

An Interview with
Jaye Gregory

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Oral History Program

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PREFACE

The interview was taped on a placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets []. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [""] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

Blanche Touhill: Would you talk about when you were young: who did you play with; your mother and father or your brothers and sisters or your grandparents, who among that group or your playmates encouraged you, said you have some special ability and you should really take advantage of that or go to college. What was your childhood like in elementary and secondary school?

Jaye Gregory: My father was an electronic engineer. He worked on Apollo, Gemini, all of the space projects. He did something called systems analysis and I don't really know what that is so we moved a lot, almost every year.

Blanche Touhill: Did you move because he was working for different companies or projects?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah, he was a contractor so he would go work in Marietta, Georgia. When that contract was over, there was usually some other place that wanted him for the next project.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I know engineers are often engaged in those contracts where it's a period of time.

Jaye Gregory: Yeah. I can remember, I think I was seven and we were leaving Wichita, he had been working at Boeing and my first close friend. We bought that house. I didn't think we were going to move. I thought we were permanent and I screamed. I was hysterical: "Let me stay with Diane." I'm sure her parents were, "No." After that, I didn't really get close to people.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, because you knew you'd move?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah, because for sure we were going to move.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and that was hard because you moved from school to school as well?

Jaye Gregory: Well, that one time was hard.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you adjusted?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah, we adjusted to different accents. Wherever we were people would say, "You talk funny" and when we came back to St. Louis, we were around different places but when we moved to Webster, I realized that

almost everyone had been in the same school all their lives. Some of those kids had never been to Illinois and I just thought, well, how boring! It was hard at the time but I think it was a decent way to grow up. We saw a lot of the country, lived in lots of really neat houses.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Jaye Gregory: Yes, I had two brothers and a sister. I was the oldest.

Blanche Touhill: And did you play with them, or you played with the neighbors' kids?

Jaye Gregory: Let's see, in Canada, my best friend was the daughter of the Girl Guide trip leader so I was a...

Blanche Touhill: ...Girl Guide.

Jaye Gregory: I think we might have been younger than the Girl Guides. We were working on some tender foot beds but we had to build fires in the woods in the rain. It was way better than Girl Scouts...mostly with family.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, okay.

Jaye Gregory: The brother that was closest to me, we were pretty competitive and the two younger ones were like toys for us. We didn't quite accept them as human beings until they were a lot older. My younger brother, he was teething when my sister was born and the other brother and I would stick our finger in and say, "Bite, bite," and one day he had a tooth and he bit hard. Whoa.

Blanche Touhill: So you learned.

Jaye Gregory: Yeah, we learned that we had to be a little more respectful of him, that he had ideas of his own.

Blanche Touhill: And how was that on your mother, always moving?

Jaye Gregory: I think it was probably harder for her than for us but when we were in Canada, she loved that. They did Cartoons with Daddy with John Kennedy, whoa, pretty neat, and she loved everything British. She loved British woolens, and she was beautiful; she was gorgeous. She was the hit of the PTA. She and Daddy would go out dancing and he was on the news and she liked that. I think things went downhill when we came back to St. Louis, that the engineering, the space thrust, all that was over.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, indeed.

Jaye Gregory: And a lot of engineers were out of work.

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Jaye Gregory: Daddy worked for McDonnell Douglas, he worked for Monsanto and he drove a cab.

Blanche Touhill: The American society is unusual, isn't it, in that...

Jaye Gregory: All of a sudden...

Blanche Touhill: ...people of talent and then they move onto another subject.

Jaye Gregory: Yeah, and thousands of engineers all over the country suddenly had nothing to do and couldn't find work.

Blanche Touhill: Did your father say you had a certain talent? Did he recognize that?

Jaye Gregory: No.

Blanche Touhill: No?

Jaye Gregory: My mother went to Washington University...well, they both did. She was in the art department before she transferred to occupational therapy. I saw her drawings. She was good. I don't think they went out of their way to encourage me in art but it was assumed that all of their children would go to college. There was never any doubt. That's what we were expected to do and we all assumed that we would.

Blanche Touhill: And you all did?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah. It was a little odd, my grandmother in St. Louis was Jewish and she couldn't understand why her friends weren't all excited about me going to a Catholic university. She thought it was great.

Blanche Touhill: Going out to see the world.

Jaye Gregory: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: How was your high school and grade school? Did you tend to art in those days as well or not until you went to college?

Jaye Gregory: I wouldn't call it art exactly. I drew horses. I was horse crazy. I wanted to be a jockey or an illustrator for Bergdorf-Goodman, either one. Mom bought the New Yorker and I read the funnies and looked at the ads. I drew Cinderella stuff, Walt Disney stuff and horses, which is really not about art. I was not talented with Playdoh. I didn't do anything noteworthy.

Blanche Touhill: Really?

Jaye Gregory: Really, I made little baskets with eggs out of Playdoh, nothing interesting. Mom used to put all of our drawings up on the wall. She had whole walls and I guess I was probably about six and I looked at the drawings that she had up and I was making little stick figures but the arms were coming out of the waist and I realized it one day and I thought, why didn't she tell me? Does she not know that there's something not quite right here? I think they were hoping that I would be doctor, lawyer, physicist.

Blanche Touhill: And were you good at math and science?

Jaye Gregory: No. I loved science...probably the moving, so many different schools. When I started at Webster, for some reason they put me in an advanced math class and I had no idea what they were talking about. It was the little greater than, equal to stuff and my dad, the brilliant engineer, he couldn't get down to where I was. I didn't know what those little marks meant and nobody at the school would tell me what they meant and whatever it was he told me was brilliant. The heavens opened, the light came down, but I still didn't know what the little marks meant; same thing as a sophomore in high school. I was having trouble with quadratic equations and the factoring of them. We were guessing and I kept thinking, you don't guess. There's got to be a system here. Again, the heavens opened, the light came through and I got a zero on the test. He was so far above me, he couldn't come down to these really simple things that I was missing.

Blanche Touhill: I think often mathematicians also have one way to do it and there are other ways to do it...

Jaye Gregory: Possibly.

Blanche Touhill: But you just think he was more esoteric?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah, yeah. When I took college algebra, I did very well, as long as it was just numbers on both sides of the equation. Word problems made me crazy and I just thought, okay, I don't care. Logic problems make me crazy. I want to throw them across the room.

Blanche Touhill: But as a sculptress, math does matter, doesn't it or is it numbers that matter?

Jaye Gregory: Relationships matter and when I'm teaching, I try to get my students to say, "Okay, we've got these two things. Which one is bigger? If you're not sure, then they're pretty close to the same, okay, so either ones bigger or not; let's make sure that your work is doing that," and it's such a basic thing and most people are looking for something way more complicated.

Blanche Touhill: Were you a leader in grade school or high school in any way?

Jaye Gregory: Not really. When we lived in Canada, I was sort of a token American so that made me a person of importance briefly. In high school, I was the captain of my field hockey team, none of whom knew how to play field hockey. We had no idea what the rules were and there was no one around to show us how.

Blanche Touhill: But you played anyway.

Jaye Gregory: A couple times, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Did you win?

Jaye Gregory: No. We didn't know what to do. We had no idea what we were doing. It was an intramural thing and it seemed like it would be a fun thing to do, but we needed guidance that we weren't getting. Other than that, no, I was not a leader.

Blanche Touhill: So when you started off to college, did you say, I'm going to be a literature person or an art person or did you have any idea what you wanted to study?

Jaye Gregory: I knew I wanted to study art. I had been working downtown at a tee-shirt factory. They did silkscreen tee-shirts and I did the designs.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you did the designs, in high school?

Jaye Gregory: No, I quit high school.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you quit high school?

Jaye Gregory: Yes. Actually, all my brothers and sister, we all quit high school and my grandmother had a \$500 insurance policy and that was enough money for me to take three classes at Webster. I met Sister Gabrielle Mary and I talked to her for about half an hour before I realized that she was, in fact, Sister Gabrielle Mary. She was the head of the art department. I took a silk-screening class and I think a drawing class and an art history class. I knew that I wanted to do something with art. I did not excel in my art classes in high school but I knew that that's what I wanted to do. I enjoyed it very much but when the money was gone, I was working and, Washington University College, I was looking through a catalogue and sculpture, whoo, that sounds like fun.

Blanche Touhill: This is while you were working doing silkscreen?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah, that was a minimum wage job and so I took one sculpture class and loved it. Richard Dumet was the teacher. His son was very ill at the time so we had a graduate assistant doing most of the teaching but when Dumet came in, he'd just touch..."Oh," ...it was magic hands. He was glorious to watch and I wanted to be able to do that. We spent eight weeks working on the same portrait. We measured and measured and measured. It was horrible. I'm amazed we didn't put the model's eye out with the calipers, and I did a decent head. I'd never done it before. You would hope that you'd do something decent after eight weeks but then in the second semester, I heard the graduate students talking about Rudy Torrini at Fontbonne and how great he was. So I went over there and the first person I saw over there was the daughter of a friend of my parents. They were very unconventional people. They were Bohemians and I thought, well, okay, if she can go to Fontbonne, it must be okay. At the time, ROTC burning at Washington U. It was very political and Fontbonne was about white gloves and weirdness.

Blanche Touhill: So you didn't know whether they'd welcome free spirits?

Jaye Gregory: I didn't know if I wanted to be associated with them. It wasn't a matter of being welcomed; it was, do I want my name associated.

Blanche Touhill: With the white glove ladies?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah, yeah, Washington University is where my mother went, my father went, all my father's aunts and uncles went. This is our family's tradition and, ew, Fontbonne, yee, but Torrini was good.

Blanche Touhill: Did you have to interview to get into the sculpture class or you just signed up?

Jaye Gregory: Well, I signed up through Webster. They had an inter-institutional program and I paid my tuition at Webster. I didn't know that they started later at Fontbonne. I went over there, they hadn't registered me and I'm sitting in the studio, there's nobody else there and finally somebody said, go, and I opened the door and he looks at me, he says, "What the hell do you want?" I felt this big..."I want to be in your class, I think." I ended up with financial aid, very minimal loans for four years...or three years, I guess.

Blanche Touhill: So you went full-time then?

Jaye Gregory: The first semester, I had just the one class.

Blanche Touhill: And you liked it?

Jaye Gregory: Very much.

Blanche Touhill: And he liked you?

Jaye Gregory: Yes. I became one of Torrini's girls.

Blanche Touhill: And you felt that you could go to Fontbonne?

Jaye Gregory: I didn't care about the rest of the place. They could do whatever they wanted. I did take a semester off. There was one point where the mindless chatter in the cafeteria was just overwhelming but I had to go back and my last year, I changed my major from sculpture to ceramics. I had become very involved with ceramics. I loved it. I loved building kilns; I loved Raku firing, I loved making stuff on the wheel. It was, not relaxing but it was more fun, less frustrating. Making sculptures, you'd have to analyze things and I didn't think of myself then as an analytical person.

Blanche Touhill: Why do you have to analyze things, the actual structure or the emotion that you're trying to bring out?

- Jaye Gregory: Everything about it. You look at it and you say, something's not right. What isn't right? Of all the millions of things that could be wrong, what's the biggest thing wrong? You have to figure it out.
- Blanche Touhill: It takes time?
- Jaye Gregory: Sometimes, sometimes you don't figure it out.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, sometimes you don't?
- Jaye Gregory: No, of course not. Sometimes it's just, you're blind to this thing that was wrong. Most of my early portraits had pretty much the same problems that everybody's early...noses were too long; eyes were too far apart. We have standards of beauty that are subconscious in our society and close-set eyes are not beautiful so we'll make the eyes wide, and then the whole face gets wide. Short, cute noses are not interesting, so we make Greek noses, but carry it too far and it's a problem.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, I always thought it was fascinating in the American society to decide what is beautiful.
- Jaye Gregory: I think that it comes from our family. Years ago, I was working on a statue of St. Dominick and everything was okay except the hands and the feet and I wanted beautiful hands, beautiful feet. Well, I thought, I work in a foundry, these are tough guys. They will have beautiful hands and I looked at their hands, God, they're paws. They don't have beautiful hands. My father had beautiful hands; my mother had beautiful hands, and there is my idea of beauty.
- Blanche Touhill: What did you do with that piece? Did you keep the paws or did you make it beautiful hands?
- Jaye Gregory: Oh, no, beautiful hands. I used my own hands and made them heavier. I think my brother was too young, I couldn't use his hands. When I'm working on a piece and I don't have a model or the model's already gone, I kind of revert something that's in between my sister and me, that that's our norm and it's very difficult to move away from that. Torrini's portraits of women always look like his wife. They all smile just like his wife. It's so romantic.
- Blanche Touhill: It is romantic. Well, it's art though, isn't it?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: It's what the artist thinks is beautiful.

Jaye Gregory: Mm-hmm, yeah, and I can remember, in my early years, looking at models and saying, I don't like this model and it took a while to realize that you have to look for the beauty and find it.

Blanche Touhill: Yes.

Jaye Gregory: And sometimes you're looking at something that's pretty abstract, you say, wow, that is so neat; that's so exciting.

Blanche Touhill: Did you ever sell your ceramics?

Jaye Gregory: I did. I went to Tillie's Art Fair a couple years. That was...traumatic isn't the right word but I have a lot of trouble sitting, smiling pleasantly when people ask idiotic questions or when it's obvious that they don't care.

Blanche Touhill: You know, I've always thought that it was almost impossible for artists to sell their work. It's not that they're not willing to sell it; it's just that they don't have that desire to sit and talk to clients...

Jaye Gregory: And chat. Some people do. Torrini was great at it. Harry Webber is great at it.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I know Harry and Harry is great at it.

Jaye Gregory: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Most artists I know, at least on the university level, they have great difficulty.

Jaye Gregory: Right, we would rather be in the studio working and we don't like people bothering us when we're in the studio working.

Blanche Touhill: You need an agent.

Jaye Gregory: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Do you know that you need an agent?

Jaye Gregory: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: Do you ever get an agent?

- Jaye Gregory: Generally not. I have a gallery.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, that displays your work.
- Jaye Gregory: Right, but that's not quite the same as having an agent.
- Blanche Touhill: No. Why don't you get an agent?
- Jaye Gregory: You want to be my agent?
- Blanche Touhill: No, I don't, but I'm saying, I see that repeatedly. I'll talk to an academic...well, actually, a gentleman who takes marvelous photographs, artistic photographs and I say, "Well, what's your price for selling it?" and he'd say, "Well, I can't, I can't do that. I can't price it."
- Jaye Gregory: Oh, I can price things. I can give people a contract. It's getting out there and selling it. When people come to me and say that they want this, it's, "Okay, we can do that."
- Blanche Touhill: All right, so you graduate from college, really majoring in ceramics with a minor in sculpture or something of that nature.
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah, I think it was, they called it a BFA Studio.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you find the rest of your academic career to be of use to you, practical use?
- Jaye Gregory: I'm not sure, but the nuns that I studied with at Webster and at Fontbonne were the first women that I had ever been around who loved learning, just learning. I thought of my mother as a very well educated person. She had a degree from Washington University. I had never been around women who had Master's degrees, doctorates who just went to school to study, for the love of it. It was very eye-opening. I think they influenced me. I think they were more supportive of me than anyone else.
- Blanche Touhill: So they looked at your artwork and said, pursue it?
- Jaye Gregory: No.
- Blanche Touhill: How did they support you?
- Jaye Gregory: They looked at me and said, "Do what you feel like you should do." When Zelli and I were first living together, I was working in the ceramic studio a

lot and the nun who taught ceramics and the nun who was in charge of the library and her assistant would be up in the dorm making goodies. They would bring goodies down and say, "Take this home to Zelli." They knew we weren't married. They knew that I didn't have time to cook, that I was in the studio all the time; just so loving, so non-judgmental, just supportive people and I think that was new to me, too. They were very non-critical and I found that in both schools. I missed a class at Webster, a political class and the nun called and said, "You're such an important part of this class." Really? Me? Little me?

Blanche Touhill: So they knew how to call and to say...to encourage you?

Jaye Gregory: Yes. Practically speaking, science classes practical? No, I love them though.

Blanche Touhill: So it was that same love of learning?

Jaye Gregory: Yes.

Blanche Touhill: So, did you understand math in college?

Jaye Gregory: I somehow avoided taking a math class when I was an undergraduate. It was later, when I was absolutely disgusted with working in the foundry and I thought, my dad was an engineer. I can be an engineer. I have to take intermediate algebra; have to take college algebra, and I spent the summer working very hard. I started with an elementary algebra book, went through it, thought, okay, this I get. I did the odd numbered problems in the back of the book and I probably had the best scores in the class on all the tests, except the exponential growth of the rabbit population that I really didn't care about.

Blanche Touhill: And that was the word problem?

Jaye Gregory: That was the word problem and the teacher went over it in class so many times. I knew it would be on the test and I just went... Ah, well. I have no idea.

Blanche Touhill: If you do a character, do you read the history behind the character before you begin to sculpt?

Jaye Gregory: When I did Kate Chopin, yes. I read everything she wrote. I read everything I could about her.

- Blanche Touhill: And did that influence your work?
- Jaye Gregory: Absolutely, yeah, because I felt close to her, through her writing and I wanted something that she would be happy with.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, that's nice.
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah. I only had three or four pictures of her and they were from very different times in her life and, of course, one profile and then a couple fairly straight on shots and you couldn't look at the pictures and recognize that they were the same person so it was, is this something that she would approve of, that she would feel good about? The woman who wrote all these things, would she like this?
- Blanche Touhill: At the end, were you satisfied or are you ever satisfied?
- Jaye Gregory: Never quite satisfied. I am close. I ended up doing two and the one that's in bronze, I think is sculpturally more interesting and I recommended that but I'm closer to the other one. I like the other one more. I think it's more like Kate.
- Blanche Touhill: Where is the other one?
- Jaye Gregory: In my basement.
- Blanche Touhill: I have to tell you, I'm a great admirer of that one. I think it's just wonderful.
- Jaye Gregory: A lot depends on the light.
- Blanche Touhill: Does it?
- Jaye Gregory: The time of day that you look at it.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, I thought it suited her.
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah, I think it does.
- Blanche Touhill: Why did you like Kate?
- Jaye Gregory: I think she was, in a lot of ways, like the nuns that I knew: non-judgmental, compassionate and she could laugh at herself.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, I always thought she was a woman way ahead of her time.

- Jaye Gregory: Absolutely.
- Blanche Touhill: And had the courage to write and probably very proud of her writing.
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah, and the courage to write about no-account people from the bayou and to make us care about those people.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, let's go back. So you got your degree from Fontbonne and you...
- Jaye Gregory: ...waited tables for a while. That was fun for a while and then I got a job working in a foundry.
- Blanche Touhill: And what did you do in the foundry?
- Jaye Gregory: Lots of things. Initially I just cleaned up waxes. When you make a bronze, you have to have a wax first so we would make the waxes. The owner made the molds. We made the waxes. Later, I did his taxes. I went downtown to plead on behalf of his infirmities, could we lower the taxes, whatever. I was the one who got sent downtown to take care of that. I made molds. Finally, when he was out of town, I got the guys to teach me how to weld. He kept promising but in the end I was too valuable on the waxes. He didn't want me wasting my time welding when the guys were good at it. I learned to finish bronzes. One man there who had worked in Italy for a couple years so he taught me a lot. I learned about tools and that's why I wanted to be there. They had so many tools. I was like, oh, this is a party, and I'm still a tool...
- Blanche Touhill: So it was a good experience?
- Jaye Gregory: It was a good experience and I probably shouldn't have stayed nearly as long as I did.
- Blanche Touhill: How long did you stay?
- Jaye Gregory: Eighteen years. I was part of a group of people that did phenomenal work and it was very hard to leave that.
- Blanche Touhill: What kind of work did they do?
- Jaye Gregory: Fakes, mostly fakes, but we made beautiful bronzes.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you sell them to museums or what?

Jaye Gregory: No, we sold them to people who sold them to collectors. I think we made the only existing self-portrait of Frederick Remington. He bought a bronze and the guys chopped it up and they would show me the picture and say, "Okay, what do we have to do now to make it look more like..." ...I'm not sure that it was Frederick Remington, and the last I heard, it had sold for \$300,000. Well, you know, any idiot could look inside this thing and see, it's been cut up, welded. It was a greed thing but the work we did was good, very beautiful. After I left, I found out just how good we were, having bronzes cast in very la-dee-da foundries and they'd call and say, "Oh, it came out really well" and I'd cry when I saw it. How could you be so bad?

Blanche Touhill: So then what did you do?

Jaye Gregory: When I left the foundry...and I had been teaching off and on.

Blanche Touhill: At Fontbonne?

Jaye Gregory: At Fontbonne, early on.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, the community college, I'll bet.

Jaye Gregory: Yeah, the community college later.

Blanche Touhill: At Meramec?

Jaye Gregory: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: They had a very good program.

Jaye Gregory: They still have a very good program.

Blanche Touhill: Yeah, they still have a very good program.

Jaye Gregory: Yeah. There was one point, while I was still working at the foundry, I went to SIUE and got a Master's Degree in linguistics. Again, I need a ticket out of here. A foundry is a dangerous place to work. We're breathing bronze stuff, chemicals. It's not healthy, the wax fumes are not healthy and I was a little nervous at first. You know, art majors aren't the brightest people in the world. Only education majors are lower than art majors on this and of course when I started I was thinking, well, it's an east side university, no big deal.

Blanche Touhill: But they were good?

Jaye Gregory: Oh, really good, an incredible program, great professors and I loved it. I was doing research, real serious research for the first time in my life. It was great, having to write papers and consolidate all kinds of stuff into three pages. If I could have had 10 pages, it would have been easy but to do all this and force it down to 3, it was glorious. So I could teach English as a second language.

Blanche Touhill: Yes. Did you ever do it?

Jaye Gregory: Oh, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you did?

Jaye Gregory: Sure. I did one semester at McKendree. I did a couple years at Fontbonne. That was great and quite a few years at Forest Park Community College, and then I had an opportunity to teach sculpture at Meramec and I told my supervisor...at the community college, you can't teach three classes. If you're adjunct, you can teach two-and-a-half classes. This is a board of trustees. It keeps people from moving up the pay scale.

Blanche Touhill: No, I understand.

Jaye Gregory: And so I was trying to weasel out of the listening and note taking class that I'd been teaching and she said, "Well, fine" and she gave both of my classes to somebody else. I was appalled but teaching sculpture is much easier than teaching ESL. You don't have tests; you don't have papers to grade.

Blanche Touhill: It's the product.

Jaye Gregory: Well, part of the problem was the program. People would be put in my classes and they didn't need them but they were getting federal financial aid...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, yes, you have to have 12 hours a semester or something?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah. I had one woman in the listening and note taking class, I think she was a stenographer. In shorthand, she would have every word from a movie that we were watching. I couldn't do that. She did not need to be in the class. People who could write very well, better than a lot of

American kids, they don't need this class and so we'd go round and round. There was none of that teaching sculpture. I showed up, I knew what to do, my students knew what was expected and we went to work and we just...it was joyous.

Blanche Touhill: When you teach sculpture, do you teach, like, in a three-hour time or how do they handle the time aspect of it?

Jaye Gregory: Usually it's a two-and-a-half, three hour class.

Blanche Touhill: At one time?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And then how many times a week?

Jaye Gregory: Usually twice a week.

Blanche Touhill: So it's like a lab combined. Well, I guess it is like a...

Jaye Gregory: Well, yeah, you come in and the model is there and you get your clay out and you get your work out and you start working and the model takes a break every 20 minutes. At some point, the model will take a longer break and if you need to go to the bathroom, you don't ask; you go, you come back, you get your coffee, you come back and work.

Blanche Touhill: And just keep going?

Jaye Gregory: Mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: Then do you come in at other times in order to work on your project?

Jaye Gregory: When I was at Fontbonne, I would be there all the time. At the community college, adjuncts really don't have that, other things going on in the studio.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, so a student doesn't have a work area that is sort of his or hers?

Jaye Gregory: No.

Blanche Touhill: But at Fontbonne, you did?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah. Well, I was a graduate student at Fontbonne.

Blanche Touhill: I know, but I'm just saying, you had an area?

Jaye Gregory: An area and even undergraduates could come in and use the studio. It was expected, hoped that they would come in and work but we didn't have as many classes going on in the sculpture studio as the community college does. The community college, in most of the studios, they are booked up from 8:00 in the morning till evening. So if you want to go in and work outside of class, it was just impossible.

Blanche Touhill: So you were teaching at Meramec and you really preferred teaching sculpture than to English as a Second Language. That's what happened. You slid over back to the sculpture?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah, as soon as I got the opportunity, I did.

Blanche Touhill: And then you began to teach sculpture at Fontbonne at the same time, roughly?

Jaye Gregory: No, I had taught sculpture at Fontbonne. I think I got my MA around 1987 and it was only because Torrini needed somebody to teach the night class. I was, okay. You need to have a show. That's all you need to get your MA and then you can teach. Of course, the salary was considerably less than what he had promised but a private school, they can do that.

Blanche Touhill: So you were there for 20 years?

Jaye Gregory: No, I think I probably taught there for three or four years. I had taught ceramics because the nun was ill and then I taught the sculpture for several years. There was kind of a gap.

Blanche Touhill: Do you teach at both even now...

Jaye Gregory: No.

Blanche Touhill: ...or do you teach just at Fontbonne?

Jaye Gregory: I'm not at Fontbonne at all.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you teach at the community college?

Jaye Gregory: I teach at the community college.

Blanche Touhill: At Meramec?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: But at some point, you just used to go back and forth, didn't you?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah. I started on my MFA at Fontbonne in 2001. I got my MFA in 2002 and I kept taking classes. At first, when I started, I thought, okay, I can take anything they can dish out and within a couple of weeks, it was, I only have nine months. That's not fair. I've earned more than that. I deserve more than that, and it was good to be back there. I loved being there.

Blanche Touhill: Now, when did you open your studio then?

Jaye Gregory: It was shortly after I graduated with a BFA that I had my first studio. I was working as a waitress at Artichoke in Webster and I found a place just up the street. I was wonderful, a little tiny studio that had been a dentist's office and I could run down to the Artichoke and sit in the bar and have a cup of coffee, chat with the other waitresses, and go back to work. It was great. I kept a studio somewhere up until the time I went back for my MFA. I decided that I couldn't afford to pay studio rent and tuition.

Blanche Touhill: Did you sell your work?

Jaye Gregory: Occasionally; not often.

Blanche Touhill: So it was your working that kept the studio going?

Jaye Gregory: Oh, yes.

Blanche Touhill: But aren't sculpture materials very expensive?

Jaye Gregory: Well, having stuff cast in bronze is very expensive. Other things are not all that expensive. Oil paint is very expensive. Once you get clay, you can use the same clay again and again. You can get by pretty cheaply unless you're casting things in bronze.

Blanche Touhill: But now, is your studio now more viable?

Jaye Gregory: Right now I have no studio.

Blanche Touhill: But you're building a new studio? No?

Jaye Gregory: I've been rehabbing a house and the idea was that we would move into the house and I would have the house we have now for my studio.

Blanche Touhill: And how is that working out?

Jaye Gregory: Not well. We won't go into that.

Blanche Touhill: So you haven't moved into your new place yet?

Jaye Gregory: No.

Blanche Touhill: But you will?

Jaye Gregory: Not likely.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, okay, all right.

Jaye Gregory: But I've made a beautiful house.

Blanche Touhill: I understand that, that you have really spent a lot of time and effort in...

Jaye Gregory: I have learned how to make cabinets; I've learned how to make drawers; I've made beautiful drawers. I bought, at Habitat for Humanity's re-store, I bought what supposedly are Dan Dierdorf's old kitchen cabinets. They're gorgeous but, of course, moving them into a smaller kitchen, some things didn't fit and needed to make more and they were custom made someplace in Minnesota or Wisconsin or the cabinets that I made match...yes! They look good.

Blanche Touhill: Now, are you selling more things?

Jaye Gregory: I have a commission right now.

Blanche Touhill: That's what I'm interested in.

Jaye Gregory: Yeah, I'm working on a piece for the Highland, Illinois Arts Council. They will be donating it to the Highland Library and it will be in the children's reading room at the library.

Blanche Touhill: And what will it be?

Jaye Gregory: It's a little girl, squatting down drawing on the sidewalk. It's, I think, going to end up being just a little over life size and it will be a super plaster. It won't be bronze. Their budget...

Blanche Touhill: How far along are you?

Jaye Gregory: The armature is finished. I've started putting clay on it, and being a bad person, I started on the face right away because the little sketch was way

too sweet and I didn't want it to be sweet. I could work on it for two more months but the main part of it is there.

Blanche Touhill: When do you have to finish?

Jaye Gregory: It's open. I don't have a time-frame that it has to be done.

Blanche Touhill: How do you get commissions? Do people advertise or do they call you or what?

Jaye Gregory: In this case, they had called Harry Webber first. He had something else going on. They wanted somebody to demonstrate at the art fair and he had something else going on and suggested that they call me. They did and I was demonstrating shortly after that at a Webster art fair so they came by, saw what I was working on, went over to my gallery, saw what I typically do and they said, "Yeah, we would like you to do something" and within 15 minutes of talking to them, we all had this kind of idea about a kid drawing with chalk. I don't know, it was just really neat. So then the big problem was figuring out something, exact pose...not exact but a close pose that everybody was happy with. For me, it had to be sculpturally interesting. For them, it had to look like a little kid but I think it's going to be a real neat piece.

Blanche Touhill: Where else do you have your work?

Jaye Gregory: I have the two pieces in the west end.

Blanche Touhill: What is the second piece?

Jaye Gregory: The news boy.

Blanche Touhill: Where is the news boy?

Jaye Gregory: It's on Lindell. It's almost at the corner of Euclid and Lindell. You see it best if you're driving north on Euclid. If you're on Lindell, you're paying attention to traffic and you don't see it.

Blanche Touhill: So if I'm coming over Euclid going north, it's on the corner?

Jaye Gregory: It's not right on the corner. The library is on the corner.

Blanche Touhill: The Schlafly Library, yes.

- Jaye Gregory: Yes, and then just to the left of that, just west of there is a parking garage. It's right in front of the parking garage.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, my goodness! Okay. I'll take another look at it or a look at it as I go down the street.
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: So you have a Chopin and you have the news boy, and?
- Jaye Gregory: I think those are the only...
- Blanche Touhill: ...two in St. Louis?
- Jaye Gregory: Well, public things.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, the others are in people's homes?
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: Do people hire you to do things for their home or for their gardens or both?
- Jaye Gregory: I have one piece, it's in the gallery and I want it so badly to be in a garden. I want it to be in bronze in a garden. I look at west end gardens and I think, right there, surrounded by ivy, yes; she would be gorgeous, but she's close to life size. She'll be very expensive to put in bronze.
- Blanche Touhill: When you say "expensive," what do you mean?
- Jaye Gregory: Forty...fifty thousand maybe.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, it would depend on the person.
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah, there are people who can afford it. Whether they're actually going into that gallery ever, I don't know. People have come to me wanting portraits of reliefs of their kids.
- Blanche Touhill: Oh, so you still do portraiture?
- Jaye Gregory: I love it. Oh, it's fun, yeah. I'm not as good at reliefs as I would like to be. It's very difficult.
- Blanche Touhill: I bet reliefs are difficult.

Jaye Gregory: Mm-hmm, but when it works, it's very exciting.

Blanche Touhill: Is it hard to do children?

Jaye Gregory: It's hard to do people from photographs. That's very difficult, even photographs that I've taken myself. You say, okay, so I can copy this photograph and then you look at the kid and it's, no, that's not it at all.

Blanche Touhill: I've often wondered about children because they have the same face in a way but it's changing.

Jaye Gregory: Yes, you can't spend a long time working on a portrait of a child.

Blanche Touhill: No, you have to be able to capture more their spirit, I think. I mean, anybody can draw their face but you have to capture something else.

Jaye Gregory: Well, you know, for me, drawing is harder than making sculpture.

Blanche Touhill: I can imagine, yes. I understand that, but sculpture has to have that same expression, that same inner soul that has to come out?

Jaye Gregory: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: But you could do it more easily when you're working with clay?

Jaye Gregory: With clay, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: So, if I said to you, what's the theme of your life, what is the theme of your life? Obviously it's art...

Jaye Gregory: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: Obviously it's sculpture...

Jaye Gregory: Mm-hmm. I think it's...and I have to go back to one of my teachers at Fontbonne: "We make things."

Blanche Touhill: You like to make things.

Jaye Gregory: We make stuff.

Blanche Touhill: Just as you like to fix your house?

- Jaye Gregory: Yeah, it's making stuff. In the house, it's making a beautiful space using the light, getting more of the light, making something that fits, making something that's beautiful.
- Blanche Touhill: So you're the opposite of your father in a way? No, no, I don't mean that because he made the space but his contribution was more theoretical, wasn't it?
- Jaye Gregory: Up here, yeah. I think it was very theoretical.
- Blanche Touhill: And your contribution is you would have made...
- Jaye Gregory: I want to do it.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, you would have made the vehicle.
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah, yeah, the physical doing of it is the joy.
- Blanche Touhill: Do you know ahead of time how it's going to look? What is the difficulty? Is it in knowing what you want...
- Jaye Gregory: ...and achieving that or realizing at some point that what you're doing is valid, maybe better than what you wanted. Some of the cabinets that I made are just so much more beautiful than what I could have anticipated, even though they were supposed to match this.
- Blanche Touhill: When you're creating a sculpture, do you have different paths you can take?
- Jaye Gregory: Oh, yeah, but at some point you have to...
- Blanche Touhill: ...take control of it?
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah, you have to decide on the path and say, this...you can do it again; you can do another one.
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, and follow that other path.
- Jaye Gregory: Yes.
- Blanche Touhill: And that's what you did with Kate Chopin in a way?
- Jaye Gregory: I think so, yeah. There were two slightly different paths.
- Blanche Touhill: But it's a creative process which sort of takes on a life of its own?

- Jaye Gregory: Yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: And you have to keep focused on where you're going but you could also change a little, couldn't you?
- Jaye Gregory: I do change.
- Blanche Touhill: You do change?
- Jaye Gregory: I do.
- Blanche Touhill: You're influenced in the creative process?
- Jaye Gregory: Sure, yeah, that the thing that you're working on starts talking to you. When I was building the cabinets, I had these fairly cheap corner clamps and in theory they make a thing square. Well, I'm putting drawers in this cabinet. It has to be square. So I get it all together, it's glued; it's nailed, and I take the big square, it's not square. I beat that poor thing into square. I took a hammer and I beat it into square. You don't do that with clay. Sometimes you have to be forceful but sometimes you have to respond to what's there, what you've already done.
- Blanche Touhill: And that precludes doing the other thing?
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah, and I think the standing back and looking at what you've done, subconsciously, who knows, and seeing, yeah, there's something really exciting there.
- Blanche Touhill: So you're proud of your work?
- Jaye Gregory: Oh, yeah. It doesn't mean that I'm proud of...I would like it to be better. I look at other sculptors' work and I think, oh, my God...
- Blanche Touhill: Yes, but you're proud of what you've done?
- Jaye Gregory: Yes, not every piece. There are pieces that, eh...
- Blanche Touhill: But see, I think that's a wonderful way to have a life, that you create something and you're proud of what you've created.
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah, that is wonderful.
- Blanche Touhill: Let me ask you two other questions: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what would your life be like?

Jaye Gregory: I can't even imagine, truly, I can't. My mother was such a talented woman. I grew up thinking that she had sacrificed everything for her kids and she told me later, no, she loved us. We were more important to her than all the other things. For a woman my age, as we came of age, we had birth control available to us. It was cheap and it was good. So we could choose. My mother couldn't choose. My grandmother couldn't choose. If you had a relationship with a man, you had children. Probably I would have been very frustrated. It's nice to think that I would have loved my children and been fulfilled by that but, for wealthy women, yeah, you can have children and have this other thing too. Without a lot of money though, children are a...trap is not the word I want but all of your energy has to go there.

Blanche Touhill: Would you have been an artist?

Jaye Gregory: I don't know. A lot would depend on finances.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, and it was the finances of your husband.

Jaye Gregory: Or your father.

Blanche Touhill: Or your father, that's right, who would leave you something.

Jaye Gregory: Yeah.

Blanche Touhill: That's right...or your mother. I mean, it was family wealth of some kind.

Jaye Gregory: Yeah. I think it was almost impossible for women to be artists of any kind.

Blanche Touhill: So let me ask my other question and then I'll be back: Is there some award that you've received that you're really very proud of or some recognition?

Jaye Gregory: It's not so much that I'm proud of it. Many years ago I got the John Gregory Memorial Prize from the National Sculpture Society.

Blanche Touhill: And what is that?

Jaye Gregory: I think it was \$50, but they only awarded...

Blanche Touhill: Oh, no, I meant, is it a national organization and you were one for the year?

Jaye Gregory: Yes.

- Blanche Touhill: And what did you submit that made you that awardee?
- Jaye Gregory: I think it was photographs of my work and I think it was several different pieces. I don't think it was one piece that got the award. Until that time, I think my husband considered my work as a self-indulgent hobby, that I might be pretty good but I think when I won that, he took me seriously.
- Blanche Touhill: And that was a turning point?
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah. I know I wanted to go to Rome. There was a big fellowship program and he refused. He said, "I'm not going to Rome for a year. I don't speak Italian." Well, neither do I. "What would I do for a year?" And it was like, this is so important to me but after I won that prize, he was quietly but much more supportive.
- Blanche Touhill: Did you get to Rome?
- Jaye Gregory: No. I got to Florence briefly, not to study, but I did go.
- Blanche Touhill: And that would be very enriching for someone...
- Jaye Gregory: Oh, it was wonderful; it was beautiful.
- Blanche Touhill: Do you think the women's movement helped you?
- Jaye Gregory: Absolutely. I think that young women now don't appreciate what the women's movement did for them. On the other hand, maybe the encouragement of the nuns was more important than actually the women's movement.
- Blanche Touhill: Well, you know, actually I think it's sort of an interesting thought: I think the nuns in many ways have not been able to get recruits because of the women's movement, because a girl can choose so many different things and still have sort of a spiritual dimension and a desire to help people but I think they were at the forefront of a lot of the creating of an individual who sort of could make their own way in the world.
- Jaye Gregory: Yeah.
- Blanche Touhill: How do you envision the next couple of years?
- Jaye Gregory: I hope to be making a lot of sculpture.
- Blanche Touhill: Would your mother and father be proud of you?

Jaye Gregory: I think so, yeah.

Blanche Touhill: And your brothers?

Jaye Gregory: Absolutely, yes, and my sister is proud of me.

Blanche Touhill: Good. And what kind of sculpture do you want to make?

Jaye Gregory: Oh, I want to make bronze; I want to make things that are not big, monumental, but bigger, life-size, things that fit outside, things that can be outside that are of a size that they can be in a garden in a public space. I like the scale of working, life-size or a little...the garden piece, when I...

Blanche Touhill: When you talk about the girl in the garden.

Jaye Gregory: Yeah. She was supposed to be under life size but I was at Fontbonne and when the Chinese girls came back after break, I realized that she was bigger than they are. So life size depends on how big you are.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, it's relative.

Jaye Gregory: Yeah, it's very relative. To a football player, they're small.

Blanche Touhill: So you're ready, really, to go into bronzes which is a very expensive but very satisfying...

Jaye Gregory: Yeah. Well, I can do most of the work myself. I would rather not but I don't trust other people to do it the way I want it done.

Blanche Touhill: Yes, I understand that.

Jaye Gregory: I did the finishing on Kate.

Blanche Touhill: Oh, you did?

Jaye Gregory: Oh, I did, but the foundry did a marvelous job. It was a beautiful casting, a really, really fine casting. They were wonderful.

Blanche Touhill: Well, I must say, I look forward to your next invitation to when you sell something that goes in a garden and I know that I will enjoy it as much as I like Kate.

Jaye Gregory: Thank you.

Blanche Touhill: Thank you very much.