ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Kat Epple

Columbia Center for Oral History Research

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Kat Epple conducted by Sara Sinclair on February 19, 2015. This interview is part of the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Transcription: Audio Transcription Center | Session #1

Interviewee: Kat Epple | Location: Fort Myers, Florida

Interviewer: Sara Sinclair | Date: February 19, 2015

Interviewer: Harrison Ferrell | Date: February 19, 2015

Q: Today is February 19, 2015 and this is Sara Sinclair with Kat Epple in Fort Myers, Florida. As I was saying, I'd just like to start with a little bit about you, some of your early memories. So if you wouldn't mind just starting with where and when you were born.

Epple: About me—not just my early memories of Bob [Rauschenberg]? I was born in Ohio and haven't lived there much since I was a child. I've always played the flute. Since I was five, I started playing instruments and music, and that's my life's passion and has been my career for I'd say all of my adult life. But it started before I was an adult. I started playing in coffeehouses.

I am known as a flutist, I play flutes, not only the regular standard jazz, classical kind of flute, but flutes from all over the world. You can see there's part of my collection there. I use that in my original compositions. The other thing I was known for was synthesizers, for playing in one of the very first synthesizer bands; one of the very few, I should say, that performed in concert on the big synthesizers, which were very unwieldy and difficult to fly and difficult to tune. So I started early in that genre and that's when I learned about John Cage and electronic music in general.

When I was living in the San Francisco area—and I actually lived in upstate Connecticut, New York—that's when I was known as half of the band Emerald Web, which was known for synthesizers. We added flutes and other acoustic instruments, and used to get terrible flak for that because the electronic musicians would say, "Why are you bringing a flute into a synthesizer studio?" And the acoustic players would say, "Why would you play a synthesizer and ruin a perfectly good acoustic instrument sound?" So we were between both of those worlds and did that for many years. In fact, my old music from the late seventies and the eighties is now being reissued. Pretty much all of the albums from those old days are being remastered and archived. I'm overseeing the archiving of the old tapes, which are being reissued by record companies mostly in Europe.

Q: How did you discover—where did you first hear about John Cage?

Epple: I learned about his music in an electronic music class. Then I met him many years later, through Bob, which was great.

Q: What was that meeting like?

Epple: It was just always fun. I think maybe the first time I met him was at the Trisha Brown performance. I cannot remember the name of the performance, but it was in Washington, D.C., I believe it was the same week as Bob's *ROCI* [*Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange*] opening at the National Gallery [of Art, 1991] and Trisha Brown was there and did this beautiful

performance. I believe that's the first time I met John Cage. [Note: premiere of Trisha Brown's *Astral Converted (50")*, with set by Rauschenberg]

Q: But you considered him an influence on your work or—?

Epple: Well yes, I performed some of his music throughout the years, but he was a pioneer of the genre I had been playing in for many years.

Q: When did you leave San Francisco?

Epple: I left San Francisco in 1989 and that's the year I met Bob.

Q: What happened next? Where did you go after that?

Epple: I came to Fort Myers. My husband and I were the band, and we had just signed a contract with Passport Records and they'd given us a cash advance to record the next album. I was thinking well, this will last us four months in San Francisco, we can really work on the album. Or we could live for a year in Fort Myers and really take time, to not only record that album, but some other projects that we wanted to do too. So we moved here and I'm still here. Fort Myers is a great place to have as a home base because I do travel a lot. After I met Bob, it was not as easy to leave. Because it's a pretty long drive from where I live to where he lived. I would go see him quite a bit and play for events. It was really great.

Q: How did you first meet?

Epple: We met at a party at the Fennings' house. He ended up being one of Bob's doctors, but at the time when we all met, Bob was very healthy. They were a wonderful couple. [Dr.] John [B.] Fenning passed away just this past year, but John and [Frances C.] Fran [Fenning] were both collectors or, after meeting Bob, became collectors. They were always art collectors, but they started collecting Bob's art and traveled some with him or met him at different events. I met him at a sushi and wine-tasting party they were having. Bob's there playing with his chopsticks, hitting the different wine glasses and wine bottles, so I picked up the wine bottles and started playing them like a flute and we had a little jam session. I thought oh, these people will never invite me back. But they did.

Q: How had you met them?

Epple: I met them through the arts scene in Fort Myers.

Q: What is the arts scene or what was the arts scene like at the time?

Epple: Fort Myers is a sweet little city. It's barely a city, but it has this really nice community of artists who are very collaborative and supportive, which you don't always see, especially in bigger cities. Coming from San Francisco, there were a lot of musicians who were collaborative and a lot of them who were competitive. I found that—especially once I started spending time

with Bob—I really enjoyed artists. I have a lot of musician friends, too, but the visual artists were fun because it was so different from the people I'd hung out with before. It was great.

Q: I interviewed [Richard] Dickie Landry last month and he also spoke about being a musician who really loved visual artists. How does it feel like a different tribe?

Epple: Let's see, how is it different? It is very different. Musicians are just as unusual, is the way I'll say it. I don't know what it is. I should've talked to Bob about that. We used to talk about similar kinds of subjects all the time. I guess musicians actually collaborate with each other more often, we're always playing with each other; visual artists, not as often, although Bob enjoyed doing that. I enjoyed hearing the way visual artists would talk about their vision and what they wanted to do, and it was something that I hadn't really thought of. With music, I have heard a lot of what musicians have, as far as their vision. There's always something new, but a lot of times it's the same blues riff or something. But artists—they seem like they don't play chord progressions as much, especially contemporary artists.

That's the way I would talk to Bob about art and music. He would see me looking at a new piece he might have done and he would ask me—it wasn't what I think, it wasn't "Do I have your approval?" It was more like "What do you think about it?" Not "How is it?" I would just describe what impression I would get from it, knowing not to try to talk like an art critic. He did not care for art critics in general. I would see it as a composition of music and so we would talk about that a lot, music and visual art, and how they're the same thing, just somewhat different. I

think that visual artists aren't appreciated as much, in general. Although the artists who are out there are ostracized as are musicians who are out there.

Q: Well, I guess music keeps us company a lot more. So music occupies maybe a larger space in most people's lives.

Epple: I think people are a little more tolerant of something they don't understand musically. You hear people all the time, seeing a visual work of art and saying, "I could do that," or, "My kid could do that." Well that's because you've never really tried to do art. Almost everybody's tried to play a trumpet or something and realizes how hard it is. But everybody can get a paintbrush and thinks they can create art.

Q: I'm curious what you mean when you say you would look at a piece and he would say, "Tell me what you think." Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Epple: Gosh. Well—there's a lot of jazz in that one: the melody, with the hand that's pushing, and nature. I can hear music that would have all of those things happening at once or one at a time.

Q: So when you look at a piece of work, you are hearing a sound. You're hearing a score?

Epple: It's almost like a musical score, but it's more like when I compose; how the music, not even how it feels, but—it's like which instruments would be that color? It's like I can hear it as

either sound or just an overall—how to explain that? A lot of times when I compose, I don't actually always hear the music, but I know exactly what has to come next. That's what I think.

Q: And is the hand the melody because it's the most pronounced image in the piece?

Epple: Well yes, but it's also the most concrete. The other parts are a music bed and the string section.

Q: So when you would have these conversations, do you think that he was also interested in the inverse of that? So you were looking at painting and you were seeing sound. Could he then hear sound and see painting?

Epple: I think it wasn't that he would see painting, but he would play music, and I have air-quotes going on here. He used the instrument, whatever it was, like he would a paintbrush. When he would play music, like with that piano that's out there or I would give him instruments, a lot of people would, a harmonica or whatever—we would kid because it wasn't always musical when he would play. But it was very collaborative when he would play music with someone else. He wasn't just bam, bam, bam—it sounded like that, but you realized no, he's being very forceful in his playing, but he was interacting. He was one of the most collaborative musicians I've ever played with, with really no music technique at all. But the real feeling for music—if he had wanted to spend time with an instrument he would've been able to, but he was not just abstract, but free-thinking in his creating art, in general. It probably would have been hard to tie him down to playing a violin the way you're supposed to.

Kat Epple and Rauschenberg with Laury Getford in the background, Captiva, Florida, ca. 1999

Q: You said that he was interactive. Like when he was pounding on the piano, how do you mean that that was interactive?

Epple: He would pound on the piano, but then allow some space so that if I were playing a flute or a kalimba or something, there would be space for that color for a little while. It wasn't just a big canvas painted brown; there might be some brown in there, but there were also little lines of red.

Q: You were just saying that it may have been hard to tie him down to learning technique associated with playing a particular instrument and that reminded me, I read something that you said about your own music training and that you were discouraged by some of the rigid methods that your music professors were teaching, which reminded me of him and the stories that he tells about studying with Josef Albers at Black Mountain College [North Carolina]. That must have been something that you talked about.

Epple: Yes. I think that that's one of the things that he really appreciated about me. I'm pretty soft-spoken, but musically pretty fearless too, I hope. But it took a while for me to be able to just say, "Well, F you, this is what I'm hearing." I had that happen with a flute teacher who told me—this was in college—she said that if I continued to play in the rock band I was playing in at the time, that she would no longer agree to be my teacher. I said, "Okay, got to go," because the rock band was a lot more fun than sitting quietly playing the flute. It was a really good decision for me to make because teachers who have that kind of attitude can really push you down so you lose your unique voice and also make you lose your confidence, especially women. I think it's best to get away from teachers like that if you want to do something unique. Bob eventually got away too and he did okay. [Laughs]

Q: So after the first time you met, with the impromptu session with the bottles and chopsticks, what were the next meetings like with him? How did you guys become friends?

Epple: My husband [Bob Stohl] was the other member of the band and we all met that night. He actually died later that year in an accident, but my husband and Bob and I got together a few times to play some music and in fact that album that I sent you—

Q: I haven't received it yet. I'm sure it'll be there for me when I get back.

Epple: We recorded that early into our friendship. I believe there's video of it somewhere too. I was playing that night. We played it that night in what is the Beach House [on Rauschenberg's

property in Captiva, Florida]. It was ’89. As we did that and he played with us, we started to talk more and more about music.

Rauschenberg and Kat Epple,
Rauschenberg’s Laika Lane studio, Captiva,
Florida, ca. 1992. Photo: Courtesy Kat Epple

Anytime he was having a party or something he’d invite us and then he invited us to play at the ROCI opening at National Gallery. Unfortunately, my husband passed away before that happened. I still played for that, which was in the contemporary wing. Bob had me play up in one of the catwalks. After that, he invited me to play for a lot of his events. Every year I would go back to the National Gallery with him to play for the Lab School of Washington events. They’d have a reception for the grant winners who were there for the training. I remember one of the things I would do there is—I think there’s a little motor that turns the [Alexander] Calder and at night I guess they must turn it off. At night when you go in, a lot of times it’s just completely still. I would start playing the bass flute and get the Calder to move. I did that every year and I eventually mentioned it to Bob, that I would get this huge mobile to start to move just with the sound. I remember one year somebody was trying to talk to him and he said, “Wait a second,”

and he just looked up. Then I looked around and noticed all the security guards were looking up anytime I would play because they noticed too. Nobody else did, but the security guards knew. That was another event I'd play with Bob every year, for twenty years, I guess. The last few years he wasn't well enough to go, but he went for probably fifteen, more or less. When he wasn't able to travel to the Lab School he would send me and Bradley [J. Jeffries].

Q: What else do you remember about the first show that you played in Washington? Is that the first time you traveled with Bob?

Epple: Let me think. Yes, I think it was. A lot of us went. That particular time, I was staying in a different hotel, but I was there with Lawrence Voytek and a lot of the other staff who were there. We had a blast. It seemed like almost every night there was some performance or party. When you traveled with Bob, it was like traveling with a rock star. It seemed like you were on the guest list. When I flew to Ferrara, it's like, I don't know anybody in Ferrara, Italy, but as soon as I arrived I got a phone call and they said, "Get dressed quick, we're going to a dinner party that the mayor is throwing for us." So I just threw nicer clothes on and went, and it was this beautiful, elegant dinner party at the best restaurant in town that the mayor threw for Bob. Any chance he could, Bob would invite me if I were traveling. There were a lot of those—I felt like—not a party crasher, but—because I was invited, but it was kind of—that's also something you had to do when you traveled with Bob, just be open for a last-minute invitation to something spectacular. Because you'd never know.

Q: I met Janet [Begneaud, née Rauschenberg], his sister, last month, and she was telling me about how she would pack for travels with him. She's like, "You needed one comfortable thing and then one thing for a nice afternoon out and then you needed one really fancy outfit. You never knew what was going to happen."

Epple: And it usually did happen. Something usually did happen. Yes, that's true.

Q: What's been interesting for me coming here is that I've been in New York so I'm around the [Robert Rauschenberg] Foundation there, but this is the place where he lived for a long time and where a lot of the work—

Epple: Yes, he called this home. He did.

Q: Yes, where the work was made. So I think it's interesting from your perspective, being here with him and then going to the outside world. It must have been kind of the reverse observation that I'm having. So do you remember what your impressions were about how the art world was, interacting with him?

Epple: It was very interesting when you traveled with him. Like I said, it was like traveling with a rock star. But he was so beloved, it wasn't like a rock star exactly, it wasn't just people who only loved his work. It was amazing, you'd go to an art opening with him and he would hold court because there'd be people waiting in line. It wasn't like they just wanted to see him or something. Almost everyone had something special they thought of ahead of time they were

going to say to him. So often it would be something like, “You’re the reason I became an artist,” and, “You’re such an inspiration.” It was always something meaningful. So that was interesting to me; it wasn’t like traveling with somebody because they’re famous. He was a beloved person. People who’d never met him loved him so much.

When I would be there with him—and all of us who traveled with him would do this—we would watch—most people were just really nice and then they’d step aside and let somebody else go. But every once in a while, somebody would make him uncomfortable, somebody would ask him for money or something uncomfortable. He would give me one of those looks and I’d go over and he would take my hand and squeeze my hand so hard and it was like, “Get me out of here!” So I would act like this dumb woman and say, “Oh Bob, I’m so thirsty, will you go with me to get some wine at the bar?” I’ve even see people look at me like, “Can’t you get your own damn glass of wine? I’m talking to him here.” He would always say, “No, no. I’m going to go with her to help her get a drink.” I can definitely get a drink, but to just help him break away from those conversations.

He would go to events that had just beautiful food and he wouldn’t eat because, even before he was in a wheelchair, he couldn’t get a chance to even put a bite in his mouth without somebody asking him a question. And when I played flute at these events, I couldn’t eat because I usually don’t eat if I’m playing the flute. So we would get a drink and we’d toast and Bob said, “Kat, we’ve turned down some of the finest food in the world at events like this.” Because we’d see it go by and say, “Oh, that looks good.”

It was interesting to travel with him. In Europe it was even more so. I remember in Ferrara, Italy, people were waiting around the block to come in [note: *Rauschenberg*, Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara, 2004]. It was almost like, I don't want to say Disneyland because that's not exactly how I want to say it, but people would wait a long time to get in to see the show and they'd file through, look at everything, and talk to Bob. I think Bob was in one of the middle rooms at that time and that would make a bottleneck so that nobody could get past. I remember he said, "Kat, I want you to come in here and play flute in this room," where he was. I said, "Oh, why is that?" and he said, "Well, because it'll kind of relieve some of the—" not nervousness, he used a better word, but to get the energy flowing again. He was very astute about energy. That was an interesting, interesting experience.

Q: What else did he say about energy?

Epple: He probably would never use the term, but he always, I think, was very attuned to it. Like the Fish House [on Rauschenberg's property in Captiva], he loved the energy there, that was something he held as very sacred, as does almost anyone who goes there, you feel that. He was a pretty good judge of character too. There are notable exceptions where he perhaps gave people more of his energy than was healthy for him, but in general he would be able to size a person's energy up pretty quickly and move away if it wasn't compatible with his artistic vision.

Q: What kind of qualities did he like in other people?

Epple: He liked somebody who's open-minded and somebody who's fun and funny. I think some of the people he enjoyed talking to really didn't understand art, but they were genuine people with a passion for life. I think that's it. I remember so many times we'd be at some fancy dinner, gala, or something, where there are art collectors all around and whoever the host was, who was trying to introduce Bob to all these collectors, would look around and say, "Where's Bob?" He'd be over talking to the waiter or the person who's sweeping up or something. Sometimes they'd say, "Can you go get him?" And he'd say something about, "I think these people are more interesting." Not all the collectors, but I can understand that at some of those events where the people are not there for the art, they're there for some other reason, making an appearance or whatever.

Q: Did he express frustrations about that part of his work?

Epple: Well, sometimes you'd see him grow impatient, but I don't think he put up with it too much. He wasn't that frustrated because he didn't allow it to be that much of a handicap or a factor.

Q: How did he describe ROCI to you?

Epple: Artists could go into a troubled place and create art without making it political. It would be about humanity and not politics. I thought that was a pretty good concept.

Q: What other ROCI shows did you play?

Epple: Well, I'm trying to think. The final ROCI show, I believe, was the one at the National Gallery, so I got in there at the tail end of that. But after that I played the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum] retrospective [*Robert Rauschenberg*] in New York [1997–98] and then in Bilbao, the Guggenheim [Museum Bilbao, Spain, 1998–99] there. At the one in New York, Bob asked me if I would play, so I called the museum—I was going to bring my own sound system—and they said, "No, don't bother, we've got a band and you can play through their sound system." I'm thinking okay, well, they probably have a band for a preliminary event or whatever. I get in there to set up my microphone and the band says, "Oh no, you won't be playing, we're playing tonight." I said, "Well, Mr. Rauschenberg invited me to play." One of the guys said, "Okay, well, you can play during our break." I had to ask, "Well, can I play through your sound system?" They wouldn't let me play through their main sound system, but they said, "You can play through this," and it was a little amplifier, just a little guitar amp. I thought that's not going to do much. I dragged it out to the middle and aimed it straight up because it was in the Guggenheim, that main area—if everybody's drinking wine and talking, you don't want to be that loud. So I pointed it up and I started to play. Of course nobody around me could even hear me, I just tried to keep people from knocking over my mic stand. Then I looked up at the higher floors and people all around were looking at me over the railing from the upper floors and they could all hear my music because the sound was just going straight up. So as people wound down the spiral tower there, they would come up and find me, they'd say, "Oh your music was so beautiful up there. Thank you so much for playing."

The band that was also playing at the opening says, “Okay, it’s time for us to play,” and they play again for forty minutes, then they say, “Okay, you can play again,” in a condescending manner. I played again, got a really good response from people up there on the floors above, and then I see Bob had come in, right before I started this second set, and he heard me and I could see him looking all around, “Where is she? Where is she?” I finished and let the band have their amp back and I thought okay, now I’m done, Bob’s heard me. Bob goes through the crowd as everybody’s trying to talk to him, he makes a beeline for me and he says, “Kat, why did you let that other band play? They’re like a square band in a round hole.” [Laughs] Because they were playing jazz, and I love jazz and Bob did too, but this was straight-ahead jazz in this noisy, noisy room so all they were doing was fighting with the conversations. With me, I was just playing wafting music because that’s all I could do that would work for the room. Bob liked the fact that I would play the room and I wouldn’t try to play my songs in a big cavern like that. Play what a cavern’s music should be. That’s what I enjoyed doing. I think he appreciated the fact that I would play the room, the environment.

Q: Yes, I wanted to ask you about that, about the feeling of playing these galleries and how that might be different from playing a concert, where people come and they’re there to listen to the music and to watch and observe. It’s interesting.

Epple: It’s very different because you do have people who are listening, but it’s also part of the art opening or museum opening. People are there to talk and to have a glass of wine. I don’t take it personally at all. I just go into a mode where I am communicating or communing I guess is a better word, with the space. I have fun with that. The people who catch the fact that that’s

happening enjoy it and other people who don't, it still creates a nice ambiance for the room and it's very different without live music. I'm sure you feel that too, when you go into an event and there's live music. It changes the energy of the space. Even if it's terrible music, it makes a big difference.

Q: Was there a favorite space for you?

Epple: Gosh. I know which one is my favorite, actually. Bilbao was great, but I think my favorite interactive space was at the Guggenheim in Venice, the Peggy Guggenheim [Collection], I was playing there for Bob's memorial [May 29, 2009]. Mark Pace was putting together the details of the event and he had hired a sound system for me to play through, two big speakers on stands. We aimed one towards the courtyard where the speeches were going to be made and I was supposed to play as people arrived and after the speeches. The other speaker we aimed out at the Grand Canal. The concept originally was that, because most people would be arriving by boat, they'll hear the music as they arrive. So that was, "Oh, that'll be fun." What ended up also happening is that I was up on the rooftop so the people in the Grand Canal could hear the sound of the flute and see the silhouette of a flute player, so I got so many reactions from people in the gondolas and the water taxis. The gondoliers, they came up and they would see me and I would play a music passage and then they would sing opera back at me. Then I would play another passage and they would answer musically. [Laughs] It was wonderful. Then they would have to move on because their tourist fares probably wanted to move on, but there would be somebody else, in a kayak, who would react with whistling back. I had a lot of applause from people who

were going by in the *vaporettos*. I think that was one of the most fun interactive spaces that I played for Bob. Yes, all sorts of boats going by with all sorts of reactions.

Q: Who else participated in that particular memorial?

Epple: Well—I was the only musician—that was really the European memorial so there were a lot of Europeans from all over. A Swiss family [José and Barbara Fichmann and their sons Daniel and Dustin] was there who also had a home on Sanibel [Island, Florida], that's how they knew Bob. I think Mary Lynn [Kotz] was there. So there were a few scheduled people to talk and then they invited anyone to get up and talk. So people were getting up to speak in all different languages—mostly Italian, but some English. And this little boy from the Swiss family, who must've been ten at the time, he gets ready and gets the microphone and we're all thinking, "Oh my god," and his parents are right there and they're thinking, "Oh my god, what's our little boy going to say?" His name's Dustin. I could see him thinking because he speaks some Italian and he speaks German, but he decided to speak in English for this because that's what he spoke to Bob. He talked about how the first thing he remembers about Bob was his big shoes. He talked about Bob coming to their house and getting off the elevator—Bob was in a wheelchair when Dustin first met him—and he remembers his big shoes coming first out of the elevator. That was very cute.

There was something else that I just thought of that was related to that. I don't know if it was the Guggenheim or—I guess it's gone. Hmm. I don't know. I've got a lot of stories.

Q: So tell me about the Lab School events.

Epple: They were really amazing and the Lab School is amazing. At that time, Sally [Lieberman] Smith, the founder of the school, was still there, and as soon as we arrived, we'd have to get dressed and go meet Sally for dinner every time. Bob would say to Sally, "Pick out the best restaurant, the favorite place you've always wanted to go." I ate at all of the finest restaurants in Washington, D.C. for that fifteen years or whatever it was. Bob would, of course, always invite me. In fact I remember the first year I went, they were staying at the Ritz[-Carlton] and they had me at the Marriott or some perfectly nice place, beautiful place, and Bob said, "I don't want Kat staying at a different hotel. She's all by herself there. She should stay at whatever hotel we're in." So I stayed at the Ritz from then on. It was very sweet of him. He was worried that I was too far away, that if I needed help I'd be too far. Of course when we traveled as a whole entourage, I'd be with the others, the staff, who were my friends, so I'd be okay. But when it was just me and Darryl [R. Pottorf] and him, he wanted me to stay in the same hotels where they were.

Sally Smith was this colorful, brilliant, funny, passionate person who started the school back when we really didn't have words for dyslexia and other learning disabilities. Her son had a learning disability and she just tried everything. That's how she really developed this, through trying to help her own son. I can't recall what he ended up doing, but he went to college and he did fine. It really teaches children with learning differences, that's what they always called it, teaching them through their own strengths, especially through art. It's like oh my god, all schools should be like this. These kids knew more than most kids you talk to that go to regular mainstream schools. They had not only knowledge of 1492 or whatever dates, but—the way they

studied history—it was different clubs, so you weren't in first grade, you were in a club, and eventually you would move to the next club or not if you weren't progressing fast enough. They started in the caveman club so they studied prehistory for that whole year. Then they'd move up and they'd have an understanding of history because they were living history through different eras. Industrial age, they had all these different eras. It was just a beautiful thing.

Bob first got affiliated with them when he was awarded Outstanding Achievers with Learning Disabilities Award [1985]. It was given, I think, to Tom Cruise and Cher that same year. Bob said that was probably the most meaningful award he ever got because he grew up being told that he was dimwitted and not very smart, and he's this brilliant person. He went to this awards ceremony and just fell in love with the school and with Sally Smith and what she was doing. After that, he established this Foundation that would bring in teachers who were teaching special education classes, but also teachers who were teaching elementary public school—they were all art teachers—and they would come and get all of this information about how to teach the children who were falling through the cracks using art, not through Bob but through this whole staff of teachers. It was just brilliant the way they would go through exercises to help these teachers to understand, maybe this child is disruptive because of this. [Note: The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in partnership with the Lab School of Washington, D.C., has sponsored an annual training program for educators since 1994.]

Bob would always say that the school is teaching, maybe forty teachers this week, and they go out as representatives and reach forty other children and/or teachers. It was really important to him, it really was. After he established this whole program, every year they would have

Rauschenberg Day, when Bob would come in. We'd go into the school and they'd have a whole performance that they made up just for Bob. They would make their own costumes out of cardboard boxes, but it wasn't just simple, it would be huge sculptures and it was some of the most innovative art I've ever seen. And the kids would perform for Bob. He would always be crying like a baby by the end of it, because it was so moving. They'd do dance performances, because they had a great dance program and read poetry that they'd written. So it was really very moving. It was great to be a part of that.

Q: And you would play?

Epple: I would play for—Bob's other concept for this was also that not only these teachers come in and they get put up in a nice hotel and they have wonderful food, each meal is provided, but then at the end of the teaching event, they would have a really nice dinner in their honor. We did it in the National Gallery for many years and then moved it to the Corcoran Gallery [of Art, Washington, D.C.]. But his concept was to treat these people like they are the valued rock stars of their school. It was so amazing how it was so moving to these teachers. They were in tears, especially by the end, because they'd all made such good friends with each other. They all stay in touch and talk about different techniques they've learned. So it created all these networks. It was kind of like going away to summer camp because these teachers all spent all day in the classroom learning and then having meals together and that was part of Bob's concept. It was an important part of the workshop. This was Bob and Sally Smith's concept: not only are they learning specific things, they're getting this networking done where they have some support. The first day we would go in and listen to their stories and they would talk about, "Well, I'm an art

teacher for a high school with a thousand kids," and she's the only art teacher. I always found that interesting. One of them said, "Well, they don't give me a room, they let me use whatever room is available and I have a cart," as if art is like, "Oh, damn, we have to include art in our curriculum," just give them a pushcart and they can take whatever is left over. So for them to be treated like they were guests of honor at an important event really meant a lot to them. It was really beautiful. Maybe they're still continuing with that. Of course Sally is gone and so is Bob, but I'm sure they must still have Rauschenberg Day.

Q: When else would you travel with him to New York?

Epple: For a lot of his gallery openings. I played for the [M.] Knoedler [New York] and the Gagosian [Gallery, New York]. Any kind of important art opening, if I could possibly get away from work and do it, or if he hired me to come up for it, which would be pretty often. I remember I went up for the book signing release party for Mary Lynn's book, the first printing of it [*Rauschenberg: Art and Life*, 1990]. I think that was at the New School [New York].

[INTERRUPTION]

Epple: We were talking about the Lab School. I think that pretty much covered that.

Q: So let's talk about Captiva. One of the things that people have said to me is that part of the reason Bob left New York is that he wanted to be somewhere quieter, where he could work and leave the busy, bustling scene behind. Although it does sound like this place had its own scene.

And also I've heard a lot about how he really loved to have a sense of community. Maybe you could talk a little bit about the community that formed around him here.

Rauschenberg's friends and staff in front of his final painting, Untitled *(Runt)* (2008) in his studio, Captiva, Florida, 2008. Standing, left to right: Phillip Woods, Darryl Pottorf, Kevin Pottorf, Ed Chappell, and Mark Pace; sitting: June Getford, Lauren Getford, Matt Hall, Lawrence Voytek, Bradley Jeffries, Kat Epple, and Jonas Stirner

Epple: As I was saying before, a lot of the people he really loved to talk to weren't necessarily that knowledgeable about art or what he did as an artist, but they were genuine people, maybe a boat captain or something that was similar to art. Whatever it was they did, they loved it. He could hang out at the local places; he was a local celebrity. But it wasn't like people would just talk to him like he was a famous guy, it was just—there's our local celebrity and it's Bob. He could be just a guy they all liked. I'm sure he could do that in some places in New York.

We were talking before about the energy and I think that's a big part of it too. He has said that when he first came to Captiva he just loved the light and also the energy of the place. I remember so many times, he would watch a bird or an otter or a manatee or something, and it was always fun to see. He'd be in a conversation and something would catch his eye and you realized okay, you can talk, but he's not going to hear it. Once you got to know him better, you would just stop

talking, and then the bird would fly off and he would be right back. The way he watched a bird or any animal, a dog, he loved dogs, the way he would watch them move, you could see he was just zoned, so focused in on that animal. And plants.

I think it was just about as different as you can get. I love New York and I love Captiva, but they are very different places. There was also room to really work and keep his stuff, like a huge pile of metal he would collect. I think that was where he collected all this metal, in this area, so to have that. For a long time, before he moved into his big house and the big studio, he was just creating art in two small spaces. I'm sure that he enjoyed having the larger space. I don't remember him ever complaining. He just loved to create art all night. He was definitely a night owl. I've seen him paint all night and play music all night, and we danced all night a few times. He loved to dance too. But I think it was the energy. I'm sure he also really enjoyed having his friends come visit him, showing off what a beautiful island it is.

Q: Were there many guests?

Epple: Yes, especially after he got enough room for people to stay. Although a lot of his friends who would come to visit could stay in one of the little hotels or resorts there. He also would have people who couldn't necessarily afford to pay for it. It was a mixture of both. Interesting people would come through there. Norman [M.] Lear and Sharon Stone, David Byrne. David Byrne and his wife and I think his daughter were all staying there for at least a week, and David was there to write his new album. So he called Bob and told Bob and all of Bob's people that they were invited to hear the premiere of the album in the Fish House. It was only a few of us, but

somebody, probably Lawrence, has the video of that night. David Byrne played this music from that album for the first time. It was the premiere. So that was an interesting person to come through. Gosh, I'm sure Bradley could tell you all the people because she would help make travel arrangements, all that.

Who else went through there? I just remember meeting so many cool people. Wolfgang Puck came out to cook. Gosh, it was always somebody. They were interesting people from all different kinds of disciplines who would come through there. It was always interesting.

Q: Can you talk about what a normal day or night hanging out with Bob might look like?

Epple: Well, it changed through the years, but early on, he was always—well, if it was Christmas or something, then he would take the day off, but otherwise he pretty much always wanted to work late. Usually if he was going to invite me over, it would be for dinner, and then if he wanted to socialize, he would, but otherwise I would just hang out with him in the studio. There would usually be somebody helping him. A lot of times, if it was a big screenprint or something, it was a two-person job, and I was not trained properly to help him do that, so he would have Darryl or Kevin [Pottorf]—those are the ones who usually helped him. Lawrence sometimes would be there to help paint, or sculpt, or whatever they were doing, and I would just sit there and we'd talk.

Towards the last few years, I would call every Sunday morning, not too early because I had to wait until he would be up, but I would call and say, "Hey Bob, do you want company?" On

Sunday, all of his staff would go home to their families. So a lot of times he'd be there—not by himself, there was always somebody there helping, or especially towards the later years, there would be a nurse on the property—but there wouldn't be any of his friends there. For years I would call and he'd say, "No, I'm really busy, can't come over, we can't get together today." But towards the later years, I would think okay, well, he's probably busy, and I started spending every Sunday out there on Captiva because he really appreciated having the company and having somebody to have dinner with, and to sit and talk with. He was, of course, friends—or at least friendly—with all of the nurses, but they also had work to do. So I would just hang out with him, which was great, and sometimes stay over, sometimes not, depending on how late we stayed up.

In the earlier years when I knew him, like the early nineties, mostly he would get up and take care of correspondence, et cetera, all the business work, and then have dinner, and then go to work. That's what he really looked forward to doing, going to work.

Q: Are there any particular conversations that you recall often?

Epple: Yes, the conversation about art and music. He would also tell me all these stories. I wish I had a recorder going when he would tell me these stories. He would start to talk about, "Oh Kat, you should have come," and he would hit real hard—you probably heard that before—and he would say, "You should have come to this party," and he would start telling me about this party. It wasn't like he didn't realize it was a long time ago, but he was recalling, "Oh, there was this party," something would remind him and he'd say something like, "And then [James] Jim Rosenquist," only he'd just say Jim, "Jim came over and—" this is just kind of an extrapolation,

not it specifically, but it would be something similar to this, “and then Miles Davis was there and we were waiting for them to play. They brought their whole band into the house, but they wouldn’t play. Then I finally figured out they were waiting for us to pay them.” He would talk about parties or events that he enjoyed with his friends, and would say, “Oh Kat, you would’ve loved it, you should’ve been there.” I’m realizing that he is describing a party that happened in the early sixties. It’s like yes, I was four years old at the time, but I would love it today. It would’ve been fun to hang out with him in those days. He would talk about experiences like that quite a bit.

He pretty much always had the television on. I’m sure he would sit and watch a movie, but usually during his days when he wanted to work, it was not a movie; he watched the soap operas, but he also would watch cooking shows or something like that because I think it helped if there was not a lot of emotional content, like in a cooking show, you could see he was just kind of circulating ideas. If it’s a heavy movie or something, it pulls you in, and he wanted something, I think, that was like a background. He would even have that going in the studio when he was painting. He’d have some kind of television going all the time and it was almost impossible to understand what was being said on the television because it was such a big echoey room. It really was more of an audio wall of sound.

Q: Do you think it fulfilled a certain purpose?

Epple: Yes, I think somehow it helped him to focus. I think so. I don’t know how. It probably was also a way for him not to have to carry on a conversation because it was something going

on. I noticed, a lot of times, we'd be sitting watching golf, he loved Tiger, so anytime [Eldrick Tont] Tiger Woods was playing on a Sunday when I would go visit him, he would sit there and watch golf. You could see he was watching the TV, but he wasn't completely focused on that, because he would say something that made you realize oh, he's been thinking about that for several minutes because it'd be something either so impactful or something that he talks about that he just realized or maybe he'd bring up a difficult subject like one of his dogs is ill or something; it would be something where it took him a little while to formulate the thought. He'd given it a lot of thought and he would just, during the middle of a cooking show or golf, say something really important. It was pretty cool.

Q: You said that he liked to tell stories. Did he have favorite stories that he liked to tell?

Epple: Well, he's got some really fun stories about back in Port Arthur [Texas], where he lived, about his mother, and about getting on the train and just going. He liked to talk about when he worked at a mental institution. He talked about the people, about how he really connected with the people there. [Note: While in the U.S. Navy, Rauschenberg worked as a neuropsychiatric technician in the Navy Hospital Corps, while stationed at Camp Pendleton, San Diego, 1944–45.]

Q: Did he say more about them or that?

Epple: Yes, he talked quite a bit about that. I think it was an important perspective for him, to see people with such alternative ways of thinking, whether it was healthy or good or not, but it

wasn't all just cut and dry like what he'd seen back in his early days in Texas, where he really was a square peg in a round hole there. I can't imagine him as a little boy surviving that. Art wasn't even considered anything of value. You've probably heard him tell the story where he went to an art museum and saw paintings and asked somebody, "What are these?" They explained that people paint these and he was so amazed that somebody could do that and get paid for it and that's when he said, "That's what I want to do." It had never occurred to him before. He hadn't been exposed to art before.

Q: When do you think he stopped feeling like a square peg in a round hole?

Epple: Probably never. I think not. I think he just learned to appreciate it and make the most of it and have fun with it. When you see the people he would spend time with, a lot of them were in the same position, condition. If someone was too, I don't know what would be the word, I was going to say all put together, but that's not it. If somebody was thinking, "Well, I've accomplished it, I've got it all figured out," I think that was not somebody he was really close to. But he seemed to manage to appreciate almost everyone, except people who were mean to animals or to kids, to children. But I guess that's just about anybody. [Laughs] I hope I don't have any friends who are mean like that. He was, as I said, such a nature lover and so interested in the environment and the health of the environment. But I think he always felt like a square peg in a round hole and became not only comfortable, but wore it as a badge of honor.

I learned so much from him in that way. Also, I've always been very committed to music and my music career, and he really helped me feel more valid in my own stance with that. You really get

more people telling you that you should be doing it differently and Bob never did that, and to see how genuine he was, he really wasn't putting on airs, he was being who he was. He liked the big fancy events, but then he'd wear these fantastic, colorful, beautiful suits, and he could also look beautiful in a standard tux. He just was very thoughtful about what he did artistically and also in life. I think he really thought about it a lot. Trying not to do harm to people. Although sometimes he'd be painfully honest with you. If you asked his opinion about something, you better be prepared to get it. [Laughs]

Q: Anything in particular come to mind?

Epple: [Laughs] No, but I've seen him do that to a lot of people. I think it was maybe being honest and maybe frustrated, but nothing in particular that I will say. Hardly anyone was immune to that. I was more immune than others, but he would still do that sometimes and then just be super loving after saying it. [Laughs]

Q: What kinds of things frustrated him?

Epple: Well, not related to that as far as other people go, but I know that it was very frustrating for him to read due to the dyslexia. It always was. He could read, but it took a lot more effort than if someone would read the page to him. He was so eloquent with the spoken word. He created words and he would turn a phrase that was just so brilliant and he was really quick with it, but to look at—seeing him when he would read a letter—you could see he was getting the

words, but then it was an extra step to think about how the sentences were put together. I know that reading frustrated him.

When he was working on art and the materials didn't cooperate or whatever they were trying to do, he would usually just do it his own way anyway. Probably that's it: the rules that he couldn't see the necessity for really frustrated him. And any day when he couldn't create art because a collector was coming in and they had to see them, or something, that was frustrating. It's like there are worse problems in the world than having someone want to come and see your art.

Q: You've said that he was a huge influence or maybe even the biggest influence on you. Can you speak a little bit more about that? That's interesting to think that you cite a visual artist as being your greatest influence when you're a musical artist.

Epple: I think he approached his art more similarly to me than other musicians I've met. I know some really spectacular musicians, but somehow Bob, maybe because I was closer to him, but also the way he would talk about his art was more similar to how I think about my own art, my music. I also think that, when we traveled, to see him comfortable in all of these different settings was very impactful on me. I feel like I've always had an open mind, but I think that spending the time with him really opened my mind, in a way, wider than I would've ever known I was missing before.

Q: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Epple: Just to see the big picture, maybe, is what it is. To see how visual arts and music and politics and environment, how it all does fit together in a complete circuit. Yes. I think that's a big part of it.

Q: And what can you say about how he saw all those things fitting together?

Epple: For him it was all parts of a puzzle—and the pieces would fit together. Before I met Bob, when I was younger, I thought well, that's over there, meaning a war, people starving, or environmental problems, and that's here and I have no power to do anything. But when you see it as yes, you do, it might be slight at first, but they are all pieces of the puzzle. Seeing how Bob could relate, or communicate with, the poorest person on the street and the presidents or people who were very high-powered and celebrities, et cetera, that really helped me too. I think I always knew this on some level because I always had very well-known musician friends and Carl Sagan, people like that whom I really admire; but to be in one-to-one conversations with these people, knowing not to make them uncomfortable because they're well-known and knowing how to just be yourself. I think that's a big part of it, because I'm enough just who I am. I can always improve, I can be better, but when you meet someone and you present yourself like, "This is who I am. I'm proud to be this person." People of all kinds like that. I'm not trying to pretend to be someone, I'm trying to live genuinely and be who I really am and not who other people think I should be.

Q: It sounds like he was, for the most part, pretty unfazed by, as you said, celebrities, politicians, kings, queens. Did you ever see an exception to that? Did you ever see Bob kind of like wow?

Epple: I think he was a little bit star-struck with Cher. Well, since this might be public—and then, as he got to know her better, I think he realized that she's not really different. I mean, she is a talented person. I'm trying to think of anybody else. I think he was kind of in awe of musicians. He appreciated all kinds of passion in people. If it was somebody who was a sailboat captain, to him that's as good as being a famous actor or something. This reminds me of some other people who would come through Captiva and then I also saw in New York. Like Meryl Streep was a good friend, you probably heard that before. I went to one party with Meryl and Sigourney Weaver was there. Interesting groups of people would come through.

Q: So who did Bob love?

Epple: I think he loved a lot of people, probably in different ways, but also in the genuine, spiritual sense of the word. He loved his [former] wife, Susan [Weil Kirschenbaum], and his family. I think he kept a love for any former lovers who he might have remained friends with, many of them. On Christmas he would want to see the staff and he would always invite me. That's pretty much it. On holidays, that's who he wanted to spend the holiday with—he could've gone anywhere, been with anyone. That's what he would do. You would see so many people he really loved, like I know he was very close to Trisha Brown. Who else comes to mind? Darryl and the Captiva staff. I know there's a lot of them, I'm trying to think of when we'd go out to dinner, because usually he would cook or Darryl would cook, but when we'd go out, who—oh, Dorothy. He loved Dorothy Lichtenstein and Lauren, the model.

Q: Lauren Bacall?

Epple: Not Bacall. Hutton. Lauren Hutton. Who in New York he would always want to have come over and sit with him. I know he loved [Donald] Don Saff and Ruth [Saff].

Q: Ruth who?

Epple: Don's wife. And [Sidney B.] Sid [Felsen] and Joni [Moisant Weyl]. It's a long list. There were people he really liked and enjoyed, but there were people that you could tell he had that really close spiritual love and concern for. Those are the only ones who come to mind. I'm sure I'm forgetting at least a hundred. He knew thousands of people on a first-name basis so if there were a hundred, that's—

Q: How do you think he saw you? As a little sister? As an artist friend?

Epple: I don't know. It's interesting that—I don't think it was—I don't know. [Laughs] He thought I was hilarious, I know that, because I have kind of a dry sense of humor and so I would say things that he thought were funny that nobody else would say. I don't have any of his works here that he gave me, but he'd give me artworks that had nudes on them almost every time. It's like, I don't know, just to embarrass me or I don't know. A lot of times he'd invite me to play for a gallery opening or something and then I'd get my flute out and play a little bit, but then he would just distract me and start me in a conversation or hold my hand or something. So I know that part of the reason he invited me was to be there with him.

I know that he had several people he liked to do this with, but he would like to walk into a gallery opening with a woman and he liked it when I would walk in with him, a lot of times because not everybody in the place would know who I was, so I could be kind of a mystery for a little while, especially before Google. I think he liked to kind of cause a little bit of gossip, like, "Is that Bob's girlfriend?" I had people ask me that a lot and I sometimes would not say. [Laughs] I could've just said no, but I thought well, what would Bob want me to say? Tell them it's none of their business. I told him that once and he told me, "Tell them it's none of their business, bam."

So it was kind of unique in that way. We were like family in a way and close friends. Because I wasn't really working for him, but I was still always included in what he called the family gatherings, which were the Captiva staff mostly. He would do things for the people in New York too and really loved them, but his social circle was Captiva, because that was really his home, Captiva. I know that Bob loved Lawrence and Mary [Sullivan Voytek]'s children, the Voytek kids. He loved kids in general. He loved Phillip [Woods], who is staff, but the kids of the staff too, were part of it.

Q: What was he like with kids?

Epple: He was always like a big kid, so he would talk to children, ask them a question, and really listen to the answer, which most adults don't do. Yes, he really loved kids. I was always impressed with how he was so respectful of women and their intelligence. Some artists I've

known, like—it's all men and women are just some lesser creatures. Bob was never like that. He had probably an equal number of women friends to men friends. That says something about somebody's character, if you have both men and women friends.

Q: Did life in Captiva change a lot in the later years after his stroke?

Epple: Yes, it changed a lot. There were different stages of his being able to move around and his condition got worse. He still continued to work on his art. On some of those Sundays when I would be there all day and stay overnight sometimes because it's a long drive home, he would talk about thank goodness for his art because that was the only thing in his day that hadn't changed that much. He could still create. He did lose the use of his right hand and that was a huge thing. But he still—and he still—I'm trying not to use the word "but" because it kind of negates what you just said—and he still loved food, good food, sophisticated food, and simple food too. He really thought a lot about food and what he would want to eat and how to prepare it. That was nice, that he still had that up until the end.

I remember some of the later years when he couldn't walk. But when I first met him, he could run and dance all night, so I saw quite a bit of deterioration over the years, physically. But even after he wasn't able to walk like he used to, we would go out to restaurants in New York. He would really think about where we were going to dinner and it would be something very exotic. I had a great time with him with food and I learned a lot from him about food and wine and that sort of thing.

Q: Anything in particular? Any particular food adventures stand out in your memory?

Epple: No, but especially in the early years he would order all kinds of unusual and fresh ingredients, and the FedEx would arrive and well, truffles. He loved truffles. So I gained an appreciation of truffles through him. It was always an adventure to have dinner at his house and, especially since I don't eat beef or pork, and he was a lot about having big pots of chili, but I always told him, "Don't worry, whatever else you have will be plenty," but it was so sweet, he always made sure that there was something that I would eat too. So that was nice. What was the original question? I think I had something else.

Q: I was asking if there were any particular food adventures or memories.

Epple: Just the fantastic variety of food and restaurants.

Q: Sounds fun.

Epple: Yes, it was. He was always so generous to invite me and he knew that I couldn't afford to eat there so he would always tell me not to worry about it, he's got it. Which was very sweet.

Q: Do you have any other—any of the stories that you jotted down, is there anything that we haven't—

Epple: That should be mentioned? Let's see. Oh, there is one. It was actually the last time I saw Bob, and it was in the hospital and the doctors were making the decision to release him. So I was there, waiting with him. It was just me and him and maybe his sister. I think his sister was there too; she was in and out, talking to nurses, et cetera. I said, "Okay, Bob, looks like you're going to go back home. I'll come out and play flute for you on Captiva." He said, "No, no, no." I thought oh well, he doesn't want to hear it. He was on a respirator and he couldn't talk well, so he grabbed me with the strength like he used to and I was thinking it's okay. He said, "No, now." I went down to my car to get my flute and I had a flute with me. He was in ICU so I knew it was like I can't play something raucous here, so I played really softly, a piece of music that was just very emotional and spiritual. Bob listened to every single note and then the last note just tapered out to a whisper. Bob was crying and he grabbed my hand and I hear [claps hands] all over the ICU, patients and doctors and nurses had all been listening too. Bob smiled at hearing that.

Laury Getford and Kat Epple playing music at a memorial for Rauschenberg in his Captiva Drive studio, Captiva, Florida, 2008. Photo: Courtesy Laury Getford

I had planned to go out and see him again, but after I played for him and I hugged him, held him real close and we connected spiritually, I knew that I'd already said goodbye to him and he knew that too. As I said, I had planned to go back out to see him, but I also felt like I didn't really need to because he was fully conscious and present at that moment, and it was a beautiful thing that he asked me to go get my flute and play for him. It was one of the hardest concerts I ever played.

Q: You've spoken quite a bit about this throughout, but just if there's anything else you want to say about—I read that you said that Bob gave you a passion for art and a passion for life.

Epple: Oh, that's good. I wonder where I said that. Where did you find—

Q: I don't remember.

Epple: I don't know. I don't remember, but that's a good one.

Q: I just wonder if there's any sort of closing thoughts that you'd like to—

Epple: That's a good quote. You can quote me on that one. The passion for art—I always loved visual arts, but when I first came into his inner circle, I'm so thankful that I was smart enough to just shut up and observe and listen and not try to—he was always interested in my opinion, but I saw so many people giving their opinions of what art is good or what isn't, and it's like me telling a mechanic how to fix my car. I would be smart just to smile and learn. I'm so glad that I did that because I learned so much about art and that's probably not what would be taught in the

textbooks because I was meeting the actual artists. Jim Rosenquist, I have photos of him giving me a big kiss on the cheek. He was just a hilarious guy, I love him. I was meeting all of these artists through Bob. Chuck Close. Just to interact with these people and learn about the whole art—not only art but the art scene too, around the world and especially in New York City, was very interesting to watch and learn. It was a good education.

Q: When you look at his work now, do you see him in it?

Epple: I see his energy and yes, like segments of his life in each one. It's kind of his energy and his perspective, his philosophy, maybe is the way to see it. If you knew him and knew how much fun he was, you see that fun in every piece I've seen of his. There are some that are just intense, but most of his art has an element of play. By learning to see that through looking at it with Bob and learning about visual art through Bob, it gives me much more appreciation of other artists. I can see much more about where they're coming from. Are they fun or are they a pain in the butt? [Laughs]

Q: And life?

Epple: I think I learned a lot about being fearless from watching Bob be fearless—fearless in art especially, but in life also. The chances he would take, not necessarily physically doing daredevil stuff, but he did a lot of daredevil stuff with his career and art and the choices he made were based on who he felt he was and what was real. I learned a lot from that.

Q: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that—

Epple: Let me see if I can see anything in my notes that jogs my memory. I had one story about, for Christmas he would have a Christmas tree, but it was never a tree; every year it was something like a ladder that was decorated and the presents might be under it. One year I was the Christmas tree.

Q: You were the Christmas tree?

Epple: Yes, I have a photo of it. I'll send you the photo. He had me dress in this robe that a Tibetan lama had given him and the hat, and he wanted me to come out playing music dressed like this. It was pretty cool. It was a surprise, he didn't want anybody else to know. It was this very elaborate robe, really heavy and very embellished, embroidered. It was a beautiful thing.

Q: And you were able to move around?

Epple: Yes, I was. I was able to move. But he had a huge artwork on the wall that day, so I just stood in front of that, in the track lighting that was lighting up the painting. Yes, if you see any of the photos from Christmases, there's always going to be a photo of the Christmas tree and I probably went three years in a row before I realized that was the Christmas tree because it was always something different. It was a bicycle one year. Some of the other staff there would remember. That was the early years so Lawrence Voytek, probably would remember that

because he probably helped make some of the Christmas trees. That was just another fun story, it's not anything that was totally significant but it shows you how much fun he was.

Q: It's a great image. Okay, well, thank you very much.

Epple: You're welcome. And if you—if I think of anything else that I'd like to include, I'll let you know or if you want to do another interview, if there are any specific events where you hear that I was there, just remind me where it was.

Q: Okay. Thank you.

Epple: Well, it sure was a pleasure to meet you.

Q: It was nice to meet you too.

[END OF INTERVIEW]