxaca called Ocotlan. He went to Mexico City when he was twenty-four and only came back once or twice a year at the most, riding a train. He studied at San Carlos Academy, which is very famous, and he taught at a preparatory school that prepared students for college. He taught art there. He taught for twenty-five years and painted alone in his studio without showing it to anybody but his few artist friends. Finally, he was encouraged by a woman sculptor whom he knew to show his work. And the famous Mexican artist Rodolfo Morales was maybe forty-eight years old then. The most famous Mexican artist at that point—because Rivera had died and other great muralists had died—was Rufino Tamayo. He saw this work in a town outside of Mexico City. He loved it and realized this was a man who could be mentored. That was kind of the beginning. He was almost fifty years old when he got to be known. But it was his own recognition by somebody already very famous, Rufino Tamayo.

Tamayo was world-famous; he lived in France; he lived in New York. Almost every one of these Mexican artists returns to their town what they feel is important. They share their art. Rufino Tamayo started a pension and retirement plan and medical insurance out of the great wealth he finally had. He spent it on the people of the state of Oaxaca, and there's a big institute there so people can get medical care. Teachers get retirement, all the things the state could not afford. Rodolfo Morales began to take most of the money from his work—from his wonderful collages with the little cut tin frames, the wonderful lithographs, some of the paintings—and he poured all of that money back into restoring fourteen churches and *conventos* in the Ocotlan area and in Oaxaca itself.

So he lived very simply. As soon as he began to have some money in his fifties, he bought an old broken-down 17th century home in Ocotlan, right on the streets—but then you open the gates—and restored it. His family, his sister and nephews and brother-in-law, all lived there so he could come home and visit. And then he retired there and just painted. He got up every day at 5:30 and made a collage. Then he had some coffee, and he heard the church bells chime because it was a roof-top studio; he had two different studios. He would take a little time off, and then he would go back in the afternoon and paint. But his whole life was about work. It was about devotion to work as a sacred obligation that was also the core of your being. I want to cry about that, and I really relate to that in what I do. (she tears up)

DY: I think that's exactly what you do.

RG: And I had this epiphany in Mexico because I realized that whether [or not] I ever got to be well-known as an artist, I have done something that was the work of the world.

DY: And you've brought it all back home.

RG: And I've brought it back.

DY: And so many people have benefited from it.

RG: I guess they have; they really have. But more than that, it's like you want to honor these people.

DY: Well, Roberta, it is, from the literary, archetypal or Jungian perspective, it is the archetypal hero. The archetypal hero is not a hero unless he or she brings the treasure back home that he has somehow worked and earned and fought for. So, yes, in that sense, I think it's very much what you have done.

RG: So I hope that I have left a legacy. I would love to have a Latin-American gallery. I'm not sure right now the people who have control of that understand how important it is though, you know? You can talk about it; you can have people understand how beautiful the work is. But it's a little idiosyncratic. It's not a famous 19th century landscape painting; it's not one of the honored icons of whatever. So it's kind of hard. But I think I try to make the point with the students and with my colleagues and with those who understand that art is about more than pretty pictures. Art is about more than whether other people like it or not. Art is so deep and intrinsic to the soul of the artist making it, to the people who come and see it and relate to it . . .

DY: To the human spirit.

RG: To the human spirit; and to the whole society in which it's created. I did a great treat for myself less than a month ago. I went up with friends to New York. I had been invited by Christo and Jeanne-Claude—Ted had actually brought them—Ted had, not me, I just got to know them—to do the *Surrounded Islands* when he was manager of the [Miami] New World Festival of the Arts in 1980. I got to meet them then, and I learned something of their philosophy. I had already been showing their films in my art appreciation classes at Miami-Dade so I pretty much knew who they were and what extraordinary things they were doing. But then to meet them was something entirely different. They would not promise anything; they would not accept any money to come to Miami. That's when I knew what extraordinary people they were.

We paid their expenses; we put them up in a nice hotel and then drove them around. Beth Dunlop, who was one of the people with the Dade County Cultural Affairs Board, a very nice young woman—she drove them everywhere. Jeanne-Claude kept making her stop at all the causeways that go across Biscayne Bay. Beth didn't quite know what to make of that. She thought they'd grab one of the

new glittering skyscrapers in Miami or a bridge or whatever that goes over the Miami River, which is a very beautiful bridge. They said, “We’ll let you know whether we’ll do anything.” They called, I guess it was maybe almost four months later, and said, “Yes, we will do a project for Miami, but we won’t tell you any more than that. Pay our way down again, and we’ll propose this thing.” It was the *Surrounded Islands*, which was Jeanne-Claude’s idea. It was the first one that was totally her idea. He’s an engineer; he tended to do more wrapping buildings and bridges. This was this great polypropylene floating material that was anchored to all of the spoils islands—twenty-three of them—in Biscayne Bay. They were like lily pads. It was her homage to Monet, and it was wonderful. You could see it on a boat, but the best way, because there are all these condos lining the bay, was to go up in somebody’s condo and look down and see this whole thing. It was fabulous. It beat whatever we thought they were going to do.

Well, when we had the Olympics; I was part of the early Olympic committee in ’92. I called them on the phone and asked if they might be interested in coming down and considering something for the Olympics in Atlanta. Jeanne-Claude really handles all of this. She said, “No, Roberta, we are so busy with [another project]; that’s all we can concentrate on now.” So I said fine, but then I found out about a traveling exhibition in 2000 that was two projects: One was called *Over the River*, which was the Arkansas River and Colorado, and the other was *The Gates*. They had had this as a dream since 1979, so I wanted that show. It wasn’t that expensive to rent. So I rented the show, and we showed it in the Fine Arts Gallery. They had people come down to help with it. But they were so nice through the whole thing. They are just so relaxed and real; they have no airs about them whatsoever. She’s very keen and likes to argue. She’s a wonderful lady, that kind of French intellectual quality. He’s very quiet and poetic.

DY: You went up there the weekend before Valentine’s Day, didn’t you?

RG: So we went up—my friend Sandy Corley and her husband—we went up to New York, and we were there for the unfurling of *The Gates*. It was thrilling; it was more than I could imagine. But to tell you a little more about this, I invited Christo and Jeanne-Claude to come and lecture when we had the exhibition of two projects, one of which was *The Gates* with this beautiful drawing and lithographs and all. Jeanne-Claude said in a lovely French accent, “Roberta, I don’t think you can afford us.” I said, “Well, how much is your fee?” She says, “Well, normally in public or for museums, it’s \$25,000.” Well, they were already world-famous. “But for a university,” she said, “we’ll come for \$15,000. However, if you or the university can buy one of our works . . .” I said, “We don’t have that money either.” She said, “But I’m sure there must be a collector or somebody in Atlanta that you know that might want to.”

Well, I believe in serendipity. I swear the next day a doctor from Alexandria, Louisiana, of all places, who had retired and moved to Duluth, saw the information about the Christo and Jeanne-Claude exhibition at the school in a

newspaper advertisement or something that we did. He said, “Oh, I own a Christo. Are they going to come to lecture?” I said, “No, because I can’t afford them. But you own a Christo? Would you consider buying another one?” [laughter] And he did!

So they came and lectured for free. That was the first time that we ever raised any money in the Jolley Lodge. When I told the president about it . . . even Joe Meeks said, “Oh, you can’t charge money for a lecturer; we’ve never done that before. And you’re not going to get anybody to come to the Jolley Lodge.” I said, “Joe, Betty, these are world-famous people!” So I did this little thing. For fifty dollars a piece, you could get a free ticket and an après-lecture champagne supper in the Jolley Lodge. It was packed. There were people standing in the back. Students came from UGA, from Georgia State; people [came from] everywhere. So I think they were kind of amazed. [chuckle] I’d like to keep doing stuff like that.

DY: Before our time runs out though, I really want to hear what Roberta has to say about where you see things going at Kennesaw from your perspective. I’ll just leave it open like that.

RG Okay, from my perspective, I think that it has made amazing strides. I think it’s really positioned itself, especially through a lot of Betty’s vision with this idea of the First Year Studies and the RTM thing [RTM Institute for Leadership, Ethics and Character] where they’ve gotten a million dollars from Dennis Cooper, owner of RTM. But I know Jean and Dennis Cooper very well. What I would like to see, in terms of real money and real effort, is as much money put into the arts as has gone into business and these other things. In some ways, as much as I’ve tried and as much as I think I’ve succeeded within a limited arena, I really think that in many ways the visual arts take a back burner to the performing arts. For everything that I’ve done, I’ve gone out and raised money for it either through student activity funds or through grants. I just got a \$10,000 grant from National Endowment for the Arts and worked with Ming Chen [Associate Professor of Theatre] on this. This is the first National Endowment for the Arts grant that has ever been given to a state university gallery, and we’re really proud of that.

DY: Congratulations!

RG: But I see at some point . . . and I argued this, too, at Miami-Dade because I worked just as hard there at the downtown campus for five years, and I remember writing a passionate letter to the dean. Somewhere along the line, all great programs are put in place and developed because of the passion and the willingness to work of a single visionary or maybe a group of visionaries within a department. But then if the university itself doesn’t step in there and build on what has already been built . . . I have seen this happen; it happened at the University of Miami, and it was shocking. They never did get the kind of galleries and classrooms for the art department they deserved; they remained in the old army barracks from World War II. I mean, I’m aware, because I’ve lived a long time, how hard it is for the arts to make it. There was a big article in the

paper about that, how the people at the top get these fabulous salaries, but then you find out that, you know, the guy who runs this fabulous theater in Atlanta has to walk the dog for his neighbor and mow lawns in order to make ends meet. You see, the salary levels are so disparate.

So for the university itself, it's not enough to say we love the arts and we want these things to develop. At some point, proportionate to the effort that's being made by the people in the arts, there has to be at the top level the money given. For instance, we have over 500 art majors now, and yet we only have twelve full-time faculty. We are getting more, but it's almost been a disgrace the way we've had to struggle over the years to get even little increments of things. Believe me, until we got to the point that we were really being paid attention to, at any of the points fifteen years ago, even ten years ago, if there wasn't the will to do these things, it all could have gone down. Georgia State is experiencing that in the arts right now. They've cancelled their theater program; they're struggling with their galleries. We had this wonderful Sculpture-on-the-Grounds program called *Open Skies* that Linda [A.] Hightower initiated. In fact, she told me one of the reasons she came to Kennesaw State—she's the chair of our art department—was because she knew me when she was working on her Ph.D. and also because she knew the reputation of our school. She loved what I was doing. So she and Kyle, our studio tech person, they invited all these sculptors out to do these temporary sculptures. It's been a really big success. Most of the Georgia State professors came, and they said, "We don't want to say we're envious, but how do you do it? They don't let us do these things at Georgia State."

So again, there's the will of this core group of people who keep things alive. GSU has a wonderful sculpture department, and they have a good painting department. They have all kind of equipment in their printmaking, but they've lost some of these people. One of the problems that you have if you don't support the work of the pioneers is that it can kind of be washed aside. That's my fear, quite frankly. Now they've got the money—it's state money, fortunately—to build that long-awaited music performance hall. It's great that we have it. First of all, that music department has to get out of that dinky little building; that is a real disgrace! [chuckle] And you have to give credit to all the people that have worked over the years to do that. First, [R.] Wayne Gibson; then Joe Meeks. And Betty Siegel has really wanted this. But they somehow managed to get state money, and I want to know why can't the art museum get any state money? Why is it they can build a theater and call it a learning lab? Why is it that we can build a concert hall, and the state will give them money and call it a learning lab? Don't they see—because this was all the things that I wrote, and Kathleen helped me with this—it's art. The museum is a learning lab. We could put a great lecture hall in there.

DY: Of course it is.

RG: But, you know, I can't do this alone. There's only so much I can do, and I'm going to be out of here in a year or two. What is somebody else going to do to

pick that up? That's my fear. Not because I've built a great permanent collection, and certainly Tom did before me. I think I've gotten great awareness of the arts: I think I've helped to build the program. But at any time, the top people—either a new president or the academic vice president or anybody—can come in and decide the arts aren't that important. So what's the legacy? The legacy has to be one that grows and is handed on to others. It's not something you can build yourself and say, "Hey, I've done it," and that's it. That's not the way it works. You have to have the institution, as I've said, kind of going circuitously. I got a lot of support finally from my dean and the vice-president of the south campus; but I wrote an impassioned letter about the fact that I'm not going to be here forever, and you can't just depend on the hard work and vision of one person. The institution itself must buy into that vision.

I think KSU administrators have bought into it. I know they bought into the music vision because that's a love of Betty's. I've never had full confidence that they've totally bought into the visual arts program. I mean, you might show naked people for all they know! [chuckle] I know because I've taught life drawing. You can imagine whatever you want when you sit in a concert hall and listen to music, but art tends to be on the cutting edge of controversy. I mean, Christo and Jeanne-Claude had a very hard time when they first started, but they just kept insisting in what they believed in. And I really believe that our art here should be more cutting edge art. I mean, I worked with the French Consulate; they gave me a grant for \$3,300 for having the *Process and Perception* show, which is a very cutting edge show of installation art. So there's support for that. I think we're finally breaking the ice on that conservatism that you find in the South about art being pretty pictures.

DY: Certainly in Marietta, too . . .

RG: Yes. Oh, they will never let go of that. I mean, I keep laughing when I think about Tom [Salter] and that comment that he made to me when I moved up here in 1983. And you know, there are still people that will not set their foot in a gallery if there's a contemporary show. They just don't understand. But not students . . .

TS: You're kind of implying that the controversial nature of the visual arts may be why we've had less campus support than for, say, the music program?

RG: Well, I don't think that it's anything that's at a conscious level, let's put it that way. But our campus, by and large, doesn't like controversy. It's sometimes even hard when there's a debate or an article or a community forum for people to come right out and speak their minds. I think it's partly Southern politeness, which is embedded in the culture, even though we are changing rapidly. But it's also partly the idea that in the more conservative climate that we are in right now people are hesitant to speak out and be more frank. First of all, they don't know how it's going to affect their job. They don't know really how it's going to affect how they're viewed by their colleagues.

Sometimes, the administration [worries] how it might affect the money that they're trying to raise. I'm not speaking about myself personally but just in a general level. I think, especially at a higher level, many of the administrators are very fearful of controversy because we've had our share of lawsuits. We've had our share of bad publicity. We've had a lot of good publicity though, and actually, any publicity, as you know, is better than nothing. It kind of puts Kennesaw on the map. But you'd be amazed how I can still go out in the community, and they say, "Oh, you teach at Kennesaw Junior College?" And you try not to be enraged and say, "Don't you know we've been a four-year school since 1978? Don't you know we won these awards?" People tend to hang on to old ideas, and a forty-year-old university is not a very old place; it really isn't. I think I realized that, too, because the University of Miami was started in the depths of the Depression.

I grew up in Miami; I knew a lot of those people. I was involved with so much of the culture of Miami. I went to high school there and the university there, and they always had a little bit of an inferiority complex. Oh, they were sun-tanned "U." That's where all the GIs went, you know, after they got home. Oh, if your kids couldn't get into an Ivy League school and you had lots of money, why not send them to the University of Miami? At one point, they had, I think, 28,000 [students]. They backed down to under 20,000 because there began to be visions from various presidents and key people that they wanted quality in that school, and that was the way to do it.

So I get a little worried sometimes when I hear things and go to meetings, like for planning. I went to the planning presentation a couple of weeks ago, and they're talking about 35,000. Then they kind of backed down and said, "Well, the optimum would be 25,000." They're talking about putting in a huge 40,000-seat football stadium on campus, and then people were raising questions about why couldn't it be off campus? We're trying to model ourselves after UGA. I know UGA has lots of good qualities and many fine programs, but it had those and enveloped those before they had a famous football team. They had something to build on. We're beginning to build those things, and I don't think we need a football team to do it. If we have it, it ought to be off campus, and it ought to be part of whatever else we're doing. [We should] not be telling ourselves, "Oh, if we have a football team, that's going to have a great impact on the quality of teaching, on the quality of research." How does a football team affect those things?

TS: I hadn't heard that argument.

DY: I hadn't either. It's pretty absurd. I would like to think that the revenue that's generated by a football team, some of the fallout of that, could come to the arts, for example.

RG: Right. But many, many studies have shown that basically the revenue from top basketball and football teams just gets plowed right back into the athletic line. It grows its own little empire.

TS: Right. They have their separate funding.

RG: I mean, University of Pennsylvania doesn't have a football team worth much, but think how incredibly important the University of Pennsylvania is in all levels of different programs. New York University, for instance. Dartmouth College. You think of the impact . . . Yale—you have your Ivy League schools—but when have you ever heard of them winning a national championship—Harvard or Yale, think about it.

TS: Not in sixty or eighty years.

RG: University of Chicago, you know. I mean, state schools seem to be more [athletically geared], like the University of Michigan.

TS: University of Chicago had football at one point and then abandoned it.

RG: Yes. So I'm not sure that that's the way for us to go, but I don't see us having an open dialogue about that. It's almost like the administration has decided this is a great thing, so everybody is supposed to buy into it. If I say something that disagrees with it, [they'll think], "Oh, she's an artist; you know that type. They don't think those things are important." But the arts bring in as much revenue to greater metropolitan Atlanta, and a larger audience, than sports does. So why is there this imbalance? Why in the Sunday paper is there one page of review for three or four art shows when there are a hundred good galleries and museums in Atlanta? And why are there at least two sections of sports with anywhere from—because I've counted them—twenty-eight to forty pages. I mean, young people reading the newspaper—and of course, they don't read it that much any more—how can they think that the arts are important if that's what the newspaper devotes to it?

DY: Very good point, Roberta.

RG: You know? So at the top you have to make those decisions about what's important. You really and truly have to make those decisions because those are the movers and shakers, those are the people that have the connections, those are the people who can do things. And certainly I think that was proven. I was a member of the High Museum when we moved back in '83 and had been a member before. My husband, through Eastern Airlines, had really been part of that whole building of the original Woodruff complex. I was thrilled with the level of arts in Miami. Miami and Atlanta were on equal par when I moved in '83. That is no longer true because the Latinos love culture so much, and that has been a driving force there. The very large Jewish population as well, that's another driving force. In Atlanta, you do have certain driving forces, but actually in Miami, because of its make-up of grids of streets and so forth, there's far more

coverage of the arts. I think the paper makes a point of that, but also it's easier to get around to the various art centers. So art is covered from Palm Beach to Key West in Miami, whereas it's only covered within the [Atlanta] Perimeter.

I can't tell you how many times I've talked to Cathy [Catherine] Fox [of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution], and she says, "Roberta, you have beautiful shows out there." She comes and reviews them sometimes. Often she says, "But I don't have time to go out there and review them." Because there's this idea that inside the Perimeter all the great art is happening, and anything that's on the outside of the Perimeter is provincial. I had a big discussion with several of my friends who are inside the Perimeter, and I said, "No, I think you're wrong. How many times do you see people coming from the suburbs into your art openings and concerts and symphonies? How many times do you drive the other way? You are the ones who are provincial. You have drawn this circle called the Perimeter to keep others out. What should be happening is all of us should be drawing a bigger circle and pulling more people in."

DY: Nice metaphor. I like it.

RG: Yes, but a lot people use it. It's not original, but it's true. And so until greater metropolitan Atlanta understands that there's great art happening in places beyond the Perimeter, like Kennesaw State University . . . I know we really get frustrated in the music and theater and visual arts departments because we're doing all these incredible things, but who's paying attention? We can't even get *The Sentinel*, our own paper, to pay attention.

TS: So I don't want to put words in your mouth, but if I'm hearing you correctly, you're still hopeful about our future, but you're frustrated that we haven't moved faster, perhaps. And you're frustrated because the intellectual climate steers away from controversy.

RG: Yes. From open discussions about things. I don't mean to pick out any particular department, but it kind of seems to spread all over the university. Tom, you've been here long enough, and Dede, you have been here long enough so you know what I'm talking about. But I think that you have to have a faith that it gets better, and it is getting better to a certain point. But it's been the individual efforts of people. Certainly in literature there have been people who have been plowing that ground and planting the seeds for so long in the English department. They have done a wonderful job, but I don't see where even the people who are writing in the English department—like Greg [R. Johnson] or Tony [M. Grooms]—are getting half the recognition that they should.

DY: They aren't; they aren't.

RG: From our own administration, I mean. So I don't feel like I'm alone. I'm not saying, "Here's Roberta in the visual arts, and everybody else is getting recognition." That's not true.

DY: No. And why don't we have an endowed chair for a writer in the English department? I know that Betty has wanted that for some time, but it has to do with leadership and administrators who are willing . . . There again, Kathleen Neitzel understood that you have to take people who have connections and get them to get people to give money. But I don't know. I know exactly what you're saying, Roberta. It's very frustrating, and you just get to the point that you think, "Well, are we just going to sort of grub on along?"

RG: Yes, but I think that happens in a lot of universities.

DY: I think it does, too.

RG: I was talking to my friends in conferences and meetings, and I think it particularly happens in mid-level state universities. It isn't happening at Agnes Scott, which only has 800 students. But it's heavily endowed; its emphasis has been on the arts. You know what I'm talking about? You attract a younger, more ambitious, more visionary, idealistic group of faculty to mid-level state universities who have a chance to bloom and grow to a certain point. But either they move on or they position themselves as long marchers—that's one of Betty's favorite phrases—and they hang in there, and they do a wonderful job. But coming full circle to what I'm saying is what happens when these people leave? That's begun to happen at Georgia State. And do you know why? Because I've heard from everybody that Dr. [President Carl V.] Patton doesn't like art. They can't even put sculptures in all their patios.

TS: Is that true?

RG: That's what I've heard from some of the faculty there. They're very, very frustrated.

TS: I was thinking that it's important for the president to have vision, but it's also important for the middle management—deans and department chairs—to have it.

RG: I'd love to see some kind of a bringing together of people in the arts. Let's not just call us the College of the Arts, and it's music, visual arts, and theater. There was talk at one time of including literature. We don't have the cross-over that I'd like us to see. I still try to go to some poetry readings and films, but honest to God, I am just so busy all of the time, I can't do actually what I did fifteen years ago even.

DY: I know, Roberta. And on a ground level—you've done this, too—I taught a world lit course with Pat's intro to art history course.

RG: And I did that with Don, and we had a wonderful time.

DY: Yes, yes.

RG: And we're not doing that any more.

DY: Inter-disciplinary. Tom and I have taught our joint Georgia Writers, Georgia History course for the tenth time. We keep on doing it, but we're the only holdout here.

RG: I think you are.

DY: I don't know where the inter-disciplinary efforts are going. You and I had talked years ago about, "Oh, we should do women in art, women writers . . ."

RG: Yes. I guess we still could do it, Dede. But after awhile, the requirements of your job and the programs . . . Like I really have built a big gallery program. Linda Hightower was kind of pressing me about this because she sees how I struggle with projects. She knows that I don't have—and she's tried to get me—a half-time person. But at another level, it's always, "No, we need the money for something else." In fact, that was two years ago, and I finally said, "Look, I'm going back to the classroom and to hell with the gallery. If you don't want a gallery program, and you're not willing to give me enough support to do it, I'm tired." George Beggs did pay attention, and Betty did pay attention, but I think we've grown too big now. I think maybe I've let them get too comfortable with the fact that Roberta can do anything. I fault myself for that because I guess I want to be recognized; I don't want to have to beg for things. And I think a lot of people feel that way.

DY: Certainly in these interviews that we've had, it seems to be coming through.

RG: The view has come across, too?

DY: Yes, Roberta.

TS: Oh, absolutely.

RG: Really? When you start talking—and I talk to colleagues in theater and music—they have some of the same problems; they've worked so hard.

TS: Well, it's been just as basic as trying to get a secretary for a lot of people on campus.

RG: The big thing that I've seen over years and years here—I have no access to [the higher administrative] levels for whatever reason any more because we've grown so big. There're these layers of bureaucracy now.

TS: None of us do.

RG: You used to be able to speak more directly to deans and academic vice presidents or vice presidents of whatever. I used to be able to call Roger Hopkins up and say, "Roger, I just got my ox caught in a ditch again." And he'd laugh because that was his saying. If you say you need more money for something, they say, "Oh, you're a bad manager; you're not getting any money from us," without

understanding that sometimes things happen, and you really need a little help. So I just said over the years, “The heck with that. I’ll go out and raise my own money. I’m not going to expect to get it.” For about five years when they realized that we were more prosperous and we hadn’t had the downturn in the economy—in the late ’90s and into the early 2000s—the President’s Council gave me \$10,000 to \$12,000 a year just to keep up the quality of shows that I had. I just said, “Insurance in shipping for these national and international shows has gotten so expensive, I can’t do it any more without some supplemental help beyond my small budget that I get from the art department or the money that I go out and raise through requests.” So I was getting that.

And maybe I got too comfortable about it because when it was chopped off, it was right in the middle of the Oaxaca show. Let’s see, when was the Oaxaca show? Yes, it was January 2003 for Rodolfo Morales. This was a museum level show where I worked with all the major museum directors in Mexico City. I invited them up, but I got in trouble. In May of 2002, with a big smile on her face, Carol [D.] Edwards [former chair of the Visual Arts Department and then Assistant Dean of the College of the Arts] was very happy, and she says, “Just wanted to let you know, Roberta, that you have \$31,000 this year.” Well, that was great. I went in and got all the contracts; I planned all the things. Then I come back from my vacation—because I usually got away for two or three weeks before we start in August—I come back, and she says to me with kind of a long face, “Oh, your budget, Roberta, now is \$19,000.” I said, “Carole, how can I do everything we planned to do when I’m told—that’s \$12,000 [less]! Where do I get \$12,000?” She said, “I can’t help you; you’re just going to have to cut.” See, already at that point I think she was the assistant dean. She said, “Really, there’s not much I can do. The state has mandated all these cuts. They’re looking at the arts, and this is just the way it is.”

TS: So you got about a 40 percent cut?

RG: Yes, and it was just like jaw-dropping. Of course, anybody who wasn’t a fool like me would have just said, “Well, I guess we can’t have the Morales show.” I’m sorry, I had too much invested. We were going to have the Morales show! And I went over budget quite a bit.

TS: Good. [chuckle]

DY: What happened to you as a result of that?

RG: Oh, I got a lot of stuff heaped on my head, but I survived.

DY: I’m sure it was worth it.

RG: It was worth it. And I had some help from some nice people in the art department and people who understood why this had happened. But you know, nobody ever put out a word, “By the way, Roberta is struggling so hard because we told her she had \$31,000.” It was kind of like, “Oh, well, she didn’t manage her money

right.” And I just let my friends and the head of the department then, who was an acting chair, know, “Please understand; this is what happened.” And that’s not the first time that’s happened to me. I’ve even had promises of money from the administration, like with a big glass show, and when they changed deans, all of a sudden the money disappears! [chuckle] So you have to understand that money is fluid, and you have to be at a certain level to be able to pour it into different vessels. If this administration thinks that the workers in the field who grow the wheat or the beautiful flowers don’t know that, they’re kidding themselves. We all know that, and the reason why we don’t rise up in arms or just give up and just go back into the classroom and go home early is because we have a vision and a passion, and we’re going to do it no matter what.

DY: And we have a great investment.

RG: And we have a great investment.

DY: I mean, we have our professional lives that we’ve reinvested here.

RG: Yes; yes.

TS: It’s remarkable in listening to you talk how much you’ve integrated teaching, scholarship and service.

RG: I don’t know how to divide them up! [laughter]

TS: No, they’re not dividable.

RG: And do you remember years ago, they were insisting on us to fit in a little box? I said, “I don’t fit into that box.” And I was turned down for a full professorship in 1993—it was very bad—because several of my own committee members [in the Department of Visual Arts] looked upon what I was doing as not adequate scholarship. Curating exhibitions and writing catalogs was just informational; it was service and was not scholarship. I tried to fight it. Actually, Pete [Joseph H. “Pete,” Silver, [Sr.], was lovely. He said, “Roberta, you’ve got to fight this thing.” Well, I broke my foot at that time stepping off the curb, and I was in a wheelchair for twelve weeks. I was told I would have a 40 percent loss motion in my foot. I had to take care of that first, you know. I was so mad that I said if I ever got started on this, I probably wouldn’t know how to stop. That’s not the kind of person I am. I’d still want to say, “What’s most important to me?” And I could have. But I said, “I’ve got all these great shows in the works. I’ve got all these things that I love to do. Am I going to be able to take 100 percent of my time, other than what I have in the classroom, to just pursue this thing? And rewrite and do, you know . . .

DY: That’s the thing about seeking justice. It will take over your life.

RG: It will take over your life. And you know what? I never was a hippie, but I kind of look at them with a little envy. With my four kids in the ’60s, I thought, “What

is the value of your life and what you do? Is it in a title, or is it in what you do and the people who know you do it?" And I also got my just reward because George Beggs was a little embarrassed about this thing. There was some chicanery that happened with people not putting in stuff. These particular people will be nameless, but also Ed [Edwin A.] Rugg was a little embarrassed. I went to them and I just said, "This is a total injustice, and I expect it to be addressed." And at that point, we were getting 6 percent increases, plus we got [an additional] 5 percent increase [for promotions]—I asked for an 11 percent increase, and I got it! That's my best revenge! And I said, "I'm just not going to pursue this thing because I got the main thing." I had kids in college. I had devoted my whole life; I worked very hard; I wanted to be paid equitably for what I did. It was as much that as the recognition. So after that I felt a little bit better about it. It was almost a matter of perverse pride that I wouldn't go after it again because I knew that I was a full professor, whether some other petty people in my department—and two of the people that were on that committee were swayed by two others and came later to apologize to me. I said, "It would have been nicer if you had stuck up for me at the time."

DY: That's very interesting when people are in situations like that. That's when you find out who has integrity and who doesn't.

RG: Yes. I've been asked to chair many of those tenure and promotion committees. If anything, I always bend backward on the side of fairness. First of all, I don't think we have that many slackers at Kennesaw! Our particular milieu, our particular environment, doesn't really permit slackers.

DY: No, it doesn't.

RG: So why do you want to pick on little tiny things about somebody's degree or what they did, if you haven't done it yourself? But I tend to walk in other people's shoes and figure out what they've done because I'm interested in that, and I want to be fair. But it's the same with your students. You can err on the side of fairness or you can try to be the toughest person in the world. It especially happens in art with all these projects due. I give an incomplete, and I sit and talk to them about it, and I say, "But you must complete it in a year or it will become an automatic F. Or you can accept a D which will average in . . ." "Oh, no!" Even sometimes a "C" student [will say this]. But I say, "You've got to make that decision yourself; you've got to be aware." I've had at least two-thirds of the students who will come up and do better projects because I've given them the time, and the other third, I will meet them in the hallway or cafeteria a couple of years later, and they say, "Oh, guess what? I got an F, but she was so nice to me, and I'll probably take her class again. It was a time in my life when I didn't know what I was doing, and I wasn't very organized." But you have to do that.

DY: Justice tempered with mercy.

RG: Yes. But whatever. Enough about bad teaching. I could never be in a hard, cruel corporate world, and God bless, I hope we never get to that point in this university. There's always this push by some people to model ourselves more by the toughness of the corporate world. But teaching and learning is not corporate. In the bottom final analysis—it's very personal—it's very real; it's very exploratory. It's very challenging, and in some ways it's very mysterious. If you give up that kind of attitude toward teaching and try to get it . . . This summer—we've now got these little things you were supposed to answer because we've got this [Art] 1107 class with a hundred students. Everybody thinks all this technology is great; the professor asks the questions [in] this great big art appreciation class, and then you press these little CPS buttons: *Yes* or *No*. Or there's something on the screen, you know. So there was the idea someone brought up, oh, we could have these in the gallery, and you could know immediately after you had a discussion about the art on the walls or on the floor what the students' reactions were. I said, "That's so mechanistic; you can know that just by talking to the students!"

DY: And looking at their faces.

RG: And looking at their faces. Why do you have to have them pressing buttons? And I've had some students come to me and complain about the use of CPS in the classroom. I've gone to the professors and said, "I've heard this because I think they're afraid to tell you, but . . ." Sometimes, they're afraid; they don't know how to handle the stuff. Other times they don't get feedback from the instructor; they give you the feedback, but then they don't get it back. So I think we're ameliorating that, but art is not about perfect control. Art is about letting go. You know, it's about being unafraid to leap the chasm, being unafraid. You know this as a writer—being able to plumb the depths of despair as well as the peak of things. And if you've never known deep despair, how are you going to know ecstasy? But we don't want that anymore; we want to pop a pill instead.

DY: And even it all out.

RG: We want everybody pressing these little buttons, so you can read something on a screen instead of looking at people in the face and asking what they think or feel.

DY: It's scary.

RG: So, I don't know. I think it's enough.

DY: Well, it won't happen as long as you're in the class.

RG: No, and it won't happen as long as you're Dede Yow in the class. I've heard about you! I've not heard you and seen you teach, but I've heard from your students that you make it come alive. You ask them questions; you pull that into the whole process. And that is what teaching is about, whether you're teaching ten people or whether you're teaching a hundred. I do love the fact that this university does honor teaching. I think that's the thing that they have to hang on

to, but they really have to listen to the people out there on the front line who are doing the teaching. I know this university loves art and loves the fact that what we do in the arts is so important. But they're also going to have to think a little harder about how can they make it happen in ways that support the people who are doing the work—not just taking it for granted they're going to do it forever. So that's just the way it is. [chuckle]

TS: That's a good thing to stop on, to give you a chance to go to class.

RG: Yes, right. Well, I'm really a talker, as you know, once I get started. Thank you for asking me some questions. But obviously, one of the things I'm glad about [is that] I've been here for twenty-two years, and I haven't lost my passion.

TS: That's obvious!

RG: And that's just me. But what's the point of being alive if you don't live with passion?

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