

Interview with Kate Thomas, 1601 Guilford Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21202

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Interviewer: Aiden Faust

Transcriber: Johanna Seymour

Part I

AF: Today is Saturday, March 2nd [2013] and I'm interviewing Kate Thomas at the Cork Factory, 1601 Guilford Avenue, at 11 am. The interviewer is Aiden Faust.

KT: Okay.

AF: Good.

KT: I'm ready.

AF: Well thank you for talking with me today. I had a couple of questions first, just kind of for background information. Could you tell me about where you are from?

KT: I was born in Washington state, but we moved around during my developmental years, you know, back and forth across the country—Chicago, Baltimore, California. In my early adult years, I moved around, too, back and forth across the country. For 37 years I've lived in Baltimore.

AF: Okay.

KT: The longest that I've ever been anywhere.

AF: What was it like growing up in your family?

KT: Well, I'm the second of four kids, two sisters and a brother. My father was alcoholic, but he was a businessman, did well but eventually lost his job and then started his own business. He kind of more or less got sober. More or less, you know. We moved around a lot. We had very little involvement with extended family, but a little bit, with one of my grandmothers, who was my favorite person. It was basically, other than the alcoholism, which was problematic and caused my parents to fight and so forth, I think that my parents were pretty loving towards us. So that part of it was always pretty positive.

AF: What brought you here, to Baltimore?

KT: At the time, I was married. We had two children, a 4-year old and we'd just had a little baby. My now ex-husband got a job here after graduating from law school. He got a job here in Baltimore at HCFA [Health Care Financing Administration]—which is what it was called, out at Social Security Administration—as an attorney, he worked there for a couple of years. So that's what brought us here.

AF: And what other parts of the city have you lived in since you've been here?

KT: We first moved out to the Catonsville area because he worked out at Social Security, so we moved there. Then, later, I moved into the city, down in Barre Circle, near the Inner Harbor and Martin Luther King [Boulevard]. And then I moved here, into the studio. So I guess three parts to that.

AF: I guess that I had a question about that time period in which you moved here, into this building. What originally brought you to 1601 Guildford?

KT: Bob. (Laughs) Bob and I met in, gosh, in 1986? 1986, I think. And then we started seeing one another and then kind of increased our commitment after maybe two years of dating, a year and a half, something like that. And we were looking to buy a place that he could do his pottery and we could live. So we looked at places. We just weren't finding what we wanted. And also things that we would find were maybe too expensive for us, that kind of thing. So at some point, we just decided to fix up his studio, because he was living here. Although not like this, you know. It was mostly a studio, and he had a little room in there that he stayed in with a little kitchen and just his bed with a TV, basically. So we decided to expand it and make it a place where we could live and he could work.

AF: I see. So at that time you decided that you were going to live together, and also buy this place at that time as well?

KT: No. We didn't buy the place at the time. He was renting the place from the guy who owned the whole building at that time, a guy named Ells [Ellsworth] Weant. He had a printing company downstairs, underneath us. He rented, and he had been renting the other places in the building, mainly to artists for studios. So Bob had lived here for a couple of years by the time that I moved in here. So, like I said, it was his studio, and we were renting when we first came here.

AF: I wondered at that time when you first moved in, who were the other tenants in the building?

KT: Wow.

AF: And what kinds of activities....

KT: Mostly different than who's here today. I'm just trying to think. I mean, was anybody else here? Paul Moscatt may have been, but I actually kind of forget when they came in, to be honest with you. I'm not positive. Paul Moscatt may have been in the building. All of the other people that are here today, weren't here, I don't think. No. So who was living here? Tony Fiore, who has a woodworker, lived upstairs. Up on the top floor, on the other side, was Dorfman Wax Museum. They made all the figures for the wax museum. So they were up there. There were some people who made paper, Helen Frederick, who had a papermaking studio on the 4th floor. A guy who is a pretty well

known artist, Charles Lawrence. Dan Bradford. They were both here renting space. So there may have been some other people too, but there was a kind of a different blend. And probably the Moscatts were here, too, when I moved in. And not everybody was living here, by any means. In fact, it was illegal to live here. But the majority of people just had studio space here. But more and more people—Bob had lived here—and more and more, some of the people would live here sort of on the sly, not with fixing their places up, but sort of making do.

AF: I guess that makes me think about, from your perspective in this building, how have you seen things change over time, as far as this building itself, and the people living here, or the people working here?

KT: Wow, oh definitely lots of changes, in the sense... I think that there were a lot more people in the building. Sometimes, some of the studios would be rented by a variety of different people, sharing the space. And again, using it more for studio than just living space. So there were more people who were a little bit more transient. Some people came and went, that kind of thing. So that was very different. Nobody was living here as kind of a permanent place to live. Like I said, they weren't fixing them up or anything. There were bathrooms in all the studios, so people had a bathroom. And people might do something like get a hot plate and try to make a makeshift kitchen. But there was no real attempt to kind of live here. So it had a very different atmosphere until Weant wanted to sell it and then Bob and I got together a group of people who wanted to buy it from him. And then things began to change, because things became more permanent. There was a more permanent way of being here.

AF: Would you tell me about that?

KT: Yeah. God, when was it? I'm so bad on dates. So forgive me for that. Probably going back 14 years now or something? Weant was just getting older and he wanted to retire, and he wanted to retire to Florida, and he was going to sell his printing company. But he also wanted to get rid of the building. And it was tricky because the building was illegal. Nobody was bothering us, but there was no zoning. We were sort of squatting here. He was even squatting here. His company wasn't legally here. And so it was tricky to sell it. So he knew Bob and I well. Bob sort of served for him as kind of a manager, because he was here 24 hours a day, and would take care of a lot of things in the building. He just got to know Bob and I and liked us. So he offered the building to us, to Bob and I, to buy. And we really debated it. He was selling it for \$200,000—the whole building. And we really debated it. At that time, it seemed like a lot more money than it does right now. But we also probably could have pulled together the money, and I'll explain how. But we worried so much about this building—you know, if the roof went, there were just all kinds of *huge* possibilities, which have proven to be true. We would be taking on such a huge liability. It scared us to death. So we decided that we really didn't want to do that. Weant offered to hold the mortgage for us, because we'd never have been able to get a mortgage because it wasn't legal. So there was no way that we could get a mortgage.

So we had two good friends of ours, Carol Higgs and Dennis Livingston. And they'd always—Dennis had always been interested trying to get into this building. He loved it. So we got them and they were very enthusiastic about maybe buying into the building with us and getting a space and so forth. So we got them. And then we began to just let the people that were here, already in the building, know about this, and were people were people interested in joining us in this as a joint entity? And there were several people who were—others were not—they didn't have the money or didn't want to or whatever. But there were a handful of people who were interested in buying the building. So that's kind of how we got it started. So we got this group of people together. And we met, we got an attorney, Eisen, I forget his first name, but his last name was Eisen, E-I-S-E-N, down in DC. He was kind of a—God, I don't know what you call it, exactly—kind of a property lawyer or something. He helped us draw up, develop this as an LLC. We looked into doing it as condos, and that created a lot of problems that we didn't want to have. And there were no co-operatives in Maryland at that time. I think that there are now. There was no such thing as co-operative. But we wanted to do was as a sort of co-operative, so we did it as an LLC. He helped us draw that up and do the operating agreement and so forth. So there was this original, core group of people who bought the building.

AF: I see. So that LLC model worked well as a structure, but then within that that, as far as how—they were friends and people who you knew—but how did you begin to operate and make decisions about the space collectively? Is it just something that just evolved as time went on?

KT: Yeah, we still... Well, the operating agreement as it was written originally is, I believe, is more or less the same as it was originally. Over years, we've changed some things and so forth, as issues and problems came up. But basically, it's kind of the same operating agreement. And it does tell us how we go about making decisions and so forth, even down to having a quorum and these kinds of things. You know, you have to have a quorum to vote on things, and we have to have a simple majority except for certain things that take a two-thirds majority. Something like a sale that would take a two-thirds majority. But most things just take a simple majority. So those things are all spelled out in the operating agreement.

AF: And over time, you have had major upgrades and maintenance type things that you've had to address?

KT: Oh, yeah. Oh, absolutely. For a long time, like when we first took it over, we bought it and, as I said, Weant held the mortgage. So we would just paid him a monthly mortgage and interest rate from all of us. And we were just taking care of things as they needed to be taken care of. Like there was a water main break I remember one time. We had to pay for stuff to have that all repaired. The basement flooded, you know, it was a mess. So there would be things like that, and we'd have to take care of whatever needed to be taken care of.

But later, when we began to work with the City around making these buildings legal, then there was a bunch of stuff that we had to do to get the buildings up to codes. So there

became even bigger things. We still get involved in that. Like a couple of years ago, we had to get all of the windows on the outside of the building scraped and painted and repaired and so forth to keep up with code. And now we're having to do—we are about to start it pretty soon—we're going to have the back end the building repaired, all that has to be done. There will be repointing of the brick because there's some leakage. But it's also to keep things up to code. We had to get fire doors on the stairs, things of that nature. There's been a fair amount of work we've had to do. We are doing some work with the City about the water. We're paying too much for water. We have to replace something, or get a new gauge, or some dang thing that's going to cost a bunch of money.

AF: And your experiences together, collectively, working with the City on these issues have been—How would you describe it?

KT: Well, there is always a tension, you know, around it. For a long time, Bob—we've only had two managers here. Bob was the manager for the first huge amount of time, from when we bought it on... I don't remember when we bought it. That's so crazy! I think that we paid it off like four or five years ago, and it was a 10-year mortgage, so we've owned it for awhile. But anyway, Bob was the manager for the first many years. And then a guy named Lou Linden, who lives downstairs, became manager when Bob gave it up. So they've had a lot of the burden of dealing with that kind of stuff. So, it sort of depends. We have a rule that if we have to do repairs that are over \$500, we have to get three bids. So people, you know, the manager would have to find three plumbers to do this, and get bids. So there is a lot of like work to do those kinds of things.

When it came down to the stuff with the City, once the concept of the Arts and Entertainment District and getting the zoning changed here and getting our building up to legal [code], we actually sort of lucked out, in a way. There was a guy named Kirby Fowler, Bob may have mentioned, who... I don't remember what his position was at the time. He worked with Mayor O'Malley. He was an attorney. I don't know what his position is right now, but he is still helpful to us now. He's a great guy. He really helped us walk through the process. Without him, I really don't know if we would be where we are today. So he made it a lot easier. But it was a lot of work and involved different agencies. You had to get a fire inspection, a building inspection, and then housing. Because a lot of us wanted to live here. So some of these studios—like ours, like Carol's, a few of them—had to meet the codes to become legal as housing.

AF: So housing inspectors would come through the interior looking?

KT: Yeah, and we had to meet different standards than people not living here, obviously. They had to meet building and fire standards. And we had a public space because we had a gallery space, and that had to meet standards to get an occupancy permit. So there was a lot of stuff.

AF: Yeah. That is significant.

KT: And now we still have dealings with the City. Like this recent water craziness. It has to do with the fact that the pipe that enters our building is too big. And you're apparently just billed for the size of the pipe, not how much water you use. Well, this is really just a residential building. We're really not using very much water. But the people that were in the building attached to us—called Industrial Roll—they used *tons* of water. But they're now in the process of selling that building. They're out of there. So we've had to get the pipe... That's been, kind of a boondoggle with the City. And once again, we got Kirby Fowler to come help us with that process. Because it's really hard to navigate a lot of times through the City.

AF: That's what I was trying to image, going through just all different agencies and everything, what that would be like.

KT: Yeah, sitting on the outside of it, because I never did it directly. Bob did it and now Lou does it. But sitting on the outside, knowing what those folks do, I think that it's tremendous. I think it's a headache. It is what it is, you know. I'm sure that there are reasons why all that exists, but it makes it really difficult.

AF: Sure.

KT: You know, you'll call down and get a clerk, like... Lou kept getting different people, who would say different things about what we needed to do about this water. At one point, we didn't know if we are going to be spending \$10,000 or \$70,000, you know? Because we didn't know what we needed to do. So, yeah, it's a lot. And when you deal with a building this size, and as old as the building is. But we've been helped, because... this goes back to O'Malley as mayor, really, but they wanted us here. That's really what helped us. There was this move afoot to bring... O'Malley had this idea of bringing more artists into the city to revitalize the city. So I think that that whole movement really helped us. They kind of worked with us because they wanted us to be here. Us and other buildings in the neighborhood, obviously.

AF: What is it that you like best about being here?

KT: Wow, yeah. You know, at different times, in all the years that we've been here, I probably would have said different things at different times. But I guess currently, well first of all, just to be honest, it's just home. There is this sense of, "This is just where I live." You know, like anybody, you come home, and you're familiar with everything. But there are specific things about living here, in this particular space. I like my space. I like the large ceilings, and we have lots of space to put things and do things. We can do whatever we want with it. We are thinking about fixing up Bob's studio, because he's not using it anymore. So having all that is really is a lot of fun.

But I like the idea of—I mean, it was always exciting to be part of the art scene—I'm not an artist. I've always joked that I'm the only non-artist in the building. I don't think that that's true anymore. Lou's not actually an artist, either. But I was the only non-artist in the building. So it was always exciting to be part of that arts scene, and being supportive

of that idea. I guess I've always been a person who, I don't know what it is, likes to be a little off-center from the mainstream. So the idea of living in this funky warehouse, in kind of a weird neighborhood, has some sort of weird appeal to me that many people wouldn't want. Unless they're also a little off, they probably don't get [it]. You know, why would you live here?

AF: (laughs)

KT: But I do. For me, it appeals to me. And I like living in a place where we have, you know, it's not exactly communal, the pure commune idea. But I like the idea of having a group of people with a common interest in the building and in the neighborhood and in getting together. And, you know, we've become friends, and there is a sense of support, and not doing it all on your own. I like all that. I think there's a variety of reasons to live here. It's convenient. We're right downtown.

AF: What would you say that you like the least about living here?

KT: Some of the things that I like the best. I sometimes dislike having to deal with a whole bunch of people, and different points of view, and needs about things, and so forth. As much as I like it, I also dislike it, if that makes sense. It's like, we have to—you know, maybe I want something and somebody else doesn't—and we have to argue. And we have these long meetings where we have to make decisions. So, in a sense, you don't have the freedom to just sort of make your own decisions here, to a certain extent. I think, if anything, that's what it is.

I'm almost on the fence about how much improvement happens in the neighborhood. (laughs) Others aren't, but I am, because I sort of like the way it is. As I get older, I don't want a lot of noise. We have bands sometimes across the street. I like that idea, in theory, that people should have that space, as young people, to have a band, that's cool. But you know, when you are trying to sleep... (laughs). So having more people in the neighborhood creates more congestion and more noise. And I do also see it as my home. I guess those are the things. But I also like that about it, you know. I like the vibrancy.

AF: I can understand that.

KT: Yeah. So it's a mixed bag.

AF: I had questions about both of those things. As far as how the group makes decisions within this building, and also your feeling about the amount of momentum and change as this area, the larger Station North area, geographically is physically changing right now.

KT: Right, sure, sure. Well, the first one: how we make decisions. I mean, it sort of depends on what it is. I mean, a lot of decisions are relatively easy to make. We even sometimes use e-mail. Lou being in charge—or it could be anybody—but Lou being in charge would maybe send around an e-mail saying, like... Recently, we were going to get a new heater for the studio downstairs, and there were a couple of bids, and he just

wanted our opinion about the pros and cons of each bid. So we just did that over e-mail, everybody voted in on it. So that's made relatively easily.

But there are other, bigger things that we have to meet about. So we will have meetings. We do it fairly... It's not pure absolute Robert's Rules of Order, exactly. But there is a formality to the way we go about it. Everybody gets a chance to speak and we discuss the issue, and somebody calls the question, and then somebody seconds the motion, then we vote on it. In a sense, it is really that kind of process. And even if it's on e-mail, we're still looking for votes. But there's an awful lot of consensus. I would say that on most issues we have here, there's really—we vote on it—but it's really sort of consensus.

But there are other issues where we really diverge. We can have... It's always been very friendly, you know, not fighting about it. But people can be very polarized about how they feel. And then it comes down to just a vote. That's kind of how we do it.

Then in terms of the improvement in the neighborhood, well gosh, you know, for a very long time, at least since they started talking about the Arts and Entertainment District, that whole thing, there's always been this discussion about how our neighborhood is going to improve. "Now it will take off." But if you look around, it's kind of taken off, in a way, but it hasn't actually... It's improved...

AF: Yeah.

KT: It's different. But it's not like it's totally gentrified. Which is good! We don't want it to be gentrified. I can't speak for everybody, but I'm pretty sure that there is no one in our building that wants this neighborhood to be totally gentrified, which has happened in a lot of places. For one thing, we could all be out, because eventually we couldn't afford these kinds of places, as has happened in a lot of places. So we are not looking for gentrification, and it's not happening. I mean, there used to be no one living here, virtually. And Bob and I for a long time were the only people living here.

There really was a lot of, you know... There was gun violence, lots of drug dealing. It was a fairly dangerous neighborhood. We had to be somewhat careful—well, quite careful, I guess. And we still do. But a lot of that has really changed. At the same time, a lot of it has just moved some of those problems out of our neighborhood to some other neighborhood. And for a long time, a lot of the houses in the neighborhood were boarded up. There still are some, but that's beginning to change. People have taken them over and are beginning to rehab these little row houses that surround our building. Some of the other streets have really quire fancy row houses, if you've seen them on Lafayette, large kinds of row houses.

And there's an active community association. And it's gotten more active over the years. The community, which is called Greenmount West—is also very interested in the neighborhood. They're not just the arts people They're the people who live here, as well. And some of them are new to the neighborhood, and some people have been around for a long time. But a lot of those families have moved out, or in some cases probably died off,

you know, older people. So that's really changed. But now, it probably looks like it *is* posed to a certain extent to take off more. You know, City Arts has made a difference. If these people choose to take this building that's attached to ours, they're going to rehab that. And of course, the school across the street [Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School] has made a difference. And the school that's now coming in [Baltimore Design School] will make a difference. It's great, but it's also a little worrisome, you know, to have a high school right across the street from your house.

AF: It's a huge building.

KT: It's a huge building. It's beautiful.

AF: Yeah.

KT: Yeah, I'm very much in favor of that moving in there, don't get me wrong. But there is also the kind of the day to day reality of having a bunch of high school kids there. (laughs) But I like it. I think that it's a good thing. So, you know, it's kind of taking off and it's also slow, in a way. It feels that way to me. I guess just because we've been talking about it for so long. In some ways, it's still a funky neighborhood, although improved.

AF: As a group, when you are with your friends here, are those kinds of changes topics of conversation? Or do people....

KT: Oh yeah, absolutely. They're definitely topics of conversation. I think that, in general, people are really excited about the change and the movement and wanting to see it. Again, I think that we are somewhat protective of how that happens. There have been things like the building across the street [the Copy Cat]. This guy wants to sell it for a lot of money to developers. So then you get into this idea of gentrification. And then we get worried. We really want this neighborhood preserved for people of diverse incomes and for artists to have affordable space. And I think that we all have a direction that we'd like to see the neighborhood go, which is not necessarily consistent with what's happened a lot of times throughout the United States in neighborhoods where artists moved in. You think of Soho, for instance, nobody can afford to live there now. It's totally gentrified, whereas at one time, it was just artists squatting in warehouses. So we want to preserve that part of it—diverse income, artists' affordable space—and see improvement. And that may be tricky, I don't know. But it hasn't so far.

AF: Yeah.

KT: I mean, it's managed so far.

AF: I think that is a question that a lot of people have. And the idea of having ownership of the buildings for artists' spaces, and having relationships with the neighborhood, and also with the City, as part of a stabilizing strategy... Like at this point, where you guys are in the building, as things began to happen around you, and you've been here for a

longer time than a lot of the residents in the Cork building, or obviously City Arts and that kind of stuff... Do you feel like you are just watching things change, or is there still an active role to be played within the conservation with the City, or with the development that's happening?

KT: Yeah, I think that there is still a role for people to do that. I really do. I mean, like these folks who are thinking of developing a separate—well it's a separate building, but it's attached to our building—they have this idea. They've been meeting with us to get our input and say that they don't want to do things unless we agree to them. We are attached to one other. And then, of course, there is the community association, which any of us can have a role in. And, being honest, we certainly haven't been very involved in recent years, but we can be. And the community also looks at proposals and ideas for things that are happening in the neighborhood. So they can say, "Yeah" or "Nay," to at least give their input.

So I think that there is a still quite a role for all of us to be involved. I think that there is probably some sense for us that because we're older, it's an artist-owned building, not just a rental, we've all have been here for a long time, we're sort of seen as the senior members of the community, to a large extent. So I do think people do take our voices seriously. It doesn't mean that they don't take other peoples' voices seriously, I don't mean to imply that. But certainly I think they take our voices seriously.

AF: And through the changes in different administrations since O'Malley, the feedback that you've gotten back from the Mayor's Office as far as the role of artists in this district has been fairly... Has it been positive?

KT: Gosh, to be perfectly honestly with you, I really don't know. My sense of it has been, yeah, it's been positive. I certainly don't think that there's any... All of this kind of happened under O'Malley. To a certain extent, it was his drive that may not be the current administration's. But there is certainly no move to close this down. And there is certainly recognition of the Station North Arts and Entertainment District. There is obviously interest in the city in the larger neighborhood, because there are *all kinds* of things happening in the larger neighborhood. I'm talking most specifically about what we call, "Greenmount West," our immediate neighborhood. But if you go over to North Avenue and Charles Street, which is all part of the Arts and Entertainment District.

There's obviously got to be interest in the city, because there are all kinds of things happening here. Catherine Pugh, I know, was fairly instrumental in getting this high school [Baltimore Design School] started across the street. I think there was another model for a school of architecture and design someplace else that she was aware of.

AF: I guess that I kind of think of this Greenmount West area, as well, as being its own piece of the larger district.

KT: Right, yeah.

AF: To what extent, in the conversations that you guys have been a part of for the Arts and Entertainment District, does the North Avenue corridor, and the Charles Street corridor over by the Charles Theatre—how does that play in?—to what extent?

KT: Bob, up until a year ago or so, was on the Station North board, and he'd been on it for years. And I don't know who's representing us in Greenmount West now. There probably is. Maybe Jim Vose. Bob probably knows. So there was some interchange between the larger... things that affected us as an Arts and Entertainment District. So there is some of that. But we're also sort of a separate entity, because one of the organizing bodies here is the Greenmount West Community Association, which really has interest in the Station North Arts and Entertainment District, but it's separate, too, if that makes sense. So I think that a lot of what happens in this peculiar part of the neighborhood is we're more concerned with that than we are with the greater... I mean, it's certainly exciting. I think it's great, the whole Arts and Entertainment District is taking off, I think that's wonderful.

AF: Sure.

KT: But I think that we're more concerned with our little piece of it.

AF: As opposed to like, Load of Fun Studio, which is further away.

KT: Right.

AF: Or the MICA building, the Bank building that was renovated [the Graduate Student Center], or that kind of a thing.

KT: Right, exactly.

AF: Okay.

KT: But there is, like I said... We are part of that. So there is a piece that I know... For a long time, I kept up with it more because Bob was on the board. He went to these board meetings and would come back and talk about what was going on in the whole neighborhood. Because all of that does have an impact, so it is important. I don't know what is going on with it as much right now, because Bob and I are not directly involved in it. But we could find out.

AF: And as far as the amount of exhibitions and public programming that happens out of this building, has that also changed over time, with the arc of people's artist careers?

KT: Um, probably. For a long time, there has been open studios stuff, so that's always been a forum for our building as well as other buildings, for people. So that still continues. We just had it in October, open studios, so that people open their studios and do kind of a public thing. We talked for a long time about having a public space to do something with, but we haven't.

There was a time that we actually had an opening in our lobby, where we did a real arts show in our building. It was kind of juried arts show. I was on the jury, so... (laughs). But anyway, whatever. We had a party and an opening. We sort of did it as a more formal thing a few years ago. I don't think that any of us have the energy now to do those sorts of things.

And then when we had—Dennis and Carol and Bob and I owned the gallery upstairs on the 4th floor—that now, oh, God. When Dennis was dying, we divided up the properties that we owned together. We owned the studio underneath of us and then the gallery up on the 4th floor. The four of us owned those two places jointly. As Dennis was dying, for ease of passing things along, we divided up. So Carol and Dennis took the gallery, and Bob and I own the space downstairs. We sort of made an even split with it. So when Dennis died, Carol had to rent that space. So now it's rented to an artist. He himself is interested. He does some gallery openings, just by himself up there. But we no longer have the gallery space to offer to people to do gallery shows. So throughout the years, we've had all kinds of stuff in there, all kinds stuff, a lot of exciting stuff that's been going on up there.

We did children's art shows for the kids in the neighborhood. We did projects in the schools, we would help the kids do art, then have an art show in the gallery and their parents would come. We would have food to eat and they could sell their artwork. But also other artists and all kinds of things have gone on there. So without that venue, we don't have that an established space for anything like that. So it's going to be more individuals.

Now Dave Herman, if you get to speak to him, who's downstairs, he's been doing some stuff with his space using it—like they had a dance, he sponsored some kind of a dance thing there, invited the public. He's done some other stuff. Individuals might do it. There is not much of a building move to do it anymore.

AF: I see. Bob had said something when I talked to him about this idea that when there's something that needs to be done, we work together on it, but kind of once we've accomplished what the goal is, artists go back to their studios. As though the sense of the collective, but also the individual; the communal, engaged part of it, but also the private.

KT: Oh, definitely.

AF: Practice of the artists who live here.

KT: Definitely. Yeah, and I think that probably increasingly so, but just my own experience is that mostly this is just where I live. It has nothing to do with being part of a group. You know, on a day to day basis, if you know what I mean. You know, then there are things that come up and we have to get together and deal with jointly. Yeah, the sense is... Absolutely.

And I think that that's more and more true. It's partly that our building is different than some of the other buildings, too. Everybody is older, for the most part, and kind of more established in whatever it is that they've been doing. So they kind of go about doing what they've been doing. Like Paul Moscatt teaches courses across the hall, and he's been doing that for a long time, and he continues to do that. But that's kind of his own thing. It's nice to have in our building, but it really has nothing to do with the rest of us. We can probably say that about all of our spaces.

There is also this idea that we're all getting older. We have two members of the LLC that are somewhat younger, Dave Herman and Lori Ferrara. We always call them our young people, but they are not as young as they once were. None of us are. But I think that they would be interesting to talk to, those two, because they are going to have a slightly different direction than we are. And rightly so. We are talking, you know—Lou Linden, Nancy, Carol and I, and others, the Moscatts—especially us, because we live here and we just sold that space on the top to this guy Grant Anderson, who is going to be back soon, he is in Afghanistan, who will be part of our group, he's a little bit older too.

Anyway, we talk about things like turning this into a rest home. You know, with some seriousness about it. You know, some of it is just fun talk, you know. As we get older, you know, can we all just, you know, grow old and die here, you know, because it's wheelchair accessible! We talk about it with some amount of seriousness. We figured that this is where we are going to live, how can we make this work? Going on into the future, I mean Dave and Lori might look at us all a little nutty (laughs). I think it's changed the direction of our building as we've gotten older, if that makes sense.

AF: Yeah, that's wonderful.

KT: Yeah, I mean none of us are giving it up quite yet, but we are talking about it what all that means.

AF: Thank you.

KT: Yeah. That's my take on the whole thing.

AF: Are there things that you want to talk about that we didn't cover?

KT: It was kind of fun to talk about all that. I don't know what we are going to do with it. Years ago we used to talk about this and Carol and I decided if we were going to do it we were going to call it, "The Radical Rest Home." And that would be because we are all old radicals. (Laughs). We sort of like the vibe of it. We haven't settled the name yet so it's so still the Cork Factory. (Laughs).

AF: We didn't talk about that, the overlap between artist and activism in this building.

KT: Yeah, yeah, that's huge.

AF: Yeah.

KT: That's huge. And again, most all of us come out of a tradition of political activism and some of us more than others, and some of us in different ways than others. But certainly, you know, Dennis Livingston, was an amazing activist and an amazing person. He kept the faith much longer than the rest of us, I think (laughs). Bob and I, we come out of political activism, and our hearts are still in that direction. But Dennis kept carrying on that work. But that was always kind of a drive. It was kind of created as an artist community, for artists, but because of the nature of who was here—Dennis and Bob and I—that we were interested in that. So, for instance, the gallery—as much as we would hold that open for gallery space, for art shows and things of that nature—it also was a huge place for gathering people. I mean that the stuff that has gone on in that gallery is just amazing over the years. I mean, all kinds of political organizations have met there, had meetings there, gatherings. I remember that we had Bernardine Dohrn from the sixties come one time and speak to us.

There were just all kinds of things going on around here that revolved around it. So there always was a combination of activism [and art] here. So it's the bent of the people in the neighborhood and us, in peculiar, but also the direction of the gallery for a long time. I think it's kind of a nice marriage, probably not an unusual one. Artists have been involved in political activism for... Nonetheless, I always thought that was a good part of it. And, for me, I was probably more interested in that direction, to a certain extent, than the arts. I like looking art, you know, I like art. I have nothing against art. (laughs). I don't do it, you know, I probably have less enthusiasm for that.

My activism over time became... We all sort of went in different directions, but mine became, over time, sexuality. I took on the mission many years ago to create a more sex positive world. At least the world that I have any influence over it in various ways of teaching and clinical work and speaking, just all kinds of stuff, joining organizations and so forth. So I used the gallery a lot for those kinds of activities. And all of us had different areas that we were interested in promoting.

Bob did a lot of his work up there in the gallery, in our building, you know, in terms of promoting physical, emotional and spiritual health, through Eastern wisdom and Tai Chi and so forth. We did Tai Chi classes here for years and did workshops for people up in the gallery for many years, on and on and on. Dennis was involved in a zillion organizations, I can't even tell you how many. I have a book that lists all of that. (laughs) But Carol could tell you. So that's been a nice marriage.

When Dennis died, we did a memorial service up in the gallery. And Dennis had directed it, from before he died, but also probably a little bit from the grave, making sure that we all did it just right, just the way that he wanted it to be. One of the things that he wanted people to do—it was a huge gathering, it was a couple hundred people and we were all smashed into the gallery—he wanted everybody to talk about their work in the world. Basically, their activism. And that was really interesting, the way that people see what their role is. You (AF) have a passion; you know what I'm talking about.

AF: Sure.

KT: The archival pieces and so forth. It's nice to have people directed in all kinds of ways.

AF: And the fact your community here, people support each other whatever the overlapping passions that you have?

KT: I think so. Yeah. I think it is. I think it is in really in a sense taking that all seriously, that we all have this important work to do in the world. And although it doesn't all intersect in a sense, it all forms part of this larger picture. Certainly the work that I do is not what other people see as activism, but it is, it's a corner of it. Or whatever anybody else does. So yeah, I think there's a lot of support for it, definitely. And we've all been sad to see the gallery go, because that formed the space to make it all happen.

AF: Yeah.

KT: But it just became reality, you know, we had to let go of it. So it's been a big change. We would like to see it not be that way, but it's just not practical. That's alright. New blood coming in everywhere. Right? (laughs)

AF: (laughs)

KT: New people can take this all over, as we all kind of retire and leave the scene, to a certain extent.

AF: Leave, but also stay.

KT: Sure, to an extent, as long as you can, sure. Absolutely, absolutely (chuckles).

AF: Well thank you.

KT: Thank you, it was fun. Good to talk.

AF: Absolutely.

KT: Fun thing to talk about. That's why I think that everybody will be enthusiastic about doing this project, because it's fun to talk about.

AF: I appreciate it, I really do. Thank you.

KT: Yeah. You're welcome.

Part II

March 16, 2013

Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Kate Thomas (KT)

Interviewer: Aiden Faust (AF)

AF: Today's date is March 16, 2013. The interviewer is Aiden Faust. The interviewee is Kate Thomas. This is the second interview with Kate Thomas to discuss her career.

Do I have your permission to continue this interview, on another day, today?

KT: Yes. Today? Yes, you do.

AF: Very good. [Adjusts recorder] Alright, we should be good.

KT: Alright.

AF: Today, I wanted to talk about career because I realize that that was something that came up a little bit last time, but we didn't go very much into.

KT: Ah. Mm-Hmm.

AF: What do you do for a living?

KT: I consider myself to be a clinical sexologist. That's what I call myself. That means that I do psychotherapy, I do teaching, I do consultation, some research, etc... all around the topic of sexuality and gender.

AF: How did you begin your career?

KT: Woah! My background is, I was a nurse, but it goes way before that, but essentially how I got here that I was a nurse. I did obstetrical nursing and then did nurse-midwifery. And I realized that what I really liked to do was talk to people, more than I really liked the more technical aspects of nursing. And so I started working in an adolescent prenatal clinic. And the young women would often talk to me about sexuality. They were pregnant, but they also had a lot of questions about sex. And so we started talking really openly, and I realized that I was pretty good at it. They felt trusting in me and asked me a lot of questions. I just felt like maybe I could do this, I was pretty good at this.

So I decided to go back to graduate school and do psychiatric nursing in graduate school. And as part of my graduate training, I found out about a program at Hopkins—this is about 1988 or so—and I found out about a program at Hopkins where they were working

with people who had had sexual offense in their background. And I walked in there and asked if I could volunteer and do maybe an internship or something like that. They sort of welcomed me in and the rest is history. I've been there ever since! (Laughs)

I started working with Fred Berlin, who is well known in this field, and he was my mentor. I also got connected to Dr. John Money, who was another mentor in the field. He sort of took me under his wing and, for whatever reasons, began to train me, as well. So I worked with him for a number of years, until his death.

Then I went in 1989, I went to school and got a doctorate in human sexuality. So I became really interested in the field, and I had my licensure in psychiatric nursing, so I could function as a nurse practitioner at doing the psychotherapy work. All along, I had done some teaching, and I introduced—in 1990 or so, 1991 maybe—I introduced a course in human sexuality out at Stevenson, began to teach that, and I've taught it ever since in the psychology department. Then I was invited to Loyola to teach there in maybe 2001 or something. I've taught a graduate course in human sexuality there, as well.

Then in 20---, about eight or nine years ago, I was invited to go to Hopkins to be on the faculty there, to both coordinate and oversee the medical students' teaching about sex and gender and also to be one of the attending faculty at the Sexual Behaviors Consultation Unit, which my colleague and I, Chris Kraft, have run for many years. The clinic actually started in 1971, he's been there 11 years; I've been there 8 years. So we've taken over the running of that clinic. We train psychiatric residents and see patients there. It was just odds and ends of other things.

I've taught all over the world, actually. I've been invited different places to teach. Human sexuality is a small field, so you kind of get known, and people invite you to do things. I'm on the faculty of the Institute for Advanced Study on Human Sexuality in California. So I get invited out there to teach sometimes. So, a lot of teaching and that sort of thing. That's kind of it. Here I am, that's what I do.

AF: Wow.

KT: (laughs)

AF: We've covered a lot of ground really fast.

KT: (laughs)

AF: At least the way that you've just described moving through nursing and into everything that came after that, it seems, at least in your telling, it's a very... One thing just sort of led to another. Has that been your experience?

KT: Oh, yeah. I feel like I've been very fortunate almost to be in the right place at the right time. None of this started out to be something that I planned. Like when I first graduated from high school, I was not the least bit interested in medical care, psychology,

any of that. I majored in music and English and had some idea—frankly, that I wanted to be a rock star—but maybe write, maybe do journalism. So I had different ideas when I was young and whatever. No real plan. And when I had a baby, I decided that I thought that it would be wonderful to be a nurse-midwife, and so that's how I got into the field. So I began to pursue—you know, went back to school and got the courses you needed to get a bachelor's degree in nursing. I eventually did that, and then got a master's degree in obstetrical nursing and nurse-midwifery, and later, psychiatric nursing. So that kind of began to develop. So at one point, I had a direction and went from that to—I was going to be a nursing-midwife, period. And that was where I was going, and I did that for awhile.

But then things began to happen. I got this job at this prenatal clinic. I really liked it much more than I thought I would. I really wanted something else, actually, but I got that one instead. Just walking in and talking to Fred Berlin and for whatever reasons, he and I just clicked, and he invited me to work with him. Do you know what I mean? One thing just seemed to happen after another. I met Greg Lehney and he introduced me to John Money. Greg and I became friends and he introduced me to John Money. It's just been this whole series of little events that I was kind of in the right place at the right time, without any real plan or direction as to where I was heading. At some point, it took direction, but not for many, many years.

AF: And you've been able to pull that all together now, into having an expertise which is such that you, then... These opportunities... You, then, are invited for additional opportunities as a result of that.

KT: Exactly. Right. It's a fairly small field internationally and you sort of get known as somebody who has expertise in the area. So, at my age now, at 64, I'm just one of the—I mean, I wasn't always—but I became one of the experts. So people come to me with questions, whereas I used to come to them. We all do that, you know?

AF: Is your work concerned controversial?

KT: Oh sure, yeah, absolutely. It's controversial both in the community at large and it is also controversial in the psychiatric community and the academic community. I mean, it's quite controversial. One of the populations that I work with are people that have sexually offended, and you can well imagine that people ask me how in the world I can do that. But even being in support of those people, and not just saying, "Let's throw away the key," has met controversy. Issues around gender identity have lots of controversy out in the community. They have is a lot of controversy within the field.

You know, a lot of the colleagues who I have worked with at Hopkins have not been, you know, do not have the kinds of attitudes or ideas that I have around this. More and more we are seeing in the academic community—attitudes that help to promote the idea of gender transition as an appropriate treatment modality. But that doesn't mean that everybody in the field subscribes to that. So, that's certainly controversial.

But even the issue of sexual dysfunction, which is sort of a third part, has met with problems. Sometimes people think, "Why are people concerned about their sexuality? Why are we putting money into helping women be more orgasmic? How important is that? We've got to cure cancer." You know? So I think that sex is just really a controversial field.

Then when you get into ideas around when do we begin to teach, and what do we begin to teach people about sexuality? Which I feel very very strongly about. Boy, that's a really touchy topic for all kinds of people. I even approach my young students who are 18, 19, 20 years old, and they think that the idea of teaching a 4-year old about sex is just hysterical. "Why in the world would we talk to a 4-year old child about sex?" And yet, we're finding more and more that we need to be talking at very early ages—in appropriate ways—but we really need to foster and have sex as be a conversation in our society. So I feel very strongly about it, and often meet with pretty vehement views on the other side.

AF: I guess, in general, how would you characterize your response to that type of controversy, as you've experienced it within your field?

KT: Oh, man. I think that it's been an evolution for sure. Certainty in the beginning of all this, I was somewhat intimidated by it, by people arguing with me or giving me... you know. But this was really helpful to me. The first day that I attended graduate school, the very first class, we were all sitting in class, and having this philosophical lecture, more than a technical lecture, I guess. And one of the things that I heard, I don't know what was said, but I heard in there, kind of went like, "Oh my God, I'm now on a mission and my mission in life is to foster sex-positive attitudes everywhere in the world. That's my mission." I kind of went, "Oh my God. Why am I doing this?" I had a bit of this feeling, like, "Why am I doing this?" But that's how I felt. And it was a good thing because it kind of helped me constantly know that is exactly what my work in the world is.

And I probably was helped having graduated from high school in 1966 and immediately entered the counterculture. And have always been an activist. And, you know, an activist in many ways. That probably helped to know that I didn't want to live in some ways a life that was completely straight and narrow, where I subscribe to you know more traditional views. So I could protest the war, or march for civil rights, gay rights or whatever. It was those things were always part and parcel to my life experience. So that probably helped some too. Definitely it was an evolution.

AF: One of the questions that I wanted to ask you was if you felt that your politics affected your work? Are there other ways?

KT: Wow... Yes, absolutely. I'm sure that there are plenty of people in the field of sexuality who do work who probably have different politics than I do, but the majority of people that I know in the field, we probably hold similar sorts of values because of the type of work we do. So yeah, it definitely has influence it quite a bit. But maybe even more so from the stance of just feeling inherently, in any of the activism that I've ever were involved in, that ultimately that what's at stake is the celebration of every human

being no matter what. And that it's okay to be different. And it doesn't matter. That's something to celebrate, not to feel, you know, less than. That part of it has always been a part of it, if you think about it. Just about everything... Even Vietnam, in a way, coming out of that era. Certainly with the civil rights, you can see that. People really did think that people of darker hues were less than. But even Vietnam, to a certain extent, the people went to Vietnam were very often poor, less educated individuals and so forth, because there were college deferments and things like that early on. So, in some ways, it was a class war as much as a lot of other things. So the idea of wanting to foster—more than foster—celebrate—I prefer that word—difference in people, just who people are, is just so inherent in me. You know, I don't see anyone... I see everyone as worthy of that kind of respect and so forth, even sexual offenders, to be honest. They are human beings, they deserve our respect.

AF: Do you feel that your work has subsequently informed your ideas about the world? Working with all these different types of populations that you do?

KT: Oh sure. No question. Sure. I mean, I can think back to when I was in high school and it was a different time and there wasn't this thing... I hadn't even... I didn't know anything about transsexuality... but homosexuality, I knew very little about it. It was mostly all the little titterings of, you know, "Fags!" and all the negative aspects of it.

I always tell this story because I was in a group of women, there were four of us, and we were best best best friends. You know, we did everything together. We shared everything together and we were best best best best friends. So I ended up moving after high school, I moved elsewhere and didn't really connect with my high school friends. But I decided at one point to go back to a high school reunion. And we all walked in together and it was kind of like no time had ever gone by. We were best best friends again after 20 years or whatever. These people were so special to me. And one of my best best best best friends was a lesbian woman. And I never knew that. Neither did any of us. She never shared. She talks about it now. She talks about how she couldn't talk to us about it. You know, how she felt like that was a totally taboo topic. Now the world has changed, and that certainly has been helpful, to me and hopefully to most of us. But those kinds of ideas... I've had maybe nowhere more than in the area of working with people who've crossed boundaries in terms of being sexual with children, or rape, or things of that nature. It's not that I in any way condone the activity. These are crimes and they hurt people. I probably don't feel any differently about that than anyone else. But the idea that I can still respect that person an individual who struggles, and struggles with something that we don't completely understand, and how much people struggle with things that we don't understand. I can't think that sexuality—I mean, there are many things that have taught me that—but clearly sexuality taught me that a lot.

There are so many things about ourselves that we do not understand. There are not conscious decisions. We are not making the decision to be a good or a bad person. We find ourselves in situations and we wonder why. It really speaks to a humanness about us. For me it's been a really valuable lesson about myself and everybody that I know.

AF: I had a question here about debates within your field where you work. Like currently, obviously over time, those debates have probably changed. But right now, what are some of the big debates and where do you stand?

KT: Oh! (Laughing) Well, I think that just because of where I am, the biggest—well, there are a couple of them—but the biggest one, if I had to pick one, it has to do with gender identity in general, but maybe most particularly revolves around what do we do with children. And this is complicated because there are different factions at work throughout the world and throughout the United States who believe either that kids who are gender variant, who display, you know—boys who display more girl-typical play and dress and activity, and girls who conversely display more boy-typical activities—that those individuals are gender variant and that they will essentially, what we are dealing with are young trans-individuals. And we should help those young children at early ages to transition gender in some way. So that we can not have them go through a life of pain. Complicated. Because, the problem is, that's sounds good, and would certainly go along in some ways with my own feelings about—you know, I'd like to see young gay/lesbian individuals be able to come out earlier. Most of us know our sexual orientation somewhere between 6 and 10. I'd like to be able to see kids come out earlier and not have to struggle to be accepted and so forth.

But in this peculiar population, are these kids going to grow up to be trans-individuals, or gay or lesbian kids? So there's not a lot, there's a handful of studies. Really, as far as I know, there are four longitudinal studies that have been done that tried to look at that. And all of them lean in the direction that most of these kids grow up to be gay or lesbian and not trans. The studies are not good and, of course, being trans is so much rarer than being gay or lesbian. If you figure that a generous estimate is that 5% of males are gay, that's probably huge. It's probably too huge, it's more like 2% or 3%. But whatever, it's something. But if you are looking at how many people are trans, you know, we're getting just *a fraction* of that percentage. So how are we going to find this? You know, it's like finding a needle in a haystack.

So there is a real controversy. Do we help these kids as young kids? How do we figure out who is who? Do we just allow them to develop and wait and see what happens? What do we do? This is huge. There was just a good article in the *New Yorker*—it just came out, if you haven't seen it. Good. Excellent.—trying to document a lot of this. It has the point of view that we probably hold at Hopkins. I actually am not so different from my colleagues at Hopkins on this. I feel very cautious about it. Typically, I'm always considered the liberal, so that I might be the one that says, “No, no, we should help these kids transition.” But I'm not so sure. I don't want to hurt them. And I'm just not sure that we know that yet. Whereas, we get a teenager or young adult, we feel much more assured in dealing with that. So that's hugely controversial right now.

AF: In your work at Hopkins and work in private practice, do you see children and teenagers?

KT: At Hopkins, we see children. And in my private practice, I don't work with children I do work with teenagers. I just don't feel that I have the... I've never been trained on child psychology and child psychiatry. I just don't feel that I have the skills. But we do see them at Hopkins, and I've been able to participate in the evaluations. Frankly, more on a learning curve than me being somebody who... We often pull in people who really do have that expertise, child and adolescent people. There's a great guy at Hopkins, Patrick Kelley, who's good. There's a guy down in children's hospital, Edgardo Menvielle. Both of those guys are great and they come and help us to really think through these young kids.

AF: In your work, to what extent is research a part of your work?

KT: Well, I'm poor with that, to be honest. It's partly just time and energy and so forth. I did better when I was younger. I probably had more energy to do some. We are always kind of nudged along at Hopkins to do research, and we do some case studies stuff. We usually do it with the residents. We may write up a case and get it published, that kind of thing. We just did one—I wasn't directly involved in it, but partially—on an individual. They are just getting it finished and out for publication. But we do very little research. There's a lot of reasons. There is no money, so any research that you do, you are doing it on your own. So the kind of research that you're going to be able to do is chart review. So I feel that is an area in my life I've lacked. And I keep going back and forth, I keep thinking I should do more of that and I think, you know, I really don't want to be any busier than as I am. As I get older, I would like to have more free time, instead of less free time. So I kind of go back and forth.

But, having said all that, we have decided, just recently—and I just started doing a literature review—we're going to try to do an outcome study on people on transitioned gender. There just really aren't any good ones. And so we're doing the literature review. So far, I've gone back to about 1979, looking at all of the... a review of the literature on studies of outcome, whether or not people who transitioned gender, whether or not they were satisfied with that type of outcome. We are then going to use the data that we have at Hopkins to make some kind of a conclusion and maybe come up with a Hopkins, you know, this is what we've found at Hopkins. So that *seems* to be happening right now.

AF: Like 10, 20, 30 years out kind of thing?

KT: It's going to be hard to do that, but we are going to see what we can do with it. But it's going to be hard to do that because of the destruction of records, to be honest. You know, over the years, records, they often have a seven-year lifetime, so it's not going to be as easy as we would have liked. And even those that are still around are not so easy to access. Some day, you (AF) being an archivist and understanding this stuff more, some day, I guess with things being electronically accessible, I don't know, maybe that would make the lives of people to track things over 20 years down the road easier. But we'll do the best that we can to see if we can get at least some reasonability long-term data. Let's see what happens. So that seems to be in the offing. I've gotten involved in it. I volunteered to do the lit search, to get us started. Everybody will do some part of it.

AF: How many people are involved?

KT: There probably will be four of us. There's kind of four of us that are involved with the clinic. Unless we can drag some of the residents in to help us.

AF: One question that I had was, as a health care service provider, how do you avoid burn-out?

KT: Wow. (laughs) I actually probably don't in my work have much burnout. I mean, I guess I have, at times in my life, but I don't have too much of it. I'm blessed in that I can kind of control how much I do, to a large extent—like how many patients I see, how many classes I teach each semester. So I tend to parcel it out. So when things get to me, will have more to do with if there are other things going on in my life, can tip an edge. But work, not so much, in some ways, because I can kind of monitor it. But, I guess, sometimes I don't. But, nonetheless, I'm not perfect and I do get it. I'm certainly not perfect at it. I can get really frustrated and cranky and just want to veg out. You know, all kinds of things. But I try... I live with somebody who does balance for a living, who's always harping on me about different ways to balance my stress. So I do that, whether it's body work, or Tai Chi, whatever it is that I can do. We're going to go get a treatment from a friend of ours this weekend, because we've been dealing with a lot of stuff with Bob's brother. So I decided to do that, for instance. That will be a nice hour and a half or something, just having some nice, quiet body work. I try to do that, but I'm not perfect, no question.

AF: There are two kind of bigger picture questions that I have

KT: Uh huh.

AF: Looking at the span of your career. One is how to you derive meaning from your work?

KT: Well, you know, that's an interesting question. I guess that you can certainly say that on any given day we can go different ways with that. I guess that there are days when you think like, "Do I do anything important?" And another day I may feel like, "Oh, I really made a contribution to the world." (Laughs) There is certainly some back and forth with that.

AF: Tell me about the contribution.

KT: The contribution part! (Laughs) I think that since I really have embraced this idea that my job or my life's work is meant to be fostering positive sexual attitudes—sexual and gender attitudes—and I keep that in mind, that probably helps me more than anything else. So that in some ways, it matters less what the technical stuff or the little things are. But rather, that if someone can talk to me about the ways that they've thought or the things they have a question [about], and feel like they can open up to me or whatever,

then I feel like I've done my work. If a student can ask me a question and I can explain it to them... It could be anywhere. So as long as I keep that particular focus in mind, then almost anything that I do to a certain extent work-wise can have that feeling.

I'm in the middle right now of—this has been real interesting. My little granddaughter, Sadie, turned four at Christmas. For Christmas, I'm thinking to myself, you know, what do to with this? I'm the grandmom, but I'm a sexologist. So if I'm going to talk about these things and then not practice what I preach, then what good am I? But then, it is my son and his wife, and am I overstepping some sort of boundary? So I went around and around about this. I think that it all worked out well. I don't know if I handled it well, but the bottom line is that it worked out well. I know my son and my son would say, "This is cool that my mother's doing this." I just know my son, and he would be cool with it. He would know this is Mom's stuff; cool. I knew he wasn't going to have some kind of "she's interfering in our lives." But, my daughter-in-law, who I have a nice relationship with, but I don't know whether she can think that I'm interfering.

So for Christmas, I got them and gave it to them privately, not as a big family thing, a copy for the book that is written for parents to help talk to their children about sexuality. And then I gave them a copy of the book that I like for four year olds, to help them learn about their bodies and names and different functions. It's just a nice little cartoon book with a lot of good information. So I got them these two books, because I did not want to be the one. So anyway, I gave them to them. And at first, my daughter-in-law was like, "Ah...Oh!" Then she said, "You know what? This is Grandma Kate. Grandma Kate should be teaching our kids about sex. I think that it should be up to Grandma Kate." (Laughs)

So she went on this whole thing about this. So, long story short, it's been now since Christmas, my son has kind of taken it and he read the whole book. My daughter-in-law doesn't really want to read it. But she's really really comfortable with my son and I teaching Sadie about sex. She's really happy that we are doing it. So it all actually ended up working out very nicely. But you know, so far, so good. So we'll see. But we certainly haven't met with anything there. So I felt good about it.

With my own kids it was different, because they were my children, I could make that decision. But when you are dealing with someone else's children, as a therapist or as a consultant or an educator or something, I don't have to make the decisions for people. I can just give them some thoughts. But with my son and his wife, it was like, how far do I go with this? Anyway, it ended up being a lot of fun, and my daughter-in-law has been just delightful about it all. "Okay, Grandma Kate, what did you guys talk about today?" (Laughs).

AF: That's nice.

KT: Nice. Yeah. So there are just small ways that maybe I think I'm doing a good job.

AF: If you had to say what you've contributed to the field, what would you say?

KT: Oh boy, I don't know. That's a hard one. In a way, I don't know. I think that I have to be mostly honest. In terms of my field, I've contributed to the education of others and providing therapy for others. Those are really the things I've done. I've not been a person who, like many of my colleagues, who have research labs and figure out how to do this. I mean, I read a lot of that stuff, but that's not me. I learn myself from somebody else and then I pass it on to others so. So I'm not a person who as contributed in the sense of making a discovery or things like that. Maybe a little bit in terms of theory. I have some theories that I've written about and talked about a little bit, just some ideas and theories. But I think more with education and providing therapy.

AF: As an applied field, like as a practitioner?

KT: As more of an applied—thank you. That's exactly right. Yeah, exactly.

AF: On one hand, I feel like there are tons of questions that I could ask, and I would like to hear as much as possible about your work, because I think it's very interesting.

KT: Hmm. Yeah, it's been a great career. No regrets about that. None. (Laughs)

AF: The only other thing that I can think of as far as your role professionally—your interests as an educator and as a therapist in the work that you do—when you come back to this space, in the Cork, where you live with a variety of activists and artists and creative people, people who have had multiple roles and multiple careers... How does your work fit into this place?

KT: Wow. I think that there maybe people who would argue that I don't belong here! But that said, I don't know. Maybe not so much the people who are here now. Because the building, in some people's minds, this building was created more as an artist co-op—it's an LLC—but as an artist co-op concept, so that everybody here was an artist. I'm here because I moved in with Bob, and Bob was a ceramic artist. So that's how I got here and I would tease that I'm the only non-artist in the building. That's no longer true, but I say that.

There then were other people, probably most particularly Dennis and Carol, who are both artists also are really activists. Not that other people aren't, but Dennis was the activist extraordinaire. So they kind of bought that element into it. And in some ways, I didn't do all that stuff anymore. We've done it—Bob and I have done it—we've been involved in lots of these same community organizations, and we would do some of it. But never on the level that Dennis was doing it. But I don't know. I got more clear about it as time went on, about my role is here, whether people see it or not.

When we had Dennis' memorial, Dennis before he died, designed the memorial, down to what food we were having, and what we were having to drink. It was great. So one of the things that he wanted everyone to do was to talk with each other about what their work in the world was. And that was good, that was really good. I thought that it was really

important because, although I'd said it to people before, it gave us a forum for everybody to talk about what they thought that their work in the world was. So I was able to talk about my work in the world. And the people that I talked to, I didn't talk to everybody, but the people that I talked to, the people in my little group, were all like, "That's really cool work. That's good work." So it all fit in with everyone else's work in the world, you know? It was all different, so it didn't matter. So that was really helpful.

But I think that even before that public ability to do it, I'd certainly gotten there. But I think that there probably have been people who would argue in this building that in some ways, I don't belong here. I don't mean that badly. (Laughs) And I think that that's changed over time. We have a lot of different people here than who used to be here, who were much more, "This is an arts building." And even when Bob stopped doing art, "What is he still here?" But, you know, you can conceptualize it in different ways.

AF: Even for the purpose of this project, I was initially approaching it as an artists' building, artists' careers, artists' working spaces, and that kind of thing. But in reality, my thinking has began to shift a little, as I've begun to realize the extent to which people have many different roles that they play and those roles have changed over their lifetime. I began to think about a creative community as having quite a much more diverse...

KT: Right, which is my appeal. When people start talking about this being an arts community, I don't "dis" that. I mean, it's not that. But it's not really how I see why I am here at all. It never has been. I mean, other than when I first moved in, it was just a place to live. But over time... Because what it is for me, is the idea of supporting a community that does have this ability to have this support diversity nature. You know, [Martin] O'Malley got that guy from... You know, about creative...

AF: [Richard] Florida, or whatever his name was?

KT: Yeah, exactly. That kind of idea that we've bought in... I mean, there are gay and lesbian people who've moved in here, there are artists and activists, there are poorer people, we are not just renovating this place and making it a gentrified community. I don't want to live in a gentrified community. I'll move out. I really want to see this type of community where there is sharing, where people can get along. I've always wanted to live in a mixed-race communities. So all of those things are why I live here. They are perfectly consistent with all of our goals. They don't have anything... I don't have to be a visual artist or something to encompass or embrace that concept. So that's my concept. That's why I feel like I fit in here. And the building has changed. We're pretty cohesive. You won't hear a lot of that anymore We don't have the staunch, "We're all artists here." They've move on. (Laughs)

AF: Very good.

KT: Yeah.

AF: Well, thank you.

KT: Thank you. It was fun. Good, as always.

AF: I appreciate it.

KT: Yeah, you're welcome. Always. Yeah.

[End of interview]

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