

KENTUCKY CRAFT HISTORY AND EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, INC.

Interview with Ed Brinkman  
Interviewer is Richard Bellando  
Monday, April 7th, 2014

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Bellando: This is an interview with Ed Brinkman, past director of the Kentucky Guild Train. He's from Burnsville, North Carolina. The interviewer is Richard Bellando of Berea, Kentucky. The videographer is Ira Morel of Waynesville, North Carolina. It is taking place on Monday April 7th, 2014 at the Robert Gray Library of the Folk Arts Center of the Southern Highlands Handcraft Guild in Asheville, North Carolina. The interview is being produced by the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association with all rights reserved. Well, Ed, I know that you've been living in North Carolina for a number of years, but where are you originally from?

Brinkman: Originally from Frankenmuth, Michigan. A little German community, up there, primarily German Lutheran.

Bellando: When did you first become interested in crafts or craft?

Brinkman: Well, I really got interested in doing the artwork from grade school on and then when I got into high school, my art instructor, she really convinced me to go on to college. That I had skill worthwhile, exploring.

Bellando: Where did you go to school? College? And was it an art school?

Brinkman: It was Flint Institute of Art. . .

Bellando: Oh!

Brinkman: In Flint, Michigan. I kind of....Because of my dyslexia, I went in the back way. (Laughter, Brinkman and Bellando) I ended up going in through the sculpture as a....what do they call it? ( ) What do they call it? Oh. That's the problem with my dyslexia. Anyway it doesn't always want to come to me, but.... Auditor! That's it. As an auditor. Taking the class, rather than for a regular degree, through audit. And then, years later, they caught up with me and thought I really ought to take an entrance exam (Laughter, Brinkman) and found out, Oh you better stick with art.

Bellando: Did you....Was it because of sculpture you became interested in ceramics?

Brinkman: Well, the sculpture is really primarily doing miniature sculpture, jewelry and so I was....Met Bill Brown, my instructor Richard Devore was at Cranbrook when Bill Brown, who had graduated from Cranbrook talked to the students up there and Bill Brown heard them talking about, Oh, hey, maybe going to use our facilities at Penland as resident craftsmen would be an idea for students and he's all, for sure, the students at Cranbrook would jump on it and so then he mentioned to myself in case I was interested. And so, he set up an interview with Bill Brown to see if he wanted me to come there as his student. As a resident craftsmen to make the transition from resident into a student, studio craftsman at that time. And he had the facility, but he didn't use it through the winter months, so then he figured, Oh well, that might work out, using this school through the winter months for this expanded. And so my instructor, Richard Devore, who happened to be in ceramics and knew that I was interested in the art as a studio craftsman, you know, going out on my own, decided, well, you know, set up the interview will Bill Brown and he really liked my jewelry better than my ceramics or my sculpture, because, well, it was like miniature sculpture and I really enjoyed doing the jewelry. But when I got to Penland, he didn't have casting equipment or casting facilities and he said we really don't have the money for that. So then I had been the....In ceramics, I was the kiln master and rebuilt their kiln and did all sorts of stuff there at the school and I thought, well, might as well do some clay, because it's dirt cheap! (Laughter, Brinkman and Bellando). So anyways, ended up work in ceramics and

then Bill Brown realized I knew all about the kilns and he made me a monitor through the summer months. We did have facilities to work on our own work through the summer so, I ended up being a monitor and found out later, even though I was paying for my materials and stuff. Monitor had a different meaning, because at Haystack School of Design, or summer school up there in Deer Island, Maine, where he came from all the instructors he had come that summer realized, Hey, monitor means he'll do anything and everything for us (Laughter, Brinkman) and then they'd go for a....taking their....what do you call it, wine, afternoon parties and visiting and everything and so I was teaching the students when they were gone and we would rebuild....we actually built their first gas kiln. Another one of the instructors there and myself.

Bellando: Well, what did you....Well, I know you were trained on the wheel. . .

Brinkman: On the wheel, yes. . .

Bellando: And does that represent the majority of your work? Wheel work? Wheel throwing?

Brinkman: Not anymore. I was doing....With the Kentucky Guild Train, when I was traveling with it, we had a potter's wheel on the demonstration part of the train, the studio part of the train there, where we would demonstrate and I was doing primarily potter's wheel, because that was the easier one for me to really get the form done in a relatively short time for the school students, school kids especially coming onto the train. They could see a finished product....more or less a formed product in a relatively short time. I was able to throw on the potter's wheel very quick and enjoyed that part of it especially and they enjoyed how magically it would form into a quick little form and I could speak clearly and relatively quickly, while I was demonstrating and working the piece. I had no problem at all, and it worked out. And I....On the train we primarily scheduled a lot of the school kids on the first Thursday and Friday of that week or Friday, especially, so that when they went home they would talk so much about the train to their parents and they would bring them into the train and it worked out really good that way.

Bellando: Well, was it at Penland that you met Judy?

Brinkman: Yes. She was from New York State. She got her masters in textiles and had come to Penland that one summer at Penland School. Well, in the fall of the year, late summer I guess it was. And there were a couple parties going on at Penland and I kept making eye contact (Laughter, Brinkman and Bellando). She thought maybe she ought to come back, but she really got talked into coming down with a friend of Skip Johnson and Joyce Johnson, were the second couple that came to Penland. I mean I was the first single fellow. Bill Brown, when he talked me into coming to Penland, he said I'm going back down to Penland that evening or that Sunday, if you want to ride down with us. And so then so I quit my college, quit my factory job I had, to try and make some money and climbed in the car with him and off to Penland.

Bellando: He was a big mover at Penland, wasn't he?

Brinkman: He took over after Mrs. Lucy Morgan. . .

Bellando: Yea.

Brinkman: Had it. In fact, when I came there that early spring before school started I got to meet Mrs. Lucy Morgan and spend a lot of time talking with her and you could see how she was able to get that school going. She was a wonderful little, pixie like personality and she could talk anybody into anything. (Laughter, Brinkman)

Bellando: Well, now Judy also demonstrated on the train, did she not?

Brinkman: Yea, sometimes she would demonstrate on the train, but primarily we did workshops, where she was able to do some of the weaving stuff. Not as much on the train. She was primarily doing more of the bookkeeping and paperwork, as far as, you know, with the train. And when I was demonstrating, she could always be in the gallery part, which was the boxcar. There was a boxcar which was setup as the gallery. And then there was a passenger car, which, there's a little living quarters on the train where we would stay overnight and then the rest of the part was the demonstrating part of the train. And that way we had two different people in the two different cars and we could keep an eye on our gallery work and then she could talk about the pieces and talk about the where they came from and various artists and craftsmen and stuff and I would be working in the other car.

Bellando: Well, were you a member of the Southern Highland Guild before you became director of the train?

Brinkman: Yes.

Bellando: You were. And did you ever become a member of the Kentucky Guild?

Brinkman: No. Actually, I guess we never really joined the Guild as a regular member of the Guild because the Guild wasn't really active except for the train at that time. And so then we were just primarily with the train, in fact, Virginia Minish at one of the meeting, I think it was the last meeting that Rude Osolnik attended. He was the executive secretary, took care of the finances for the train. And when....the last meeting that he attended he said, "Virginia! You haven't paid your"....she was making a number of comments and recommendations and he says, "Virginia! You didn't pay your dues this year yet!" (Laughter, Brinkman) And she had given us all this money to the train.

Bellando: Can you make the connection from Virginia Minish and the Louisville, Nashville railroad? How the Guild got the train?

Brinkman: Oh yes.

Bellando: Tell us about that.

Brinkman: She had a wonderful way of telling this story, quite often. She'd invite us to stay over at her place, when we'd come through Louisville and we'd enjoy it, because it was quite a nice place (Laughter, Brinkman). But she had hurt her back, when she was sixteen years old, her sixteen year birthday, and a big, high cupboard, they were putting up decorations and the cupboard fell on her and so she had a damaged back. And so then at this place they had, they had an indoor swimming pool and she had it put in because she needed to swim in order to strengthen her back for that purpose. But she would throw on....oh, what you call....Derby parties over in Louisville. Was it Louisville over there? They called it Louisville? (Laughter, Brinkman). Generally it's Louisville in most places, but over there is Louisville, (Laughter, Brinkman) Kentucky. And she would throw the derby parties and she, of course, ran with some pretty good circles. In fact, that's where she had the idea, she was talking about an idea of a traveling train or a traveling art show and then a fellow that was at the party was from L & N, Louisville and Nashville, well-heeled fellow, anyway apparently managed most of the train or something or owned it, he said "Oh! We've got a couple cars you could use." And she said, "Hey! That's a

good idea," she thought. So then, she knew she needed to funnel her money somehow, you know, into the Guild and stuff so she made contact with the lady....I'm pitiful with names, but Mrs. Eastmead, I believe was her name, but it could have been another one because it was a strange, small world. My instructor in college was talking about meeting a....if I wanted to be a studio craftsmen I need a....someone to take care of me. And he was mentioning that this lady that started the ACC helped three other potters become famous and not necessarily a kept person, but probably close to it (Laughter, Brinkman). Anyway, and she had started that ACC, the American Craft Council and Mrs. Virginia Minish sort of knew her because she was a Biltmore, distant relative of Biltmore. And that kind of market of people. . .

Bellando: Does the name Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb sound like something?

Brinkman: Yea, that sounds very much like it.

Bellando: Because she came to the first craft fair we had and Rude seemed to know her. Well, so tell us how you got hired to be the director, and you were second director of the train, as I understand it.

Brinkman: Yes. They had interviewed a fellow that is Skip Johnson and....at Penland School, that summer. Fellow was down there teaching jewelry and Skip Johnson knew the fellow and he had talked about having been interviewed at Berea about the train job. And....But, he wasn't going to take the job, because he was married or? Anyway, I guess he just was not quite interested in it. And then Skip and Joyce Johnson mentioned to Judy, because they were friends with Judy and the lady she came down with when she was visiting that previous summer and then we went up to the jewelry shop and talked with him about it and he said "Yea, that might be a job you guys might be interested in." And so we contacted....( ) We knew it was Rude that they talked to, so we talked up there and then they had us come up there, you know, fly up to....we either flew or drove up, I'm not sure exactly, but anyway, we ended up going up there for an interview and that's how they contacted us. But, we didn't tell them about Bill Brown as far as the director of the school because we were a little nervous because Bill's wife was fairly influential in the school and she didn't want to lose their cook at the school and she made a comment to, we were friends with the cook and people who worked there at the school, we're pretty good friends with and they said that she didn't want to give them a recommendation for going on and leaving the school and we thought, Well, we may not get a recommendation, so, we didn't say anything, but then Rude called Bill, "Why didn't you tell us about it!" (Laughter, Brinkman and Bellando). When we got back to Penland, Bill asked us, why didn't you use me as a reference? (Laughter, Brinkman)

Bellando: Well, so you were the director of the train for how many years?

Brinkman: Almost three years. Like I would tell a lot of people, Judy came down with twins, (Laughter Brinkman, Bellando) and so then she had to quit, well needed to quit. I guess it was probably several months before we, you know, before we put in our ( ) resume. . .

Bellando: Resignation?

Brinkman: Resignation.

Bellando: Yea, I remember. I was director of the Guild for about three months and then you guys left and then Jerry Workman was hired.

Brinkman: Yes, he was hired. Yes. And he appreciated us putting in our....in the files we left a copy of our resignation. We had a lot of difficulties with Rude (Laughter, Brinkman) and he said he sure appreciated us putting it in, that it wasn't him, it was just a click with....a little difficulty with Rude.

Bellando: Well, I guess Rude felt a lot of ownership to the train, because the cars were actually refurbished in the back. . .

Brinkman: In the back of the college there.

Bellando: Yes. The siding came all the way down where they used to bring coal in. . .

Brinkman: Yea.

Bellando: He spent a lot of time and I believe it was the baggage and mail car, and that was. . .

Brinkman: Oh yea, that's what it was. The baggage, mail car.... I think that was the gallery car.

Bellando: Demonstration, yea.

Brinkman: Gallery car and then the other car was the longer one with windows in the car. So it had some natural lighting come through.

Bellando: Now, do you remember what kind of equipment was available on . . .

Brinkman: On the train? Well, when they had the....When Virginia Minish wanted to finance, what is it, through the ACC, the lady she knew as far as contact, you mentioned earlier. Anyway, she had said that the best way would be through the Department of Commerce. Because then you could get the Department of Commerce to donate, or various industries to donate various things for the train. I guess she had worked that way before and so that was a good idea. And so, then IBM had given us a Selectric typewriter for the train, it was....lathe, table saw. All types of equipment and stuff. But before we got there, they had baggage car setup still as a display so that the interviewers that they were trying to get could see how the train could be used and how it would look. But then, somebody at college, some of the kids, released the brake and it rolled down the siding until it hit a parked vehicle, down, way down...I guess something on the tracks or something, a car with loaded with coal and it put it out of business and they had to do quite a bit of work and so Rude said he had to take a bunch of the stuff off the train and put it in storage, well (Laughter, Brinkman) storage was an interesting place. (Laughter, Bellando) But, some of it came back and we had a bit of a rub with Rude because when he had an interview he showed us the Selectric typewriter that was for the train, but later on it was in his office and a secretary was using it and we had a bit of a rub because Judy wanted to type and she was really good at type and she wanted that typewriter, he had given us a Royal, but she wanted that one and from then on, the rub was the wrong way. (Laughter, Brinkman)

Bellando: Well, how did the train....When you set up the exhibits, how did you keep things from not getting broken or you know?

Brinkman: (Laughter) That was creative way too, for myself, because, we were supposed to pack it. You know, take the stuff, remove it, box it, pack it, each time and store it. And the stuff on shelves, I had broken up the long, tunnel like look of the baggage car, by putting a slight, intermediate wall up, so that you'd have to go around that wall and it'd create a bit of a two room

look. And it wouldn't look so much like a train, and the things that we put on the wall with the shelves and stuff, those we had to remove and pack. But then we had, like a maze of floor display areas, the wall pieces, the panels and stuff, those we could tighten, fasten to the walls without any trouble. Pottery. Most pottery and things that I didn't have to worry about, glue affecting it. I used Elmer's glue. Because Elmer's glue you can dissolve in water. And I nailed the piece of plywood to the floor and then glued the piece to the piece of plywood (Laughter, Bellando) and so then, in the subtle shock, the nails could give a little bit. So they were stable, not problem at all. And it cut down the time of setting up and removing pieces considerably. Because we needed to take a lot of time. We were chief cook and bottle washer of the whole thing and so we had to mop up almost every evening, because coming off the tracks and back onto the train and it needed to be cleaned and washed and a lot of maintenance involved in the train. We didn't realize when we took the job, all that was involved (Laughter, Brinkman). But it was a fun....It really....You know, being young, we enjoyed it. It was impressive. . .

Bellando: Well, tell us. How do you go about making arrangements for the train to be in certain communities?

Brinkman: Well, that was the advice also from the train committee. They would, quite often, give us various advice. Various communities that would....But we would have a map of the train tracks throughout the state and I think the initial time....we thought we could make, oh, what do you call, arrangements with the railroad, by phone. That didn't work out. We found out really quickly that Judy needed to make written contacts to the, oh what do you call it....train....I had it written down, but I can't think right now. Anyway, the fellow that would move the cars, we had to contact the various communities and find out who the guy was in charge of moving it into the siding and so they knew the date when the train would arrive and all the arrangements to get it moved into a siding, and find out that there is a siding available for us to use. Sometimes we wanted certain dates so that it would go down the track like into Corbin or on the way through Corbin we could go down several communities in that direction or we're going into the mountains, then we would line up several in a row to go through in that direction and then over in Louisville, the other direction, into the....towards.....oh, the Western part of Kentucky and then we would try to line up a number of them in that direction. And we would quite often leave some empty spaces so then, the following year or whenever, we would go back in that other direction and we could fill in in between some of those spaces.

Bellando: I know it must have been a lot more involved than this than just, like, say, letting the L and N know where you're going to be. You had to make contact with local schools. . .

Brinkman: Yes. . .

Bellando: Publicity. What about utilities?

Brinkman: Well, that was the other thing. We'd have to contact the....in writing also, we'd have to contact the local utilities, and that was the advantage also, by running the train finances through the Department of Commerce. They could get the power companies to donate their labor, their....when they had to hang a transformer. They would donate all that and they'd donate the connection, so that's it's all hooked up for when we need to be there. Sometimes we'd get there and it wasn't quite done and then we'd have to make sure it was done by the next day, so we usually tried to get there that evening or that, late afternoon the previous day before we setup, because we have to put all the stuff out for the setup and stuff.

Bellando: And I'm sure, you contacted the schools or the local organizations?

Brinkman: In general, we'd try to find a group within the community to sponsor it. And if we found a group, we'd generally try to get ladies organizations. They were really the most efficient and most willing to put forth the time and effort. We had done a couple with the Chamber of Commerce, but they're usually are so busy, the men, at that time, of course, it was mostly men, Chamber of Commerce. And they really weren't able to put in as much willingness and time to really get the school....contact with the schools, and line up the teachers and the classes and get all that hooked up as easily. It was easier if we got ahold of a ladies organization in the community. And some of these communities weren't really that small, they were fairly active ladies organizations and they really helped a great deal.

Bellando: So and. . .

Brinkman: But we primarily had to be our own advanced person. Advance man. And had to contact the newspaper and write articles to put into the newspaper. And that was a fortunate thing, Judy's father was a newspaper man and so he was able to get us to concise (Laughter, Brinkman) our publicity for the newspaper so they would put it into the paper and it worked out quite well that way.

Bellando: I'm sure you had to drive your car. You didn't drive ( ). . .

Brinkman: No, we drove our car to the locations and stuff.

Bellando: The locations. So, it was a surprise every time you came into the sliding.

Brinkman: Yes.

(Laughter, Bellando)

Brinkman: Trying to find out a new location, where the railroad track were. It was one side of the tracks and the other side of the tracks. (Laughter, Brinkman) Which was quite an experience.

Bellando: And how many communities, on average, did you see in a year?

Brinkman: I'm trying to think. It seems to me it was possibly a couple times a month. A couple communities a month, because it always seemed to take much more than a week to be able to get the train transferred to get all the connections with agents and everything. To get that train moved. That's the other fortunate thing, also. There wasn't a directive, when we had the train moved that it wasn't supposed to be humped more than thirty miles an hour. And so that was one of the things also by being able to stabilize my work on the floor, I mean, the pieces that we had. They couldn't really hit the car, the humping meant you weren't supposed to hit it faster than thirty miles an hour and so it was always moved by switch engines, they called it. To move it to different locations.

Bellando: By humping, you mean, attaching the rest of the train. . .

Brinkman: Yes, to the rest of the train to connect it. It wasn't supposed to be hit at a speed anything faster than thirty miles an hour. Which is pretty good speed. . .

Bellando:Yea.

Brinkman: When it's stationary, but there's plenty of room even the connecting....the knuckles of the railroad, they give a certain amount of give or whatever. Springs and stuff.

Bellando: And so, was it a twelve month job? Did they give you a week off or two weeks off or?

Brinkman: They'd give us....I think each....The first year, I think it was two weeks and then the second one, it was three weeks. I think the third one, which they would almost the three, but it was a month, because I think that we're planning to leave Kentucky one month before the end of the....because our vacation we figured. But then Rude wanted us to ship all the stuff back to the craftsmen. So that they wouldn't have to be responsible for getting it all boxed and packed up. So we gave up our vacation, our last one, and just boxed and packed it all up and shipped it back to the craftsmen at that time. And we're fortunate....only one piece, I think, or it was two pieces, were damaged on the train. I think....Maybe one thing was stolen over the period of time that we were there. And I found out later, what's his name from Blanco Glass. He's one of the early studio glass workers at that time and afterwards he said, "Oh!" he said, I found out almost every glassworker in studio craftsmen now has to ( ) their work an extremely long time because it very thick. And if it isn't, then it creates tension and it will explode! (Laughter, Brinkman and Bellando) And that's what happened with two of the pieces of glass! So he had gotten those pieces....We had to insure it and of course Rude's pretty clever and he said to add an extra \$100 to each piece so that it's covered for the price of the piece of the craftsman, in case. So we had to keep track of all of those book keeping stuff.

Bellando: When you decided to leave and you had a plan to go back to Penland? You and Judy?

Brinkman: Well, we had tried to save as much of our income as possible. We're quite frugal, well that was one of the things that really created a bit of a rub between Judy, my wife, she's passed away now, five years, so it's hard to remember all of the names, she would have so much more information if we hadn't....If she were still here. But anyway, let's see....where was I going with that train of thought?

Bellando: Well, about the....you were very frugal . . .

Brinkman: Oh yes, that's it! When we were interviewed right at the very beginning and then, for the amount of money that they could pay us from the very beginning he said, he'll put six thousand dollars into traveling expenses and whatever we don't use, he'll put it into, towards our following year's income, you know, as far as salary. But, then at the end of that year, it disappeared, it went into the Guild finances (Laughter, Brinkman) and so it wasn't available for the train or for the salary increase and stuff. And so, Judy, of course, got quite angry about that and from then on it was a bit more of a rub. She wouldn't even go to pick up the check from Rudy. He was quite tight, as far as preventing us from spending too much money and so he would often say, "Well, if it's in the budget, in the budget" and I'd say, "What is this budget that we don't even have the finances or understand how much there is to work with, so how can we make a budget?" And so then he had a little difficult time hem hawing around as far as . . . for every receipt or anything that we purchased or needed to spend on the train, we had to have him reimburse us for our receipts that we had to submit. And so, the second year when we went to . . . Virginia Minish recommended us to go to ACC up in New York and see her friend that was up there and she was very wonderful. She took us out and dined us and it was a wonderful time we had up there. But, we also made it worthwhile and decided to go to the World's Fair, which was on at that time. And when we came back and submitted our expenses to Rudy and also, we

would always . . . all our expenses and all the money that we would use, so that the Guild committee and the train committee actually would understand, you know, how we were spending it, even though Rudy wouldn't submit any written records of what the budget, or what the financial report or anything. But we put in our report and they were so surprised. Virginia Minish and Lester Pross, from the Art Department at Berea and they were all so surprised. How could you stay in a lodge, a place Judy found, and was it five dollars a night in New York? Or five dollars a day in New York? Book that she had. And we were just across, corner of the subway in New York. Where the Holiday Inn was, look out the window. And she found out that a lot of performers in New York, theater people, would go to this hotel. It was an old, old hotel and it was really a bargain. They couldn't believe they could stay in New York at that price (Laughter, Brinkman).

Bellando: It wasn't the Hotel Earl, was it?

Brinkman: I couldn't remember the name, but it could have been there. (Laughter, Bellando) It was unbelievable. And I found out one comedian, later on, mentioned that the hallway, when he was a kid, that hallway, he says, it was like a lobby and later on when he visited, it couldn't have been any more than five feet wide (Laughter, Brinkman).

Bellando: Well, tell us if you can remember, about the trip you made to Michigan or Detroit . . .

Brinkman: Oh, the train . . .

Bellando: Yea, because they wanted to find out more about . . .

Brinkman: More about . . . it reopened their eyes and yea . . . I guess they contacted who they could at the Kentucky Train committee and maybe Virginia was still on the committee and stuff, and so she recommended that they contact Judy and myself. And so, they called us up and they flew us up there to Michigan to the, what is it down there near Detroit there, I have it written down on paper, but I can't think of it right now. Anyway, one of the colleges there . . .

Bellando: Not Cranbrook?

Brinkman: No, no, I wouldn't be able to find it that quick.

Unknown voice: That's alright, you can look it up if you want to... I'm just going to pull this chair . . .

Brinkman: Do you want to pause it?

Unknown voice: I can edit this little part out.

Brinkman: ( ) Wayne State University. That was Wayne State University that they had us come up there and they had a number of people that were trying to get the thing. And they had a fellow they had already picked for a director and he had just come back from a sensitive, sensitivity . . .

Bellando: Training?

Brinkman: Training or grouping or something and so we, kind of, opened up his ears and later on we found out he wasn't the one decided to stick with it. We told him what they needed to do was find a director, someone that they could trust, and then give him the reigns to run with it and

really do the job, because we pointed out, we had a lot of difficulty, We would be doing the train on the weekends and then on the week, during the week when the train committee and other people could contact us, we were being contacted and we didn't have any time off during the week either, But it worked out alright, and also to be able to have the finances for the director to really be able to manage the finances to work with as far as the train.

Bellando: Well, these folks in Michigan, were they thinking about a train or a bus or . . . was it the same kind of thing . . .

Brinkman: Well, at that time they were thinking of some way of moving vehicles around, you know, as far as a possibly, tractor trailer, various ways to move, have a moving art. But then because they had heard about the Kentucky Guild Train, and one of the things with the Kentucky Guild Train also, one Virginia Minish's friends was a writer, or wrote articles for magazines . . .

Bellando: Parade Magazine?

Brinkman: I can't think of what the magazine was . . .

Bellando: Because Parade was printed by Louisville Courier Journal, that's why I asked.

Brinkman: Yea, I'm not sure. It was something. One of the world, I mean country wide, I mean distribution and the article that this lady put in there, I think, a number of people heard about it, because I know the president of the college that I had gone to ended up writing a nice letter to her that, "Oh, Mr. Ed Brinkman, he graduated from our college." Actually I left before I got my degree (Laughter, Brinkman) so she sent that article to me and so we had the letter where the president said I graduated! (Laughter, Brinkman)

Bellando: Well, Ed, as you think back I get the feeling you thought it was really a wonderful experience for you to the director, for you and Judy to be working together.

Brinkman: Oh yes, we really enjoyed it and Virginia Minish had later sent a nice, nice long letter how she really felt we had done as nice a job as she had ever thought the train could possibly have done and well, because we did do so many communities, although we were limited because the train tracks and then Michigan, later on when they did finish it, it ended up coming out of the state, where originally they were talking about even the Guild going outside of the state, but the Michigan train did go outside the state and ended up coming to Marion, North Carolina which is just down the mountains from Penland and where I was, our studio was near Penland, so we went down and talked with them down there at the train (Laughter, Brinkman) and they were surprised that we were down there.

Bellando: Just as a point of interest, where did you all live in Berea?

Brinkman: We lived on . . . what is that street? Ah, can't even think of my address! Couple different places. The last place that we lived on was right, straight passed Boone Tavern there, I mean. I think it was Center Street. The one that goes right out that way.

Bellando: Do you know what happened to the Train? What its demise was after Jerry left, after you left and after Jerry left?

Brinkman: I have no idea. All I can think of that possibly, since they were using the cars that they went back to the L & N.

Bellando: Well, the cars went back to the L & N. The reason I'm asking the question . . . Louie Nunn, who became the first republican president, I mean governor in the state for, I forget, how many years, he cut the funding for the train . . .

Brinkman: Oh.

Bellando: And we went and really argued with him and argued with him, but there was no way he was going to, you know. . .

Brinkman: Well, see, I think initially Virginia had given a lot of finances and was like some kind of matching thing with the state and maybe they didn't want to match it anymore.

Bellando: No, there was a time when he was cutting everything.

Brinkman: Everything.

Bellando: Yea, and it . . .

Brinkman: So, that was probably in the just . . . lack of funding.

Bellando: It was still a very viable . . .

Brinkman: Possible. . .

Bellando: Tool . . .

Brinkman: Tool, yea.

Bellando: Yea for people in the state to see, you know.

Brinkman: Oh, yes. Well, it's like, Virginia Minish when she sent us up to, wanted us to go to the ACC, the American Craft Council and the gallery up there and see, you know, where we could possibly get really elegant pieces for the second display and stuff. I pointed out to her, you can find really great names and it's publicity because we had gotten good names to use in the, oh, what do you call it, newspaper articles for getting people to come on to the train. But I said, you could also find exquisite pieces from various craftsmen within the state, unknown names that are doing some great artwork and great creative pieces and we just really have to mix it up and that's where... I think that second year I did have some of Rudy's pieces, maybe it was the first year I had some of Rudy's pieces on also different art, you know, different pieces. I think I even stuck one of my pieces of sculpture in there (Laughter, Brinkman).

Bellando: And none Rudy's pieces got broken either. . .

Brinkman: Oh no, no. In fact, he got a little perturbed when he realized what I knew after we were having some difficulty and he wouldn't come to the train committees anymore, because we kept cornering him on finances and stuff and he wouldn't even, after he talked to Virginia that one time and said, "You haven't paid your dues!" and she had given all this funding to the train. (Laughter, Brinkman) She said, "Oh you know these people want to pinch their pennies until they get a bunch of it" and stuff. But anyway, I told Rudy, at that time, I said, "Oh, Rudy, if you need a gift, get going". (Laughter, Bellando) He looked like a deer in the headlights, he couldn't

believe that I knew that phrase up there near Cranbrook. Anyway, there's Mount Holly area, where I used to go skiing. But anyway, there's a bee farm. They had honey and they had wax and so they made candles and their lady was making catalogs and my ceramics instructor introduced to make sales at the shop and she was showing me the catalogs and got these beautiful candlesticks from Scandinavia and they were trying to find somebody to produce those and they contacted Berea college and they said this fellow down there can make them for us, you know, rather than having them ship all the way over and it was going enterprises and if you need a gift, get going and when I made that comment he thought I knew something (Laughter, Brinkman). After that he was really questionable about me.

Bellando: So you left Berea with a fistful of money?

Brinkman: Oh, man. We were loaded, you know. (Laughter, Bellando) They overpaid us probably. (Laughter, Brinkman) Unfortunately, we weren't able to save half of what we had earned. We were hoping to. But we had enough so we put a down payment on a piece of property and, in fact, I think we're already starting to pay for the piece of property and had a Volkswagen bus that I bought from one of the instructors there at Berea College. He had it up for sale and hauled the stuff to North Carolina and there was a, in the various communities, they'd have different facilities and I'd have to haul my trash and, what is it . . . Corbin? No, can't think of the name of that, they've got a glass plant, GE glass plant and a Corning glass plant in the same community and we were invited. . .

Bellando: Richmond? Richmond had a GE plant there.

Brinkman: its south of Richmond. Just south of Richmond. . .

Bellando: London? Corbin...

Brinkman: Winchester! That's it. Winchester, KY. Has a GE and a Corning glass plant and we're invited like a lot of communities were invited for lunch and the fellow there, anyway, they invited us over and they said they're not allowed to socialize with the people in the other plant. Within the community, the managers or the people of knowledge, weren't supposed to socialize with the other people because a lot of their secrets are not patented, because people can read patents. So then they tried to keep things out of...and going to the trash or dropping off the trash, the dumpsters, I mean they didn't have dumpsters, most communities didn't in those days, they had landfills. And going to the landfill at that time, I told the manager at the landfill, I told him, "Oh, wow!" I said, "Man, you've got about the best landfill I've been in for years!" I said, All these brick, these insulating glass, high temperature bricks that you're throwing, that the glass plants. They have to rebuild the little kilns that test kilns and they'd throw that into the landfill. I was collecting and putting them on the train when they got to Berea, then I'd take them to North Carolina in my little Volkswagen bus so I'd have enough brick to make my first kiln. (Laughter, Brinkman and Bellando)

Bellando: So, you went from Berea, you and Judy had enough money to make a down payment at Penland?

Brinkman: Well, it was just near Penland. We didn't want to be too close because so many parties going on at Penland we wouldn't get any work done. So we stayed a little further away and we found a little piece of property up there in the mountains.

Bellando: So that's where you live now.

Brinkman: Yes.

Bellando: Tell us a little bit about your studio.

Brinkman: Well, I built my own studio, first I was going to add on to the house. Then I realized Judy wouldn't appreciate the dust that would filter through, you know, from being connected. So I built it a little further up and there was already, oh what do you call it, wood, storage building there and so I added onto it. And makeshift and added on my studio and then built my kiln right there at that studio and I think, sometime later, they contacted the people at Penland various craftsmen and knowing that a number of us were resting craftsmen and then living in the area, they wanted to do a traveling exhibit. The Smithsonian Institute, they came down and they photographed my near my kiln. (Laughter, Brinkman) As makeshift as it was, my big gas kiln and a number of other craftsmen, they took pieces to put in their collection and travel around and so it was a fun thing. And my studio, I made the pottery there, ceramics and Judy did her weaving and we would travel around to craft shows and which a lot of craftsmen realized, because its location Penland, is relatively easy to go north, south, east or west, you know, it was wonderfully located. And Bill Brown always wanted to have various craftsmen settle down in the area and it worked out, there's so many. And any time you went to another show, craftsmen would say, "Oh! I've heard of Penland, do you know of any property available?" (Laughter, Brinkman) And so, it really grew.

Bellando: Well, it's close to 81 and it's close to, you know, 40 and 26. . .

Brinkman: Just the last few miles you can't get there from here.

Bellando: Was your work. . . I guess, I know the answer almost, is primarily, today, when you used to sell, is very functional.

Brinkman: Yes, most of my work is very functional. I used to do a lot of thrown pieces, even great, big bowls, in fact, one of my big, I think that ...bought the largest from the fair. ( ) purchased the largest bowl that I made and then the second largest bowl that I made, I made another bigger one and they purchased it years ago, through the, from the Southern Highlands Guild. I think, at that time, the Guild would have exhibits, so then Highlands Guild would have exhibits of the membership of various people. So you could put pieces in even if you didn't have a shop, a booth in the fair at that time. In fact, I realized afterwards, that's why at Berea, I mean at Kentucky when I'd travel around, a lot of the people would say, "You ain't from Kentucky are you?" and I realized afterwards, because when I said, at the Southern Highlands Guild, when I helped setup their display in Asheville at the, I mean here in Asheville their main Guild auditorium, in the main floor, we would set up a main exhibit of various craftsmen and they said, "Oh, take it down there the fellow whose setting up the show with the German accent." (Laughter, Brinkman and Bellando) I was from Michigan with a German and Midwest accent. I realized that I gave myself away that I wasn't from Kentucky. (Laughter, Brinkman).

Bellando: When was the last show you've done? You don't sell your work any longer do you?

Brinkman: I still sell some through the Southern Highlands Guild, this gallery here. The, what do you call it...

Bellando: Allen Stand Shop.

Brinkman: Allen Stand Shop. In fact, I think I have a standing order now that I'm supposed to be filling in my studio is so cluttered with stuff. Every time my sister and brother-in-law or somebody, comes to visit, I move more things out of the house that I've accumulated and stuff them into my studio and it's getting a little too stuffed almost.

Bellando: But you don't do the fair anymore.

Brinkman: No. Well, Judy was really going downhill and really couldn't get around that well and so I needed to be around the house more for cooking and almost like a home healthcare worker and also I started collecting social security and having the government get a little bit of money to you, it's very difficult to go back to work. (Laughter, Brinkman and Bellando). But the thing is, as craftsmen we never had that much to declare because all of our write offs, you don't have that much coming in. I had talked to various craftsmen, "How can you do it?" I said, "Well, I'm an interstate bum. I can live on practically nothing, especially by myself now."

Bellando: Well, it's also a way of life.

Brinkman: It is. And in fact, our daughters, because we did travel to a lot of shows, in fact, the Guild quite often called, because we weren't over there in Gatlinburg, when the Guild was still doing their shows in Gatlinburg and we had the girls in our booth demonstrating on these little looms that they had gotten from Green Stamps. And their feet wouldn't even hit the back beam, they were so small. And they were demonstrating and the people were just, it was drawing the people into our booth like crazy and taking pictures of them and one of the girls there, the fellow says, "Do you know what you're doing?" and she holds up the colors and she says, "Magenta" and his jaw dropped. (Laughter, Brinkman and Bellando). But they enjoyed it and then the school system down here, at that time, also didn't mind us taking the kids out of school because it was such an education for them to travel around with us. Terrible as far as names, but most of the things have come back. I know on the train, when I was demonstrating, I would demonstrate the throwing pieces and then I would fire them in an electric kiln that was on the train. And then I ended up putting them in boxes and I hauled a lot of those to North Carolina. I still have them in the shed and I never finished them. (Laughter, Brinkman)

Bellando: Oh, really, they're just bisque fired?

Brinkman: Bisque fired little bottles, little vases. (Laughter, Brinkman) I should put some glaze on them and I could probably have quite a retirement, if I would finish them up, at the prices of things now, but, I know at one time Rudy said, "You know, all that work you're doing really should belong to the Guild" and I said, "Do you figure our hours that we're producing or hours that we're putting in when we're running the train" because we're putting in so many hours and started writing down how many hours and then they kind of were surprised how much time went ( ) because it was a salary job, rather than. . .

Bellando: Sure, well kind of in retrospect and as you think back over the years, how important do you think, the train was to the communities that you visited?

Brinkman: Oh, I think it was really significant. I know Whitley City, which was the one community where, a more fascinating community we had workshop in, Elmer Boggs, I guess was his name, was the county extension agent and he was already very active in that community to get craftsmen, people in the community to do works. They had their own little log building to make sales for that community. One of the poorest communities almost in the country. But it is the poorest one in the state of Kentucky. Primarily, because it's mostly national forest. There's very little

land available. Just south of Whitley City there is that coal mine. Now they've made it quite a tourist attraction there. But, it's very little land available for tax purposes for that county and we had a workshop there and one fascinating thing was, his wife was doing some, I was trying to get them to change from doing thrown, I mean from doing pour mold work. Some fellow got them started on pour molds and I said, 'They're very good and make nice elegant pieces for your shop, but unfortunately, I said 'Where I was in Flint, Michigan and they had some adult classes up there and they were doing pour mold work. And I said, they're buying the same molds as you are buying for these pieces and when they're traveling and see these same pieces, they're not interested in buying those, they want more handmade more home produced pieces and I was getting them to do slab work and decorating with leaves and various things and they really enjoyed that. And this one lady, who happened to be the wife of the Elmer Boggs, there anyway. She was making little figurines, little sculpture figurines and also I notice, oh wow! They look so Indian. That I looked at her. Then I looked at her (Laughter, Brinkman), well no wonder, she's Indian! And then I found out she was full blood Indian and a lot of the community, that county in Whitley City is Native American. And they pointed out and showed me where there was just a small entrance into a whole little valley that they used to chase wild-life and animals in and they would pin them up in that little valley all surrounded by, well, cliffs and mountains, in fact that's where, what is it, that falls. I'm trying to think. Cumberland Falls is in that county. It's a fascinating. And then also traveling around to the different communities, sometimes the kids, I would tell them about the clay that I'm using and that you can find clay in the various local communities that they use for fill dirt and Kentucky has a lot of clay and I said, you can make pottery with that clay just as nice as could be. And one of the kids from various places, they would bring some clay in and I would mix it up with some dirt, I mean with some water and stuff and I could throw into little pieces and the one. They had clay that I was buying from Amaco at something like, thirty or forty dollars a bag, and here they had it as fill dirt. (Laughter, Brinkman) It was the same clay. It was fascinating. I think so many of them were. . . realized the possibilities that were available for trying a making a living. But as resting craftsmen, when we ended up making a living on our own in those days, in those days, you could make almost anything that was of quality, you know, halfway decent and people were buying it because it was handmade. Now, it's very competitive as far as for every craftsmen that was able to make, about three or four were saying hey, this sounds like a pretty good free spirited life.

Bellando: Well, you made a great contribution. I think you were the longest, you and Judy were the longest directors of the train and probably had the best or the most important impact in the state, of course the first person who started, you know, they had some prospecting to do. . .

Brinkman: Oh, yes. Getting it going and everything.

Bellando: Well, I guess I want to thank you, Ed. Aaron, Thank you for being with us.

Brinkman: Well, I still enjoy demonstrating, because I did so for so many years. I demonstrated Berea, I mean at Burnsfield they have the crafts show at the center of the square and I help out the one fellow that has a school that they're having various people in Burnsfield area, other than Penland, but anyway. It has a kick wheel. I never really did that much on a kick wheel. And I still play around on the kick wheel that and demonstrate and his wife says, boy he can keep on working and talking at the same time, but I guess I've done it for so many, it was easy.

Bellando: Was it a Cranbrook kick wheel?

Brinkman: No, no, this was a regular. The ones that they had in Berea, with a big, heavy fly wheel. The potter's wheel that I had was sort of like what they had at Cranbrook, but it's what

they call a treadle wheel. There was a large flywheel on a shaft and then the shaft was driven by an offshoot bar which was a treadle and you had to kick, you had to stand on one foot and kick with the other foot. And my instructor in college said that if you can learn on a treadle wheel, you can throw on anything because you're only standing on one leg. And I realized that when he had me demonstrate that for some church organization and he had me use a small electric Amaco potter's wheel, which was the electric one. And I got to the ( ) because he said if I go to the church there they'll pay me a little, but they wouldn't pay him as the instructor at that time. And all they had was a card table to throw on. When you try to ( ) a piece of clay on a card table and its going ( ). (Laughter, Brinkman and Bellando) It was an experience.

Bellando: Around in those early days, there weren't that many potters in those early days.

Brinkman: No, not that many. That's what I was saying, the art pieces that were produced way back in those days, sold quite regularly because they were handmade and most of us were trained by various skilled artists and creative people, so our pieces came out... Well, it was interesting too, a few years, quite a few years back, they were talking with the Southern Highlands Guild, that their scholarship should go to traditional work. Well, what is traditional? Because the people who started even the Southern Highland Guild were instructors and professional, you know, instructors from, what is it over there in Knoxville and various people that had the show with the Southern Highland Guild when it started in Gatlinburg and was mostly creative artists and imaginative people who were buying up property around Gatlinburg, in the mountains, part of the national, or at the edge of the national forest there. And later on, because the creative and imaginative people found it elegant, hey and then the promoters moved in. (Laughter, Brinkman)

Bellando: Well the WPA, I know there was several programs from the WPA and the Tennessee Valley Authority. When you did TVA work in east Tennessee and western North Carolina that ended up staying there as. . .

Brinkman: Oh that's it, they purchased property and moved into the area. In fact, the Southern Highlands Guild, when they start the show, I wasn't there at the very beginning when they had the tents, but I was there when they had to add on, or close in the little place around the outside of the auditorium there, in order to get enough room for the craftsmen to participate. At that time, there wasn't enough lodging for people that were coming to the mountains to see the artists and the creative craftsmen and stuff and so then they realized they needed more motel. Then what are they going to use the motels for the rest of the year? So then they had to do other things and it snowballed and it's like my little town up there in Frankenmuth, Michigan now it's almost like Gatlinburg north, because they're making such a big thing out of those German communities.

Bellando: Oktoberfest.

Brinkman: Oktoberfest and then Skip Johnson and Joyce Johnson, they ended up going back, well not back, but anyways, they ended up going off to be the instructor at, what is it? Up there in Wisconsin. Madison Wisconsin, at the college there and because the dells, that's almost like Gatlinburg North, when we stopped there to visit them, it's really touristy because of the Wisconsin dells.

Bellando: You started with the Train in 1964 or 1965?

Brinkman: The end of 64 because of my wife and myself, we got married, that's why I always have to say, my wife was always correcting my on my grammar, because when we were going to get married she had me call my, her father, to ask for hand in marriage. And she says, now remember, it's Judy and I, Judy and I. (Laughter Brinkman, Bellando) and he said he couldn't remember, and I couldn't remember either, but anyway. Judy and myself, anyways, where was I going with that, I got sidetracked . . .

Bellando: That's when you, because it was the end of 64. . .

Brinkman: Oh 64. We got married at the beginning of that 64 and we spent, no we spent one winter, so ( ) 65, yes. We spent one winter together up there at Penland and then the following year, we found out about it that summer.

Bellando: Right.

Brinkman: So it was 65. And we had joined the Guild when we were up there in 64. The Southern Highlands Guild. Wow, that's fifty years now, in the Southern Highlands Guild. There ought to be a gold medal or something. (Laughter, Brinkman) Get a gold watch? (Laughter, Brinkman)

Bellando: Thanks, Ed.

Brinkman: Thank you very much. I appreciate it ever so much.

END OF INTERVIEW