

Interview with Marie Griffin continued
Chatham, MA
Accession #1977.002.001 B

Marie: -Creative Writing. So they're spreading out over time and I think that they expect to go in to having June, teach in June. So they really are – oh, and they have marvelous children's classes.

Interviewer: Really?

Marie: They're received most enthusiastically. Carol Eldredge is in charge of them and she has a wonderful personality. She is just delightful with the children and do delightful work.

Interviewer: That's good. Children need art more than anybody does.

Marie: So she's very popular because she has a wonderful personality. I think it's a wonderful thing for Chatham and I think it's going to grow, I hope it does because it's an outlet for everyone interested.

Interviewer: Well...what else do you belong to?

Marie: I really only joined the Women's Club because I thought if I spread myself too thin-

Interviewer: You're wise.

Marie: I'm not going to have time to paint myself. And this is my trouble, trying to find time to paint myself. I have a friend, and quite often we will paint together, just the two of us. Or I'll have one student that is very good and I'll invite her to come alone and I will paint along with her and give her help if she needs it, but I find then time to paint. And I have taken the adult education courses from Foster Nystrom in watercolor, to make me do watercolor. You know, one night a week because I find time goes on and I just won't do it. I just don't take the time.

Interviewer: You're happy though, painting a great deal of the time?

Marie: Oh yes, and this studio has been wonderful because when I first had my classes here, I didn't have the studio and we had them in the kitchen. And the kitchen was newly remodeled and I think everyone was nervous that they might get some paint on something. And I would have to go around afterwards and inspect everything to make sure my husband didn't find paint, but the minute I got this studio, I can work out here and –

Interviewer: You need a separate place for work, you really do. Especially work that's messy.

Marie: That's right. I don't keep any set time in the daytime here. But in the summertime, I don't teach in the summer, but I do try to stay out here from seven to nine at night because I find that a great many people walking around. And you'd be amazed by how many people stop in when they see the lights on. And they will say, "We didn't know you were here." And another thing I can't understand is I'll say to them, "If I'm not here, just ring the doorbell of the house." And they'll look at the house and say, "Oh you mean you live in that house?" And I can't understand why they don't connect the studio and the house. But, so many people don't. That part doesn't make sense to me.

Interviewer: People are strange, I know.

Marie: At the festival this summer, I had a madras bedspread that I usually throw over a couple card tables as a backdrop for what I have on the table. And one woman came up to me and said, "Where did you find that bedspread? I've been looking for one just like it!"

(Laughter)

Interviewer: Pick up your pictures and I'll take it home! Oh dear!

Marie: So when you say people are strange.

Interviewer: Yeah, for sure.

Marie: And then I had brought down a big chunk of glass as a paperweight, I don't know where it is. One of these pieces I've had for my glasswork. And I had it as a paperweight to weight down some brochures I had there.

Interviewer: Well isn't that nice?

Marie: And this man came over and picked up the paperweight, and he said to me, "Where did you get that?" He wanted to buy it. And I thought, "Dear me. Here are my paintings and people are interested in bedspreads and paperweights."

Interviewer: How is that made?

Marie: That isn't made, I don't think. It's just a chunk of glass.

Interviewer: A chunk of glass. Anything that's –

Marie: My original idea of buying that in the beginning was that I was going to break it up and have some globs of glass that were three-dimensional in some of my pieces of glass. And I asked how they did it and they said they either put it in burlap or an old blanket or something and take a hammer and hit it. Well it just seemed too involved for me so I never broke it up. But, it's colorful.

Interviewer: Is this glass more easily cut than ordinary glass because –

Marie: Oh no.

Interviewer: When you cut glass, you have trouble even making a straight line.

Marie: This comes with experience. All this glass is different thicknesses. And there's a kind of glass called antique glass. It does not mean it is antique. It specifies a certain kind of glass. Antique is very thin glass. And the trouble with that is if you get used to cutting Cathedral glass and you get a piece of antique glass – of course you know the difference – but, if you're not

thinking and you put the least bit of pressure on the antique glass you will crack it. But I think part of the learning to cut the glass is getting to know what the different glass does. For instance, there's a glass called flash glass and it's one layer of clear glass and then it will have a layer of maybe red on it. It took me a long time to realize that if you cut it from the back it cut much better than when you cut it from the front. So these are things you learn as you work with the material.

Interviewer: And you make all those curves with an ordinary glasscutter?

Marie: Yes, yes. You have a pattern and you lay the glass on the pattern. And you get so that you learn how to do it.

Interviewer: I can't even cut a piece for a picture frame. For heaven sakes. That's very interesting. You make your own patterns?

Marie: Most of them. This little piece here was an assignment we had over at the Artist and Craftsman's Guild in Orleans. Every year they have the student theme – or not a student theme – organization theme and everyone has to do something on a particular theme and bring it in for display in March. And that was the bicentennial, that particular piece I did was for that.

Interviewer: Is there a Cape Cod Craftsman's –

Marie: Yes.

Interviewer: Outfit still going?

Marie: Yes. Well, the group I'm talking about is the Artist and Craftsman's Guild of the Outer Cape. That was the one I was a member of. But there again, I just dropped out of that this year because I got so active with the Creative Arts Center and jurying and all of this business. I just

couldn't get to the meetings and it seemed to me every time there was a meeting at night it was always a real, real foggy night.

Interviewer: There used to be a Cape Cod Arts, I guess it was just Craftsmen. I wondered if that was still alive?

Marie: It probably is because there are quite a few of us.

Interviewer: There are. All having affairs.

Marie: But we certainly had three beautiful days for that festival. It was just heaven.

Interviewer: I have read in the newspaper, I didn't pay much attention to the specifics of it, certain people raising objections to the festival for one reason or another. What is this all about?

Marie: Well, as I say you can't please everyone. I think that some people felt that the people from Chatham were discriminated against. Which was not true. I don't think the majority of people realize that in this last show for instance, there were only 18 people from Chatham that applied to get in the show. And out of the 18, 14 were in. So that's 80%. That was one, one unfortunate thing was someone who got in the year before, who the jury didn't accept this year. So that caused hard feelings.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Marie: I think that, also there is a question about – the people that exhibited felt that the town didn't like it because they couldn't put up a banner. You know we used to have a banner across the street? Well that's just one of those things.

Interviewer: How about the traffic problem?

Marie: Well, there again, I think that's got to be quite a crucial thing.

Interviewer: Any possibility of moving the festival out of town a little bit?

Marie: There is a possibility. I don't want to get into that because I'm not in a position to say – but there is a possibility of having it in a different location next year to simplify the traffic.

Interviewer: Yeah, because it seemed to me it was pretty heavy, buses running out, couldn't you?

Marie: 'Course they had the buses going out this year, but they are talking about possibly changing the location.

Interviewer: It might actually make the business better for you.

Marie: Yes, if the parking was better. And I don't want to give any advance publicity, I'm not in a position to, but the Creative Arts Center has some really terrific ideas. Of course, I think eventually they would like to have enough money to build their own building. That's what they're aiming for. They have one terrific idea now that they're working on – it's interesting what they're going to do.

Interviewer: Well I don't – I did go through, I went to the festival, I spent 15 minutes there because that was all the time I had.

Marie: Well, of course there are all kinds of suggestions. I think I was sitting there and I heard two boys come down and of course there were 37 artists and they were all clustered together in the beginning of the festival. And I turned and two little boys came down and one said, "Are we at the good stuff yet?" And the other one said, "Nah, this is still the artwork."

(Laughter)

Marie: So I think there's a possibility they might distribute the art and the craftwork and disperse it next year. So it's not concentrated in one spot.

Interviewer: What do you think would be the virtue of that?

Marie: Well I think you can only digest so many paintings at a time and then your mind doesn't accept any more. It's like spending hours in a museum. The first hour you're enthused and then I think you get to the point where you see so much, it doesn't mean as much to you. And I think that probably having all the artwork together is not a good idea. I think if it were broken up with, you know, other work in between then when you see a piece of artwork, it would be fresher to you.

Interviewer: That's an interesting thought.

Marie: Because they always said, the first four or five people did so well and all farther down the line get petered off.

Interviewer: Oh yeah they say, "Let's go look at the pocketbooks." I could see that. That makes good sense.

Marie: So there are a lot of things that are to be ironed out. Ways to improve it.

Interviewer: What are you going to do this winter?

Marie: Well, work. No, my husband doesn't like to travel, he won't leave here. So I can't get him out of here. And I don't like to go out and leave him alone. We go up to my daughter's for weekends.

Interviewer: She's nearby?

Marie: She lives in Bellingham. So that's easy. In fact we'll go up there this October holiday. But I don't expect we're going to travel, but my classes are in full swing now.

Interviewer: How long do they run?

Marie: I usually – is it any set number of lessons. We just keep on going. And if somebody can't come, they just let me know and if I can't have a class, I just let all the students know. And we'll go right up till Christmas and then we stop, you know, at Christmas time. And then we start again after New Year's. And we go through until June.

Interviewer: And you don't teach at all in the summer?

Marie: No. Of course, the fact that I have been going down to North Truro for three weeks in July. And then in August I find that the students really pick up the studio and I just can't keep straightening up the studio to show people my work. So it's much better that I don't have the students in the summertime. Because I've people coming in all the time as they see me working out here they'll stop. And, as I say, I just can't cope with students and customers.

Interviewer: Yep. That all makes good sense.

Marie: It just works out fine. And also I find that the students rather take a vacation.

Interviewer: Yeah, most everybody is busy in August.

Marie: I do have people who are visitors here, who will say we wish you would, you know, have classes in the summer. But, I need the rest. And that gives me a chance to do some work for myself too. I get all kinds of odd things. I don't really enjoy doing people's houses or – but every once in a while someone will ask me to do something special and I will do it if that's what they want. If I think the house is paintable. Sometimes they aren't.

Interviewer: And you do things on commission?

Marie: Yes, I do. And it's exciting. I had a woman come in from Canada and bought four paintings this summer. And another woman came in from Washington and I was doing a floral painting and I hadn't even finished it and she bought it right off the easel. I said, "Well I haven't

finished it." And she said, "When you finish it, send it to me." So she really was taking a chance. But, there must've been something that she liked about it in the beginning.

Interviewer: Very good. That makes you feel very good. You got a whole new career, second or third career.

Marie: That's right.

Interviewer: Besides, I think doing things keeps you alive, interested and interesting. Don't you think that some people who do something, women who do something, are so much more together?

Marie: That's right.

Interviewer: I mean there nice to talk with and do things with – I think it's healthy. Even if you didn't enjoy painting I think it's a healthy thing to do.

Marie: I do. I do think everyone needs something.

Interviewer: I think everyone needs to express themselves in some creative way. I think that's a very deep human need, after food and a few more things, to be creative is – everybody wants to be able – if they could only knit or if they can make a pie.

Marie: I sew too. I go on little binges. Two weeks ago, I made three artworks – and I haven't sewed in years because I never sew for myself, I used to sew for my daughter. But I had more fun doing that. I designed a little jumper with little dogs on the pockets. And then I had bought a milk can in New Jersey a long time ago and my daughter saw it down cellar and said, "Mother, you can do anything with that." And I said no because it was painted, and I know I'll never have the time to scrape it down. So she took it home and scraped it. So she painted it and brought it back to me and said, "Now, will you put something on it?" So I thought the logical thing to put

on it was a coat of arms and her name is DuPont. So I finally – I couldn't find the DuPont coat of arms any place. So I finally got a hold of Vernon Nickerson and he got it for me. He was going into the Genealogical Society of Boston that Saturday, so he sent me the coat of arms. So that's what I've been doing all morning, putting the coat of arms on that. Of course, I had to enlarge it so it's time-consuming. And then, of course, I've braided rugs in my life and did needlepoint and stairs. If there's anything, you know, to be done with your hands, I think I've done it. Along the way –

Interviewer: I think that's the healthiest thing you can do.

Marie: Years ago I did tray painting and I probably stenciled this chair a long time ago. In other words, I enjoy knowing how to do everything. And then if I know this type of thing interests me after I did it. I just wanted to learn so I would know and be able to appreciate other people's work.

Interviewer: That's true.

Marie: You'd probably recognize some of these places. Of course, that's Al Bloomer's shack down there at the bridge. And this one is down at the end of Richfield Road. And this one – I took the boat, it was one of the tall ships, the Red Sail Lindor (?) I took it out of the paper and put my own water in it. And this is St. Stephen's and the Customs House Tower in Boston, it's acrylic. And this is down at Stage Harbor. And this little one is at the Mill Pond. Over here, this lower one, is at the bottom of Crow's Pond, beyond Eastward Ho Country Club. And then this one I did on the corner of School Street looking towards Water Street, the house with the turret. And this was down at the Mitchell River. And this was over at northwest Chatham over there. And then that one I did at the road to Harding's Beach, right where the road forks.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Marie: And then these- this is imaginative up here, and this is the Catalpa tree right in front of the house from my living room window. And this is the abandoned light. And that's – I was right down on the beach down here almost opposite you, you know that little road that's opposite you – what do you call it?

Interviewer: Nickerson Lane.

Marie: Well I was down there at the end of Nickerson Lane, looking back up. And of course I made it wider than it is probably. And that's the Mill Pond. And that's on Nantucket. And this was over at Orleans, over at Nauset. I was at the back of Stuart's Motel, looking down over the valley. And then all of my watercolors are local, local spots around.

Interviewer: Well good. Well that's fine.

Marie: There are a great many watercolors and all local, on the watercolors.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Marie: Except for the boat things I do, which is this type of thing. I do a lot of boats because they appeal to people and this was imaginative. I took it from around the cove there in Orleans. This was over in Monomoy, that one there. Then some of these are imaginative. There's a marsh there. Some of these open spots, that was Nantucket. That was down near Pond's Marina.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Marie: That was down there. This is down in Chatham, Stage Harbor. I don't know which one that was. This was done at the end of our street. Down near Kelly's Snowplow.

(Distant speech)

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Marie: Oh, and this is right up at Fran Brown's, looking down on Silverleaf, here. But I made this wider too. Oh, that was down at Sears' Point- Heights. And that was down on Champlain Road, the little shack that's on the beach. You know Champlain Road near Gales fort, right along that beach. Oh and that was Edgartown, that architecture appealed to me. Somebody brought me lady slippers, and I couldn't just let them go to waste.

Interviewer: No.

(Distant Speech)

Marie: Again, Stage Harbor to the right. That was imaginative.

(Distant Speech)

Marie: That's down at Mill Pond where they took that building down.

Interviewer: Right.

Marie: That's Giles' Garage, across the street.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Marie: And that was the corner of our stoop before we took the old blinds off. Every day I'd come out, and this appealed to me because it cast a shadow. So right around 4 o'clock I set out by my steps and did this –

Interviewer: You just caught it, right?

Marie: I just caught it. Well that's down, looking down at Birmingham's on the beach. And that's Dr. Holden's driveway. So I have fun.

Interviewer: You certainly do! I certainly thank you! It's good.