

Carolee Schneemann Oral History Interview: Jane Wodening

Jane Wodening, born Mary Jane Collum, was a writer and artist based in Denver, Colorado. Wodening was perhaps best known for her collaborations with experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage, with whom she was married for thirty years and had five children. She played a major role in the avant-garde film movement as co-director, editor, and star in some of Brakhage's most critically acclaimed films, including *Dog Star Man* (1964), *Cat's Cradle* (1959), and *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959), in which Wodening is filmed giving birth to the couple's first child. After her divorce from Brakhage, Jane changed her name to Wodening as a feminine activation of the Germanic god Woden. Wodening published fourteen books, including *Book of Gargoyles* (1999), *Mountain Woman Tales* (1994), and a series of interviews she conducted with her former husband entitled *Brakhage's Childhood* (2016). Wodening and Schneemann's relationship began through their mutual connection to Brakhage in the 1950s and deepened after Wodening's separation from Brakhage in 1986. Jane Wodening died in her home in Denver, Colorado, on November 17, 2023.

Interview conducted by Rachel Helm

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Denver, CO

Jane Wodening: Are you doing anything else besides having lunch with me?

Rachel Helm: No. Jane, I have to admit, I'm mostly here to see you.

JW: That's amazing. Why didn't you just get on Zoom?

RH: Oh, I think it's so much more fun to do things like this in person.

JW: And you wouldn't meet the chickens?

RH: And I wouldn't meet the chickens. Who's the black-and-white chicken?

JW: That's Cleopatra.

RH: ... Cleopatra's beautiful. ... What kind of chicken is she?

JW: Silver spangled Hamburg. There's another word in there somewhere. I can't remember what it means. She didn't learn to fly, I think, but she has good big wings and many Hamburgs will roost at night on the roof. But she doesn't do that. I don't know what would happen if she roosted on the roof. [*Speaking to chickens*] You're going to come to me and see if I can do it right.

RH: Yeah. Let the expert handle the cheese distribution.

JW: She's a little bit blind, I think. That's the problem. She's quite old. ...

RH: Jane, are you from Colorado? Is that where you came up?

JW: I was born in Chicago and lived there until I was 11. At 11 we moved to Frazier, which is a little town. At that time it was a tired old ex-copper mining town. But now it's a tourist trap, so it's changed a lot. My parents were school teachers after the war, World War II. After WWII, we came to Colorado and they were teachers. And I was in, I can't remember, fifth grade or something. And then we lived in Colorado after that, going from little town to little town. I don't think the people of the towns liked my [father as] principal very much. He was certainly smart and able and sensible, but he didn't understand the people.

RH: Were they mountain communities mostly?

JW: Yeah. The mountain communities, and there was one out on the plains too that we did better actually. We were there for two years. And then came to Boulder Canyon. ... So, I've been in Colorado mostly.

RH: I haven't spent a lot of time here. I lived in Kansas City, Missouri for a number of years and would come to Rocky Mountain National Park to go camp, but I've never really spent any time properly in Colorado.

JW: To go camping?

RH: To go camping. I like to camp.

JW: You weren't into the skiing?

RH: No. Just a fire and a cooler is sort of my speed.

JW: Oh, very nice. Well, that's what I did for those two years. Driving around the country. I didn't go to motels.

RH: Were you just living out of your vehicle?

JW: Yeah.

RH: What kind of vehicle did you have?

JW: I had a Honda Civic.

RH: Oh, that's pretty tight quarters for two years living. Oh, wow.

JW: Yeah, it was fine. The main thing was that the seat that folded back was comfortable and that made all the difference. I took out the back seat so that I just had it back to the hatch, a big space that was covered with a gray poncho. Somehow, nobody found that I had stuff in there. I

don't know. Maybe they figured that the grayness of the poncho was such that probably there wouldn't be any value. Which was pretty true, although I did hide money in places so that I didn't have to go to the bank every time I wanted a \$20 bill.

RH: Did you have any particular destinations? Were you visiting ...

JW: No, I wanted to be sure to know that the world was big. And it was. Even just America was big. And a lot of variety of people. And of course, living in my car, I was hanging out with bums and, I don't know ... failures. And I felt like a total failure too. I was a piece of trash for sure. I really learned a lot. I met some really nice people, and I also got in touch with my friends. I'd arrive—did I ever do that to Carolee? I don't know if I did. To go and knock on the door and say, "Can you put me up for tonight? Cause it's Friday night and I'm in New York City and I don't want to sleep on the street."

RH: When about were you doing that? In the 1980s, 1990s?

JW: 1980s. And it was very different than it would be now. It was a very odd thing to do. I just had a little yellow car. ... I was like ... nothing.

RH: Did you have belongings anywhere or you just had what you fit in a couple of satchels?

JW: I put them in my brother's crawl space. What there was left. The kids took what they wanted. It was as if I died or everybody, we had died. We had a big house full of stuff that we'd lived in for 23 years. And so the kids took things. Although, most of them didn't have houses. Just one had a house. Everybody's mad at her because she got most of the stuff. I had just what I felt was necessary and put it in my brother's cellar. My sister in law's, actually, she owned the house. So I just had what I needed in the car, which was clothes, books, food. I got to where I'd be driving along and I could reach back and get a cookie or something. I made a list in the book that I wrote [referring to *Driveabout*, 2016].

RH: That's in Carolee's library. I've seen that at Carolee's house before. I'll have to pick it up. I would enjoy reading that. You know, Jane, I have to tell you, I was on the plane and I was reading *Mountain Woman Tales* and one of the last stories in the book ... oh here, you know what, I have it, so I can say exactly what it was. Look how good I am. Very prepared. The story about a pilgrimage, yes, at Longs Peak [referring to the story "Pilgrimage Up Longs Peak" from *Mountain Woman Tales and Bird Journal*, 1967]. I gasped when you're crawling on that rock shelf and you hit that dead end. "Oh!" I'm kind of like that as well. I mean, I love to be outside and I love the mountains, but I have a lot of nerves about it as well. And it was just so visceral, reading that, and you hit that dead end. Oh, my goodness.

JW: It took me seven years to get the nerve up to write that story.

RH: I think you mentioned that in the introduction. I was so curious what that was going to be. Have you ever been back to [Longs Peak]?

JW: I have not gone back up to Longs Peak. My one son has gone up it a few times, but he just went up now, and he's 58. And he didn't make it to the top. He just went up through the easy part and stopped. And didn't go on the cliff's edge because he was tired. He was feeling the altitude. Yeah. Because he was coming from Tennessee and to just go from Tennessee right up

Longs Peak is really dumb. I told him it was dumb, and he said, "That's all the time I have. I can spend the night here. Spend the night up at Estes Park and then go." And that's not the two weeks that are necessary to adapt your blood.

RH: I've not gotten severe altitude sickness, but I know I've been on hikes before where I've just gotten a crazy headache where it's like I'm so short of breath that I feel like I've aged 50 years on the hike. It's very bizarre how that happens.

JW: Yeah. When I go up to the cabin, which is at 10,000 feet from this, which is 5,000 feet, I feel weighed down. I feel tired. I don't think I've had a headache, but I've felt sick.

RH: Do you still have the cabin?

JW: I have the cabin, but I don't have a car. ... Which is really irritating. That cabin is where I can be alone. One can be alone in a house in Denver, but it's not the same thing.

RH: Yeah, I understand.

JW: You can be alone with the canyon. That was, I think, the happiest time in my life. And it went really well. Let's see, I got there in 1990, in winter, or something, and left when I moved down to this house, when I added onto this house in 2004. So that's, I don't know, 13 [years].

RH: That's a long time.

JW: Yeah, it's more than ten years. [Referring to Cleopatra] She's getting old. And it's very sweet that she sits by me like that.

RH: Yeah, that is very nice.

JW: She's also the one that is the most spooky. The brown ones are called Pekins because they're, I guess, from Peking. I don't know. I like them. They're relaxed. She's very tense and never gets over it, but she lets me pick her up because now she's got bad legs. That's why she wants to sit down, but anyway, she's a neat pet.

RH: She's really beautiful. I can kind of see that her legs don't—she's not too happy to be on them.

JW: I don't know what the problem is. I've heard that when they get old, it's their legs go bad. But I had always thought it was because they were big, and they were bred to be big and heavy when they really should be small, like her. But yes. ...

RH: When I was reading, something I was thinking about, because this came up in a few of your stories, is that you have a deep relationship with animals, which I share. ... I've never had animals like chickens or goats or anything like that, but I've always had dogs and cats. When you're really close with an animal you end up being really close to injury and to death and their bodies, things like that. And I was thinking about Carolee and all her cats. I was thinking of the story where Carolee was out of town and one of her cats died and it was winter so she couldn't bury it. So it was stored in the freezer. ... [There's a] lack of squeamishness with the body of something that you love.

JW: Yeah. She was not squeamish.

RH: ... I was wondering if that was ever a point of connection. I don't know how long you guys carried through your friendship over the years.

JW: Well, as I say, she came [with] ... Yes, I can remember his name. It was Alex.

RH: Alex Sweetman.

JW: So that would date the time that she came. And she came two or three times. And I think there might have been one time after Alex. I'm not sure, but you know, I never met him, but I remember his name because it was the same name my cat had.

RH: Oh yeah?

JW: And Carlos adored her, my friend that I was living with. Carolee is just the most flamboyant person I've ever met. And I'm really glad to consider myself her friend. To some extent. I mean, I wasn't her best friend, but we were always glad to see each other. I was afraid that she would not open herself to me when Stan had left me. That she would just go with him. But she didn't. She was really glad to see me and glad to see me alone, so we could really get to know each other. Because with Stan there I—well, I was a quiet child. I was quiet all through my adolescence. I was, of course, quiet while I was married to Stan because he was talking all the time. And he wasn't interested in what I said, really.

Except that I—as he did point out in some statement somewhere—that I brought him the nature. You know, he was a city boy, and he lived in the city and then we moved up into nature. I guess one reason that he wanted to do that was it was a whole lot cheaper. That was the main reason because he was having trouble making money. And he told me he didn't want me working because I was to take care of the children. [To the chickens] How are you doing? You took her place, didn't you? Yeah. Yeah. This is Hattie. And Harriet is laying an egg.

RH: Does Harriet have a song that she sings when she lays an egg?

JW: Not much. She might sing when she comes out. Or she might wait a while and then sing. And it's the egg song.

RH: Yeah, I think that's so fun how they kind of announce a little bit.

JW: "I did it. I did it." And sometimes they've been sitting on the egg for hours, just enjoying sitting on an egg. I have two wooden eggs in there in two different places so that they can sit on an egg without having to lay one.

RH: So Stan was the reason why you would have met Carolee?

JW: Oh God, yes.

RH: It was because of his friendship with Jim Tenney, yeah?

JW: No. Well, Jim and Carolee.

RH: I thought that [Jim Tenney and Stan Brakhage] had grown up together or been students together or something of that nature, that they had some kind of deeper past.

JW: I'm not sure about him. You know, I'm not sure about Larry Jordan [filmmaker and founding member of the Canyon Cinema Cooperative], whether it was part of his group in high school. He had a group in high school, which was mostly homosexuals. But they were all theater people. If Jim and Larry were part of it, I don't know. Well, there was another one, Ricardo. He was Mexican, and he was very smart, and he and Stan were quite close and did theatrical things together. Jim was great. I liked him and I was really sorry when they broke up.

RH: Yeah. They broke up towards the end of the 1960s. And I think really the main thing, it was really about having kids. Jim really wanted children, and Carolee just did not want to.

JW: No. She told me once that I had five kids while she was having five miscarriages, or not miscarriages. Abortions.

RH: You guys were evening things out, I suppose.

JW: She had five abortions, but you know, she wasn't feeling superior to me in all my crowd of children roaming at home. It was the life she wanted to lead.

RH: So, Jane, I know some people like this and some people don't, but I brought some photographs that I found from when, I think it's from you and Stan visiting Carolee in Vermont. Carolee and Jim in Vermont.

JW: You know, she made a painting of me in Vermont [*Portrait of Jane Brakhage*, 1958].

RH: I know. I brought an image of it. If you're up for that.

JW: Sure.

RH: Here it is.

JW: Oh yeah. I was pregnant with my first baby.

RH: Do you remember much about sitting for that? What that was like?

JW: Well, she asked, very tentatively like, "I would like to paint a picture of you in the nude. Would you be up for that?" Oh, sure.

RH: Yeah. Yeah.

JW: And then there was the sitting. And I was just, as you see, kind of sprawled on a chair there. And she was painting away. I guess the guys stayed out of the room. And we didn't talk much. She was busy painting. Well, she would talk some. I can't remember what it was like, really. I was doing fine and she was doing fine. And everything was going along well and then I think it took her like two days was it? Or all afternoon? It was quite a bit of time spent sitting there. And I think she finished it up later you know, not needing me there anymore.

RH: It's a very nice painting.

JW: Yeah. She said the first person who got it or bought it, he put it behind the couch so whoever visited him would think it was just a face.

RH: Oh, how funny. Can you imagine buying a painting to do that? It's very strange, to only show the top half of it. Too funny. ... This is, yes, it says "Portrait of Jane visiting Jim and me in Vermont, 1958." I think these are all from the same visit.

JW: Oh, yes. I remember.

RH: And you and Stan, I think?

JW: ... Yeah. He's talking.

RH: Was Jim a big talker?

JW: No. It was Stan and Carolee. ... But mostly Stan. Well, Carolee was in there talking. But Jim and I just were pretty quiet.

RH: Well, you know, that was actually one of the things I was going to ask you about. There's evidence on the property of where gardens used to be. And she made this film called *Kitch's Last Meal* [1973-76] that's really about her domestic life in that house with gardens, and sweeping the porch, and canning, and cooking, and doing the dishes, and all these things that everyone does every day. I was really curious if you knew, really for my own [sake], because I still maintain her property. I'm so curious if she really was as much of a gardener as I think she made out at certain points.

JW: I think she was. Yeah, I would say so. She was so involved with health food. She wanted the food to be pure, clean, and good. And the only way to be sure of that is, you don't go to the King Supers and buy it. You grow it. Yeah, she got me into it. She wasn't that much into flowers, I don't think. Although, she liked color for sure.

RH: Yeah.

JW: Mostly they'd visit us, you know. But then that one time we visited them, and I'm trying to think of the yard.

RH: Would that have been Vermont?

JW: Yeah.

RH: Did you ever go to her place in New York, in New Paltz? Was it the loft or was it her place that was upstate?

JW: The loft and the place upstate. In the loft, she had this set of little pictures of her and the cat. It was like, I don't know how many, like three dozen pictures of the cat coming to her and giving her a French kiss to wake her up [referring to *Infinity Kisses*, 1981-87].

RH: Oh! Yes, yes.

JW: And she'd snap a picture that was aimed at her face. And I met that cat when he was older. What's the name of the town?

RH: New Paltz, where her house was?

JW: New Paltz. I met him at New Paltz. It's a thing that makes me so sorry because ... the cat came and slept with me. And during that time, I noticed a smell that smelled like—I had worked for a veterinarian for a while—this smelled like kidney disease.

RH: Yeah.

JW: And then we were out in the yard the next day, and she was talking to the cat. She was saying, "Now don't give me any trouble. Don't give me any trouble. I've got to go and do all this stuff. Just leave me alone." I mean, she was talking to the cat, not to me. But I thought I shouldn't tell her that her cat has got kidney trouble. And then the next thing I heard is her cat died. And I just thought I could have maybe stretched his life a bit if I had told her.

RH: Well, if I'm remembering correctly, if it was the cat that was kissing her in the morning. If it was that same cat.

JW: I think so. I can't swear to it.

RH: That cat was bitten by a rat and fell ill from that.

JW: It died from that? Oh, then it must be another cat.

RH: Must be a different cat?

JW: Cluny. ... It was amazing to see her make cat food. She made it in a big pot. I have a cat, actually, but he doesn't like people. So he's hiding under the deck. But he's very nice to me [because] I'm not people. I don't know why. Yes, I do: because I feed him. And I've had other people come and feed him and then he does—he even rolled over for my daughter once. Anyway, I do have a cat. And he knows that he has to be kind to the chickens, or at least polite.

RH: Does he come in the house, or is he just outside?

JW: No, he doesn't. Well, he comes in a little ways. But he doesn't really come in the house. He's a wild animal. But he's very loving to me. And that's something I need, a little cuddling. But—Cluny, number two.

RH: Yeah. There was Cluny I, maybe Cluny I got bit by the rat? And then Cluny II was later. Maybe that's the chain of cat events. [Cluny I was hit by a car in 1981, Cluny II appeared in *Infinity Kisses* and died from a rat bite in 1987.]

JW: That I think is the answer to your question. I knew Kitch well.

RH: Oh, yeah? Tell me about Kitch.

JW: Kitch. She was a beautiful tortoiseshell. And she was shy with people. I worked on being allowed to pet her, and I did to some extent. Although she didn't want me to get serious about it because I think she felt I might be invading the territory or something.

RH: Carolee wouldn't want you to get serious with it?

JW: No. It was Kitch. Carolee was okay. Yeah, if you can pet my cat, that's fine. She knew that she was the important person. Yeah, Kitch. Then, of course, the strange thing was that during that [time] ... How long did we stay in Vermont? It was two weeks or something. It was a considerable period. It was quite a number of days. She had just come into heat when we arrived and she didn't go out. She stayed in the house and squirmed. And left little droplets wherever she was. And for two weeks, which is not possible. I mean it's just not possible to stay in heat more than, like, two days. It was days and days and days and days. And she was always squirming and she didn't go out. You'd think she'd go out and find somebody.

RH: Well yeah, yeah.

JW: But it was an odd heat. It was very odd heat.

RH: I think Kitch had kittens at least once, but that is pretty—I wonder what would have caused that extended heat like that.

JW: Well, Stan thought she was expressing for the two couples. I don't know. I thought maybe she was having problems with her innards. I had a goat that was having problems with her innards and couldn't have kids anymore.

RH: Well, Kitch lived to be, goodness, like 20 years old.

JW: Over 20.

RH: Over 20?

JW: I have heard of a 30 year old cat.

RH: That's incredible.

JW: However, they picked her up and put her under the tree in the morning so that she could enjoy the day, and then pick her up and put her back in the box for the night. And then she stopped breathing so ...

RH: So when you went to visit in Vermont, I guess this would be 1958. How long had you and Stan been together in 1958?

JW: Oh, not long. Well, should I tell the whole tale? I suppose.

RH: Yeah, tell as many tales as you'll tell. I'll [listen].

JW: Well, that's about Stan. It's not about Carolee.

RH: That's okay.

JW: The first time I saw Stan was ... Oh, I was on a date at the opera house in Central City in the afternoon. It was a matinee. And we came out the door and there were these two guys sword fighting in the middle of the street. And my date says, "Oh, yeah, that's that little theater that these kids have started." And they've got a little tent that they've got for their theater and these weird modern plays. So the one below, backing up was Stan, and the one above was Larry Jordan. ... Anyway, that's all I saw that time. And the next time, I was living in New York City at the age of 19, I think. I had a peculiar job adding up columns of figures right across from the Rockefeller Center. And so I'd go over there and sit on a bench and eat my lunch. And then I discovered there was a mall under one of the buildings, and so I went down there and there was a bookstore. I went in and bought some books, and the guy at the cash register was interesting. And I was trying to get his attention, you know? But he was looking down. He was very grim and glum, and he was looking down and avoiding my eyes and wrapping my package and taking my money and putting it like he was just unavailable and I finally left. That's the second time I saw him. And the third time I was dating the head of the film club at the university. And he said, after we'd been together for some time, "I would like to introduce you to a genius. I think you're good enough. You're nice enough, decent enough person to get to know, to be introduced to a genius." ... So we went to Stan's house, which was a little house in Denver, and I dressed up. Got all clean and nice. Wore a dress and went there. He was glum again, but I didn't recognize him [from the other] times.

RH: Really?

JW: Any of the three times. It wasn't until he had been talking about working in the Broom Channels bookstore in New York City. And I said, "Was that in a basement mall?" "Yes!"

RH: Oh, how funny.

JW: "And the Tent theater in Central City? That was you? And you and Larry Jordan would go up and start sword fighting to bring in an audience." "Yes." So it was the third time I got his attention finally. ... He had a cat and the cat was sitting in the one comfortable chair in the house. And although I was dressed up, I was tired and feeling kind of punk and wanted to sit in that chair. And I said, "Can I move your cat? I want to sit in that chair." "No. That's where she's chosen to sit, so no." And so I sat in a kitchen chair. Then my cousin and I started going to his classes. He was teaching classes on how to make films. And I drew a leaf moving, and he said that was perfect. That was really good. That was the only kind word that he said to anybody. So I got the top score for that. And later in the class we stood under a tree and there was this electricity and stuff, and I went home and was waiting by the phone, you know, and he didn't call.

He really, really wanted a rich woman. And I was not that. So I waited [out] another rich woman that he tried for, and then I called him. I was really depressed. And it was, I suppose, I had a sense of the importance of, "Well, I've got to be with him." Anyway, so I was driving along and there was a cliff down to the creek and I saw my hands turn the steering wheel towards the creek and my eyes told my hands or my brain told my hands to turn back. And I did and then I thought I was about to commit suicide and so I called Stan up. I said, "I'm in trouble. I almost committed [suicide]. I didn't mean to." And he said he loved me and that I should come and visit

him. And so I did, and I started visiting him like every few days or something. Once or twice a week. That would have been maybe October? And we got married in December.

RH: Wow.

JW: At the end of December, after Christmas. He called his friend Angelo who knew everybody in Central City. And we went up there because he got the ... it was Saturday and the Justice of the Peace owed Angelo something. And so we went up there and got married and then went and had dinner with my parents. We didn't have a ring. We had a stone. It was a bloodstone. And that was a long story, but that's how I met Stan.

RH: ... What did your parents think?

JW: Oh, they were horrified. They were just horrified and they never got over being horrified. And he never persuaded them to. He was always rude to them. It was not a good scene, so that was sad. I couldn't really get together with my parents. But we did use them as babysitters, which was nice, because if we went to Boulder, we'd drive down at least from La Gulch. We drove down Boulder Canyon, dropped [the kids] off at my parent's house, and go on to Boulder and watch a movie or go to a party or something.

RH: ... You had five children?

JW: Yeah.

RH: What's the age range? How many years apart from the oldest to the youngest?

JW: I was pregnant and nursing for seven years. And that was it.

RH: So just ...?

JW: Bing, bing, bing, bing.

RH: Did any of them go into creative fields?

JW: No. Stan told them not to. ... Don't be an artist. Whatever you do, don't be an artist. And they're all very artistic in different ways. I think that they feel like they were told to not do what they wanted to do or something. Some of them do. And you always tend to obey the early instructions.

RH: Well it's a hard road, you know, working in the arts. I mean, Stan—he couldn't have supported a family. Was he teaching?

JW: Well, he was teaching later, after, in the late '60s. He was teaching. It was maybe '67 or '68 when he got his job commuting to Chicago. Every two weeks to teach filmmaking at the Art Institute of Chicago. But, you know, we met Jim and Carolee there in that little house [referring to the house in Sidney, IL, Jim and Carolee's home while studying at the University of Illinois]. I remember hanging out with them on the lawn and being kind of impressed with both of them. Jim was just a pleasant fellow. He had a cute smile, and he was very nice and Carolee was like,

out there and talking to Stan, almost competing with her thoughts, you know. She was a kind of woman that I hadn't seen before. She was very forward. Of course, I was just quiet. ...

I'm trying to think if we've ever talked about—I mean, she respected my involvement with animals. If I had told her that Cluny II was going to die of kidney trouble, she would have taken him to the vet and probably left him there. And maybe the vet would have done it while she was busy doing her busy things. And I just really feel bad about that. What did we talk about? I remember walking down the streets of New York with her and chattering. I don't know, we maybe talked about people or something. I don't know. ... She had cancer, right?

RH: She had non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and breast cancer pretty much from the 1990s through her death. She never, until the very last couple of years, pursued any kind of Western medicine.

JW: No. She went once to Mexico and spent some time down there. She said she didn't like the food. But she came away from that in—what do you call it?

RH: In remission?

JW: Yeah, in remission.

RH: Was that ... the Gerson Center [alternative cancer therapy clinic], maybe? Is that what it was in Mexico?

JW: I don't know. She was mad at them because she wanted it done her way. And they were totally different. They were very square. But it worked, and she didn't even like to admit that.... She was bossed around. She was told, "Eat this, and now you go to bed, and you take a nap." I don't know. "You take baths, you bathe in the water." And she was crabby about it. ... Well, she was doing her way.

RH: Yeah. I know. She was already taking a path that probably nobody encouraged.

JW: Right. She was very insistent that I learn about health foods. And I have been involved with health foods ever since. And my children too, as a matter of fact. Or at least a couple of them. She was very involved with that. And I think that [the clinic] was not. They just used corn or beans or you know, whatever [their] Mexican idea of how to cure cancer and it worked. But she didn't want to go back.

RH: Do you have problems with things eating what you try to grow here [referring to Jane's garden]?

JW: The squirrels. Squirrels are ferocious and incredible gymnasts and amazing to watch. I haven't befriended any of the squirrels. I'm mad at them always, you know?

RH: Yeah, that's the relationship. They're cute and they're charming and they're fun to watch, and you're just going to be mad at them all the time.

JW. They're stunning. The way they move, the way they do things. And my daughter brought me a squirrel-proof bird feeder. Another one. I had another one that was squirrel-resistant. But this one is supposedly squirrel-proof.

RH: Has it proven true so far?

JW: Well, no. The one that I got is a total failure. I don't think a single bird has come to that one yet. We put it up late yesterday. And it's hanging down low like about this, at a low level because it has to be 18 inches from the nearest branch or from the ground. So it's just about in between that. I can fill it from standing on the ground.

RH: Yeah. I just use those hopper style feeders and know that squirrels are going to eat—

JW: All of it. I'm just furious. I shake my fist at them and admire the hell out of them.

RH: ... Carolee was very, and I'm sure you already know this, connected to the psychic world.

JW: Oh, yeah. That's another reason she would have understood that I knew that the cat had kidney problems. But it was really a smell—not a psychic thing.

RH: Yeah. She was saying ... Well, Jim Tenney was very much on her mind towards the end of her life.

JW: They seemed really right. I didn't like them breaking up. But at the same time, for him, maybe it was better.

RH: Well ... he had a life that he would never have had with Carolee.

JW: Yeah, you're right. ... I was living in Long Grove when he came to visit, bringing two little children. Maybe they were six or eight or something like that. And that would have been in '88. So they would have been born in 1980.

RH: Yeah.

JW: So they'd be... Oh, they could be in their 40s now. ... Let's see, I had my first grandchild at 45, I think. But we were working fast.

RH: Yeah. What I was saying is Jim was very much on Carolee's mind. Her house up there has a pond out in the woods that's a fun place to watch. Wildlife. A lot of different things pass through there throughout the seasons. But she would say how Jim would come back to her as a great blue heron. That was the form he would take.

JW: He was dead already then.

RH: Yeah, he'd been dead for a long time at this point ... at least ten years. But it's interesting because, you know, Carolee, she died four or five years ago at this point. And I still see a great blue heron at their time of year, which I think is—the early spring is when I really see them in New York. But I see them at that pond all the time and I always think, "There's Jim, checking to make sure I'm working. Carolee's sending him over to make sure I'm doing my job."

JW: Oh! So it's really Carolee.

RH: I don't know!

JW: Carolee is inhabiting.

RH: What I think is, "Oh no, I better get to work!"

JW: It's Jim watching you. That's very interesting. You know, Jim was a premature baby.

RH: Really?

JW: And you could see it.

RH: I see photographs of him, and he was so skinny.

JW: Yeah.

RH: I wonder if we have—I think there's pictures of you all together.

JW: Alrighty.

RH: Oh, there's you. Yeah, that's you, and Carolee and Stan.

JW: Oh, I've seen that one. ... There's Jim's beautiful smile. He and I once jitterbugged together.

RH: Oh, yeah? How sweet.

JW: He knew how to jitterbug. And I was just thrilled. And Stan and Carolee were just irritated.

RH: Do you know where this was? This was their place because I recognize some of Carolee's sculptures in there. Maybe that was in New Jersey when he was working at Bell Labs?

JW: I couldn't say. I don't know, I immediately assumed that it was Crisman [Colorado]. But now I don't recognize the window.

RH: Yeah.

JW: So here is Carolee with this fellow picture of Stan [referring to Schneemann's double portrait of Stan Brakhage, approximately 1958].

RH: Do you know anything about that painting? ...

JW: She gave it to Stan, of course. And when Stan left, he just walked away. And my daughter Neowyn took it and doesn't want to give it back.

RH: ... Did Stan like this painting, you remember?

JW: I don't think so. It was two tries of him. It was supposedly two faces of him, but I don't know if that was a success, because they both looked like him to me. And no, he didn't like it. We didn't have it up. Neowyn did. She cared about it and knew that it was valuable. She got the

painting. She had the house, so she got the big stuff. ... [Referring to a photograph] I've seen this one. I was sewing, you see that needle and thread or—I think that's a cigarette?

RH: No, this looks like ... you're sewing. Yeah, because you've got that kind of pulling.

JW: Yeah, that's what it looks like to me. Is this Jim or Stan?

RH: ... That's Stan.

JW: That's Stan? Yeah, I've always thought that they were kind of in love, but they couldn't—

RH: Stan and Jim?

JW: Both being strong.

RH: Or Stan and Carolee?

JW: Stan and Carolee. I don't know which child this is. This would be the same house. ... This can't be in Vermont?

RH: No, from what I can remember from looking at the labeling that Carolee had done on these, that some of this is in Meyersville, New Jersey, where they had a little stone house—unless she mislabeled the photographs—Jim got a job working at Bell Laboratories in computer, electronic music. Kind of an experimental laboratory. And so they were living in New Jersey.

JW: I don't remember anything about it.

RH: Of course, these could all just be Vermont, and were just not labeled properly, which I do encounter.

JW: Who is that person in the middle? Is that a child?

RH: Yeah, that's a child.

JW: Then that would be my child.

RH: Yeah, because she looks like she could probably be three, and then there's a littler one here. ... You can just see a little shoulder.

JW: Oh, that would be Crystal. If Myrrena is—I think she's older than three [here] ... four or five. So that would mean it was 1963. So the age of those kids would date it. Because Myrrena was born in 1958. And Rarc, the youngest, was born in 1964. And I was tired. ... I was wrung out.

RH: That's a lot of work for your body to do.

JW: And I was nursing for like nine months, into the pregnancy of the next one.

RH: Wow.

JW: Yes, this is on our front yard in that first place ... just shortly after we got married.

RH: Would you have been in Colorado then?

JW: Yeah. That was in Denver. We had a long lawn and this shack in the back right by the alley. And we lived in the shack. It was kind of nice because nobody was there, except people would drive by in the alley. ... We met several times in New York, the four of us. But I remember there was something that I said or did once in New York that made her feel like backing off. "Well," she said as they were getting into the car and leaving, "there's still the work."

RH: What does that mean?

JW: Damned if I know.

RH: "There's still the work?"

JW: But then she still somehow accepted me anyway. There was something—I don't know if I should—well, I feel that now that Carolee is dead, that I can tell the story. Once, and it might have been on that lawn, at the beginning of getting to know her, or it might have been later, she came dancing in and she was so happy, so excited. She had been to the county courthouse and she had asked when, where she was born, and she had asked to see her birth certificate and there was a pen nearby, [and] she checked that the ink was exactly the same as that on the birth certificate.

And she, being a good artist, a really talented artist, she ... turned it to a nine, made that loop. I have this sense that we were sitting on the grass. And so if we were sitting on the grass, it would be that front lawn, which was really a charming lawn. And then she swore us to secrecy. And then when she died, I thought, well, I think, you know, it's very wonderful that she lived to be as old as she actually was.

RH: I know.

JW: And I don't know exactly how I worked it out. I can't remember now when she was born, but I knew she was older than Stan.

RH: I knew that at some point in time, she had changed her birth date. But we were having a very difficult time, because every drawing from childhood, every note, anything that had a date on it, has a mysterious tear, hole, scratch.

JW: Oh my God. She really worked—

RH: She really did. And every once in a while, something will drop.

JW: Something would come through.

RH: Yeah. And I'd say, okay, hang on a minute. But we got her original birth certificate, and it says she was born in 1934 and changed it to a—

JW: 9. ...

RH: Do you have any idea why she would have done that?

JW: She wanted to appear younger than she was.

RH: Do you think it was so that she could be—

JW: Sexy?

RH: You know, in this community of artists she would be younger than them and be kind of like an ingénue?

JW: She didn't want to be an ingénue. What did she want? Well, she wanted to be younger.

RH: Yeah.

JW: So that men would adore her. She wanted men to adore her. And you wouldn't adore an older woman so much. Oh, jeez. I had another story come through, and now it's gone. Oh, dear. I'm very forgetful. ... So she went down a little ways. But why? I think that she maintained her youth into her old age. What's wrong with that? ... But she wanted to be younger, I think she had a sense that younger was stronger. Younger had a better position, social life.

RH: I mean it does make sense especially in that time period. If she were older than all the male artists around her, that would mean something very different.

JW: Very different. Then she would be the senior.

RH: Yeah, the senior, the older, the elder, the mother figure, all the things.

JW: And she was, amongst the four of us. I mean, I don't know how old she was, but—

RH: I'd been under the impression that she and Jim were born the same year.

JW: Don't believe anything about her years.

RH: No, I know, I know. Well, that's so interesting that she did that. Wait a minute though. So let's say it, this [indicating a photograph] would be, what, maybe 1958, '59. When was your first daughter born?

JW: '58.

RH: ... So let's say it was 1958. She changed the date. So she would have been—

JW: That would be only if we were sitting on that grass. Yeah. I mean because we left that place in the spring. ...

JW: Did [Jim and Carolee] ever marry?

RH: They did marry.

JW: When?

RH: I think it was maybe 1956. '57. Her parents came. ...

JW: I have no image of her going home to her parents.

RH: She really removed them from the story of her life. I mean, I don't think they were completely estranged or anything.

JW: ... Telluride, Colorado has a film thing and we used to go to it together, and one time Carolee went and she was going to do a happening [referring to 1977 performance of *Interior Scroll* at the Telluride Film Festival]. She got up and she was going around and coloring, and she was doing things. ... And then she started taking off her clothes and then she was pulling her speech out of her cunt, and she was reading it ... these very erudite big words all about aesthetics. And this guy beside me, this ski bum.

RH: Oh, yeah, because you're in Telluride.

JW: He was going crazy. "What is she doing? Oh my God!" He was just in hysterics, and you know being a ski bum, he was a strong, capable kind of a guy, but he couldn't handle this, it was crazy...

RH: You were at that? That's a pretty famous performance of hers...

JW: Oh yeah?

RH: She did it twice.

JW: Oh she did?

RH: She did it once in the Hamptons at this thing called *Women Here and Now*. ... The story that she told about Telluride is that she was going to do something else there and then for one reason or another something really upset her. Maybe the title of the panel that she'd been asked to be on or something of that nature.

JW: I had a feeling there was something. She was mad.

RH: Yeah, she was mad. I think it was maybe they put her on some sort of "Day of the Erotic Women," or something like that. It pissed her off.

JW: She had an ego problem.

RH: Well, I think it's difficult to be an artist and to want success and to not have some kind of an ego.

JW: Do you think you have to have an ego problem to be an artist?

RH: Not to be an artist. But I think you have to have an ego problem to be an artist who's going to be driven in that way, like, "I will be successful. I will break into this world. I will go to this, I will do that." ...

JW: So I can be a writer without having an ego problem?

RH: I mean, I don't know if you're going to become a bestseller without having an ego problem. I mean, I think you can be an artist and you can be a filmmaker ...

JW: Well, my friend Lucia Berlin who writes ...

RH: Oh yeah. *Manual for Cleaning Women*.

JW: Ed Dorn [poet and student of Charles Olson at Black Mountain College] said that she and I wrote the same way. That is to say, we wrote the truth, part of our own lives. And she had a very different life than I did because, and most particularly ... she was an alcoholic. Not only was she brilliant but she was the funniest person I ever met. I got to stay with her once for a few days on my travels. And, well, the problem with that was she was just on her way to the—not the detox ward but the mad ward actually. They didn't have a detox ward where she [was]. I don't know why, but that doctor sent her to the mad ward, but I was allowed to visit during the day. So I stayed at her apartment and would go and spend the day in the mad ward with her. When she died, her sons kind of sat there for a few years and then came up with a posthumous collection of short stories. She had written, I don't know, a dozen books or maybe more, slowed down not only by drinking but trying to support four children by herself, and I slowed down because I didn't start until I was forty and even then I didn't think highly of my writing. What was I going to say? Well, shit. Oh, when she died, the boys brought out this book, this posthumous book, and somehow it got into the *New York Times*, and it hit the fan. ... Yeah, I recommend it. If you like me, then you'll probably like her.

RH: I've really enjoyed what I've read [of yours] so far. I genuinely have.

JW: Of me? And you've just read ...

RH: I've just read *Mountain Woman Tales* and then the *Book of Gargoyles*.

JW: *Gargoyles*. You read *Gargoyles*. And you liked those?

RH: I [did], yeah.

JW: They were all—all but one—other people's stories.

RH: Yeah, I could tell. They weren't the happiest stories I've ever read.

JW: No, they were all unhappy except for the beetle, and that was my story.

RH: That was your story. I mean it was a cliffhanger almost. I don't know what happened to the beetle after it climbed into the soil.

JW: He vanished.

RH: ... I think there's value to hearing people's stories and hearing the abject because it reminds you that everybody's grieving.

JW: Lucia wrote the introduction to *Gargoyles*. ... Everybody's died, you know. I don't know what to do. I have to mess with people who are younger.

RH: You got to find these young people, I suppose. Carolee kind of did that. She branched out and had a lot of friends who were quite a bit younger. Because she wanted to stay active, and she also wanted access. She wanted people working at the places who had opportunities and things like that.

JW: Do we have any more questions about Carolee?

RH: ... I don't know if you remember anything about this, but ... [in] 1970, '71, Carolee had some tenants in her house while she was in the UK. They trashed the house, and they destroyed all of her letters, [including] all her letters to Stan Brakhage. When she was ... working on *Correspondence Course*, a collection of her letters, she found out that Stan burned all of her letters. ... Do you remember something like that happening? I think it wasn't just her letters, but he burned a lot of stuff, and he told Carolee that he burned all of her letters.

JW: I don't remember. ... What were the dates on that?

RH: I feel like it would be in the '70s. '70s maybe into the '80s.

JW: Well, that I don't know. It's very possible. Yeah, it may well have been that they both burned their correspondence. I was collecting things between—well, really, the time we took off to New York in 1959 or '58, the summer of '58, and we visited Jim and Carolee, so at some point in there, maybe not starting at the beginning, but pretty soon I was saying I want to collect everything that you get in the mail, you get these wonderful things in the mail, and I want to collect them. And so I had a box. I think it was like a sweater box and it held a lot, a number of years in mail. And we carried it in the car, it was always in the car, and I'd just pick it up and put the mail in there and that's where it went, during our travels. And there were a couple letters there from Carolee and she decorates her letters. Then in 1960, whenever, '65 maybe, maybe '64, as soon as I finished that table. I made this 10-foot-long table so we could do scrapbooks on one end and eat at the other and there would be no problem.

I started the scrapbooks probably in ... '64 because we arrived in '63 and it took six months to build that table. So I opened the box, and I started sticking the letters in, and the pictures, and the things that I found, and flowers, and snapshots and everything into these scrapbooks. And they were thick mothers, big, big, thick. Three of them, finally. And that took about three years, maybe four to make. Finally the box was emptied and I'd done everything, but the worst of it was everybody had gotten a job because they had kids or something and they had families. They got a job. And they weren't these young people who were gonna take over the world anymore. They had a salary to take care of and bills to pay, so they weren't sending letters much. There wasn't much of a haul anymore. And even when they did, it was like "do you have any money?" So everything went into the scrapbooks until about 1967 or ['68.] So it would be after that that they might have had a correspondence that they would destroy.

RH: It seems like, from letters I've read, that they could just really wind each other up. Sometimes their friendship was pretty contentious and they were arguing, but still checking in on the day to day. You know, "Congratulations on this," and, "Wonderful to hear about that, but in regards to your accusations from the previous letter," that kind of thing. It's pretty wild. I'm impressed that they kept up a friendship for the amount of years that they did.

JW: They did. I don't know what my place was in there. ... I was producing children for him to have around. He liked children. Not that he was good with them. He wasn't. He was bossy, so when he said, "C'mon I'm gonna read you a story," he read the entire—at the last, when he knew he was going to leave, he read the entire Tolkien quatrain, whatever, trilogy plus *The Hobbit* aloud to us and I made a rug and the children made a hanging rug, and that rug is still intact, mine had gotten walked on and destroyed, but theirs was hung on the wall and now is in the cabin. I don't know about that except that I know there were a few letters that I'd put of hers [into the scrapbooks], nice decorated letters.

RH: Where are those scrapbooks now?

JW: The scrapbooks are at Yale, at the Meineke Rare Books Building. But you can see them on the web. And that might be fun to look at because there might be some letters of Carolee's in there.

RH: Yeah, I'll have to do that. Oh, I tell you something else I wanted to ask you about. I feel like this is something that you and Carolee would have talked about, because in... was it in *Gargoyles*? It's the story of the flood, where the woman gets caught in the crotch of the tree during the flood?

JW: Yeah. That wasn't from her.

RH: No, no, no. I know. Carolee really loved snow and floods and weather and recorded the weather every day. And I'm sure you experience so many extremes being where you guys were and where you were on your own in the mountain. I don't know, just something I was thinking about.

JW: When I got into ham radio, I eventually got into the weather net and was actually taking the weather net from everybody, you know, like, for an hour and then calling up the National Weather Service and telling them what I'd found, and that was fun. That's interesting that she kept her weather. I don't remember her doing that.

RH: Yeah. In her diaries she always makes a note and would talk about the weather a lot. And she'd talk about significant floods. [What the papers would call] the worst flood in 50 years, she's saying it's the best flood in 50 years. You know, that kind of thing.

JW: Well, when people die, people don't like it. There's something that keeps rumbling around in the back corners about Carolee, but I can't remember what it is. I wanted to tell you that story about her birth certificate.

RH: Yeah, that's super interesting. It's interesting, too, that you were at that performance at Telluride. There's not a lot of documentation of that.

JW: Oh, really?

RH: Yeah. And people are very interested in what was the difference between those two performances.

JW: Well, this time she kind of turned her back so that she wasn't... she had herself about like this. And so she was like [gestures], so it was secret, what she was doing, in a way.

RH: Oh, pulling the scroll out?

JW: Yeah. And I guess she was farsighted or wrote big. I don't know.

RH: Was she preparing for that at any point in your company?

JW: No, I remember though she was very huffy, and I thought at times, she's doing this in anger. Because they didn't want her to show the nudity in the films that she was going to show, probably. Probably she was showing, what was the name of the sex film?

RH: *Fuses*.

JW: She wanted to show *Fuses*. And then she did this outrageous—the speech that she was giving was so erudite. I was at the time so struck. It reminded me of Annette Michelson [art and film critic]. Have you heard of her?

RH: Yeah.

JW: It reminded me of her because she was like, like groping for the big words, and Annette couldn't stop doing that, you know.

RH: Well, you know, I'd have to check and see, but the text... Carolee saved the scrolls, and the text for one...

JW: It must have been gooey. Maybe she had copies.

RH: Yeah, there's different versions of the scrolls.

JW: She pulled many scrolls out of her...?

RH: No, I think she would make prototypes and things like that because she had to test.

JW: I mean, if she did scrolls, what did she—did she then read them? I mean, I carried a scroll when I had to do a speech because I could do it in my hands.

RH: Well, from the scrolls that she made, they're a kind of cottony, fabric-y paper and they're all folded like an accordion.

JW: Uh huh. So she did put 'em in there?

RH: Yeah, she definitely did.

JW: All of them?

RH: I think there would just be one.

JW: But, I mean, she would do it many times ...

RH: I think she tested them, but she did that performance once [before] in the Hamptons in '75.

JW: Oh, and that's the only [other] time she performed pulling the scroll out of her cunt?

RH: She did pull it when you saw her as well?

JW: Yes! ... It was stuck. It was like [*groans*].

RH: Oh, my goodness! Could you see her facial expressions?

JW: I mean, I was maybe on the fourth row. Me and my ski bum, and Stan on the other side. So you couldn't really see her face. But I kind of thought she was having trouble getting it out. I mean, it's such a Carolee thing, to speak—it's such a women's rights, grandmother of women's rights. I didn't know that there was only one other such show.

RH: Yeah. It's interesting that you say that language was reminiscent of [Annette Michelson] because ...

JW: I almost felt she was ...

RH: She was speaking indirectly to Annette ... [about] *Fuses*, Carolee's film. And yeah, the text that she read was her [response].

JW: That's very interesting.

RH: Which is interesting because she's responding to another woman. I think it would be really easy to imagine that as speaking toward a man or to men.

JW: One thing I never did, which may have been the only virtue I had in her mind, was that I didn't criticize her for the things she did. And of course, critics tend to do that.

RH: Well, I mean, that's a part of the gig.

JW: But evidently Annette had a negative attitude toward Carolee, and moralistic. And that's probably what made Carolee mad; [Annette] would be like, "You shouldn't do that," "A lady doesn't do that." And my mother kept trying to bash that into my head and my rebellion was to do everything opposite of what my mother taught me. So I accepted Carolee. And Mom never accepted Stan. That is interesting. I can believe that she was then talking like Annette at Annette, just having to use the dictionary to find a word that would make [Annette] hopefully go to the dictionary herself. But I can't imagine Annette going to the dictionary. I'm sure she had them all in her head.

RH: That was all—she just came out like that, huh?

JW: She lived to be 90, I think. Let's see. How old was Carolee supposed to be when she died?

RH: 79.

JW: She's got to be five years older than me, at least. ... Well, I don't know. Anyway, she'd be older than that, older than 79, five years ago. ... I wonder what she had against being born when she was born? ... I don't know. Well, do you want to take a walk?