

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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Arkansas Memories

Andrew Kilgore
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford
February 26, 2020
Fayetteville, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved in the Pryor Center archives. The transcripts, audio and video files, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <https://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio and video recordings in addition to the transcripts to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first ten minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first ten minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms.
- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing; and
 - annotations for clarification and identification.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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Scott Lunsford interviewed Andrew Kilgore on February 26, 2020, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Okay. So yesterday—we're back. This is—uh—we're now day two.

Andrew Kilgore: Okay.

SL: So this is the twenty-first, I think.

Bruce Perry: No.

SL: Is that right?

AK: No, it's the twenty-sixth.

BP: February twenty-fi—sixth.

SL: It's twenty-sixth? Fi . . .

BP: Yeah.

AK: Fifth or sixth? Twenty-sixth. Sixth.

SL: See—okay. Thank you very much. [*Laughter*] Of—um—February in 2020, so . . .

AK: Ash Wednesday.

SL: It's Ash Wednesday. It is. Um—so I'm trying to remember exactly where we left off. I think we had—um—talked—uh—of course, we talked a lot about Jack, and I think we talked some about Kathryn. Did we finish up with Kathryn?

AK: No, we wanted to talk some more about Kathryn.

SL: Let's talk some more about Kathryn.

[00:00:44] AK: Okay. Uh—I—the thing that I said about Kathryn was that of the four of us she seemed to be the sanest. Uh—the only one of the four of us that was not an alcoholic. Uh—she went to—uh—oh yeah, she—we were living in—in Little Rock, and we never had very much money. And she knew that we didn't have very much money. And—and all of her—she was very, very bright and scored real high on the SATs and the other—uh—tests that—uh—seniors and juniors in high school take. And when you score particularly high, you start getting—uh—solicitations from virtually every university in the world.

SL: Right.

AK: You start getting that stuff every day in the mail. And she—and her friends were also very bright, and they had plans to go to Harvard and Yale and Princeton. That wa—they were all headed towards Ivy League schools.

SL: Mh-hmm.

AK: But Kathryn realized that we didn't have very much money. And so she thought that that was off limits to her. Uh—and—and when she mentioned it to me, I reassured her that with the scores that she had—the way that these colleges and universities work is if you can get in, then they want to keep you the whole

four years. They don't want you dropping out because of money or—or any other reason. And they do—once you're in, they do everything to make it possible for you to stay in, as long as you're, you know, doing the work.

SL: Right.

[00:02:11] AK: So—uh—she decided she wanted to go to Cornell . . .

SL: Okay.

AK: . . . because Cornell had a great vet school, and she loved animals. So she—uh—she got early admission to Cornell, and they worked out all the financial parts of it so that we weren't burdened with a big—uh—debt.

SL: Right.

AK: And—uh—so she went to cor—she went off—we went—we took her off to Cornell, and—and—uh—and about four weeks later I got this phone call from her. She and I were always—always talked about stuff. And I got this phone call from her, and she said that—uh—she—she said, "Did you know that you have to take a lot of science courses to be a vet?" And I [*laughs*] I said, "Well, yeah, basically that's what a vet is is a scientist." And she said, "I'm not very good at science." So I said, "Well, you know, what are you good at?" She said, "Well, I like to write, and I like art." So she ended up getting a degree in history of art. Uh—

and at the time there was a prestigious—uh—curator teaching there and also curating their own art museum. And Kathryn got a job working in the art museum there and worked with this woman. [00:03:32] Uh—and then after she graduated—she had fallen in love with this fella that was—uh—born and raised in the Bronx. Uh—and—and she dec—so she wanted to go down to New York City and—and be with her—uh—her boyfriend. So she went off to New York and ended up—uh—first she worked for a really prestigious art gallery on Fifth Avenue. And then she decided she liked doing the handling of the—managing of the art itself. So she applied for a job and got it—got it against so—like 800 different applicants to the job. She got this job at the . . .

SL: MoMA.

AK: No, not MoMA, at the—what's the other huge museum?

SL: Guggenheim.

AK: No, up—oh, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

SL: Oh, okay.

AK: And—in the European painting department and—uh—and worked there for several years, and it was—it was really cool. And she, you know, she handled Rembrandts and all kinds of multimillion-dollar paintings every day. It was—that was her job.

SL: So she was living the dream?

[00:04:48] AK: Yeah. And—uh—and—and after—she'd been dating this fella for about six years, and it didn't seem to be moving forward. So she realized that the hang-up was the fact that he was Jewish. And he wasn't—he wasn't very active in his faith or anything, but it was important to him because of his relatives and stuff. So this is the kind of person Kathryn is. She just got a couple books on Judaism and—and read them and discover—and decided that she could—she liked that. That—that worked okay for her. She—that would be okay for her. So she told her boyfriend that she was gonna convert to Judaism and they were gonna get married. Uh—and they—they worked with a rabbi. Uh—they both had to go meet with a rabbi once a week for a year. And then she—they had this wonderful wedding, and they've—now they have two kids in college and have been together for over twenty years. And—uh—and she's doing great. I mean, she's—she doesn't work at the museum anymore. She has—uh—she designs webpages and does different halftime jobs—uh—and—while taking care of her kids. She has three kids. And—uh—and I talk to her not as frequently as I would like, but—uh—we have great conversations about movies and a lot of things that we have in common.

[00:06:20] SL: I—as I remember, she actually babysat my children.

AK: Yeah. She did.

SL: Um—and—uh—she was just so reliable . . .

AK: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and wonderful . . .

AK: Mh-hmm.

AK: That's . . .

SL: . . . and smart, and quick.

AK: That's Kathryn. And humble.

SL: Yes. Yeah.

AK: She doesn't—she doesn't make a big deal about herself, but she's just there. And—and is, like Jack, very, very beautiful. Uh . . .

SL: And very intelligent, I mean . . .

AK: And incredibly intelligent.

SL: Right.

AK: Yeah.

SL: Right. Um—so—um—I know you kind of avoided—um—uh—the relationship between her and Jack, so we don't really need to go into that if you don't want to, but I would assume that . . .

AK: It was a tortured relationship.

SL: Uh-huh.

AK: And I think there are—I suspect that there are elements to that

relationship that she never told anybody about . . .

SL: Right.

AL: . . . uh—that would—might be quite troubling to hear about.

SL: Right. Well, let's don't—let's don't go there.

AK: Yeah.

SL: Um—so—um . . .

[00:07:31] AK: But the—but the one thing that I would say about her relationship with Jack, regardless of what the details of it might have been, is that she never—she never didn't love Jack.

SL: Uh-huh.

AK: And she—and she survived whatever difficulties there were in that relationship to become a wonderful whole person, a gr—uh—you know, her marriage is wonderful and her—she's a great mom to her three kids. And so whatever difficulties there were in her childhood, being raised by two people that were—got drunk every day and a brother who ended up gettin'—uh—self-medicating his own mental issues, she came out of it with a remarkable degree of wholeness and—and is just a great person to know. And—and I know that her—uh—when I've been up there for bar mitzvahs and stuff, there's—she has a—they have this incredible, wide circle of—of friends in their community that—uh—it's a great thing to see.

[00:08:45] SL: Did she ever produce any of her own art?

AK: No. Well, I—I shouldn't say that. I take that back, edit that out.

She—she—what she's discovered is—uh—I can't remember the name of it, but basically you have this real super-hot—uh—torch, flame . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AK: . . . gas flame, and—and all these different colors of glass. And you melt the glass together into these very small but very intricate patterns. And—and—uh—and they often make beads out of them or—or do other things with them. And she has a—she has—she offers them for sale on a webpage. And there's a whole community of people that make this kind of—uh—unique, individual jewelry out of these—uh—intricate patterns of glass.

SL: So she has a website. What—what is her—uh—married name now?

AK: It's Samalin.

SL: Samalin. Okay. Well, I'll—I'll try and find her.

AK: Kathryn Samalin.

SL: I'll try and find her.

AK: She—I think she has a—yeah. And I'll—I'll—I can for—I can—uh—send you the link for sure.

SL: Okay. Well, you oughta let her know that . . .

AK: And she uses Instagram too, I think.

SL: Okay. You oughta let her know that you're the latest Pryor Center victim and . . .

AK: [*Laughter*] Yeah, she—yeah, I'll tell—I'll probably talk to her tonight, actually, so . . .

SL: Okay, good.

AK: . . . I'll tell her all about it.

SL: Be sure to tell her hello for us.

AK: Yeah, I will.

SL: Yeah. Yeah. We always were attracted to her . . .

AK: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: . . . resilience, I think.

AK: Yeah.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:10:26] SL: Well now speaking of art and work, you know, your abilities as an artist are pretty well established and renowned. I mean, there's nothing like an Andrew Kilgore photograph.

AK: Let me speak to that.

SL: Okay.

AK: 'Cause I was thinking—actually earlier this morning, I was thinking that's something that I wanted to talk about.

SL: Okay.

AK: Kind of under the heading of ambition.

SL: Okay.

[00:11:01] AK: I've always wanted to be famous for what I do. And it—I'm a little embarrassed by that because, you know, my faith tradition teaches me to be humble and to be of service, but there's this part of me that would just would really like to have see my work have a national recognition and be part of a national conversation about how different people get along, you know, about diversity, and about stigma, populations that are stigmatized, particularly people with mental illness but also people of color and—but you know, I really always wanted that work to be seen by a national audience. And I know that I'm—I—people say, "Oh, Andrew, you're famous." And I say, "Well, actually I'm regionally well known," which is a more accurate description of—you know, I, yeah, I have a lot of people in Arkansas who know and appreciate my work, but I want people in New York and LA and Chicago and, you know, everywhere, to recognize this work and see the value of it. One of the things that I've always wanted is for some—I know just enough about how that works on that large-scale-museum level to know that there are people called curators who have the responsibility of evaluating the value—the artwork that comes into the mainstream

and putting together exhibits for museums. And I've always wanted to find one of those people well known in the national community who liked my work enough to kind of champion that work in that larger community. But I've, on the other hand, I've never figured out quite how to put my work into the view of those people.

SL: Curators. Yeah.

[00:13:24] AK: Of those curators. So it's—I—one of the things that I—you know, from the beginning, my ambition was to create exhibits of work. I like—I made all the prints myself. All my prints are made by me and signed by me. And so I would create collections of photographs and organize them into exhibits. The first one, the first exhibit I did, the *Fayetteville Townfolk Exhibit*, had sixty-four pieces in it, and it toured to about, oh, thirteen or fourteen different venues inside the state of Arkansas. The second exhibit that I did, which was called *We Drew a Circle*, was about people with mental retardation. And that exhibit actually got picked up by a national organization. But it was an advocacy organization, not a fine-art organization. But it toured all over the country, was exhibited in eighteen different state capital buildings. In the early [19]80s, it was part of the conversation about mainstreaming people with mental

retardation. And I've always appreciated the fact . . .

SL: Yeah.

AK: . . . that that work was so well known and did become part of the conversation about people with mental retardation. We now call developmental disabilities. So but that—but since then, none of the—I did a companion piece ten years later about people with serious mental illness. And it got booked twice outside the state of Arkansas, and only a couple times inside the state of Arkansas. And I think it's some of the very best work I ever did, and yet it's virtually unknown. And that was an eighty-piece exhibit. But one of the things that I didn't do was publish. [00:15:22] My focus was always on creating an exhibit that could be hung in a museum or in other exhibit venues where people would go and see the pictures and hopefully be moved by them. But I never made an effort to, except once, to publish the—to get the work published in a book. And the one time that I did create a book, I made the terrible mistake of self publishing it, thinking I—with these grandiose ideas about how—what a great job I would be in getting this book out for people to see, and I totally fell on my face. I ended up in bankruptcy court as a consequence of the debts that I accrued in the publication of that book, and ended up selling like 3- or 4,000 copies of it.

There's a warehouse with several thousand copies of this book that a friend of mine picked up just before they were gonna go into the furnace. He found out that there were—that there was a couple thousand of these books just sitting around, and the guy that had—the printer had them in his possession because I never did finish paying for the printing. And he—they were literally that day were gonna go into the furnace, and my friend showed up with a checkbook and just wrote a check and took possession of all of them. And now they're sitting in his basement or something. I don't know where they are.

[00:16:59] But I never found the—a way to get these collections of work published by a real publisher that would get them into the photographic art departments of all the bookstores in the country and get them reviewed by the major newspapers and stuff. I never figured out how to make that happen. And sometimes, you know, we kid around and say, "Well, you know, I'll need to die before that can—that kind of recognition will come." And then sometimes I think, "Well, you know, maybe I've just kidded myself about what the ultimate value of these photographs are." I mean, maybe they have done the work that they're able to do and just are not innovative enough or whatever, well-crafted enough to enter into that national level of

conversation. But it's something that I've really kind of longed for. And you know, if I live long enough and the right person stumbles across this archive of photographs, then maybe they will get to have a larger audience. I don't care about the money part, obviously. *[Laughs]* But I just would love to see like a half a dozen books of the different exhibits that I've created over the last forty-five years be available for people to see.

[00:18:54] SL: So has—I'm hoping that you have the negatives and all the materials and . . .

AK: Oh yeah. Let's talk about that.

SL: Okay.

AK: That—when I started out ac—you know, the first five years that I made photographs, I was just kind of figuring out how to make them.

SL: Right.

AK: You know, just the basic, you know, how to develop film adequately and get good exposures and design photographs well enough. And then when I discovered my abilities with portrait photography and kind of got pretty good at it in the mid [19]70s to late [19]70s, then I realized that my goal was to create an enormous in-depth archive of all the different kinds of people that were alive in the United States during my lifetime. And so

for the last fifty years now—because I—there are a lot of images from those first five years that I think have a comparable value. They're a little different in how they're designed, but they have a comparable value. For me at least. But I have. I've kept every negative I ever exposed. I have an enormous collection of prints. I have prints from all the exhibits that I've ever made. And most of that work has—the negatives have been scanned and edited appropriately and are available digitally. Not all the—the exhibit-length pieces are, for the most part, available digitally. So I've done what I set out to do. I've created an enormous archive of photographs. [00:20:46] And I think for a lot of people—the idea of diversity doesn't, for me, seem to go deep enough. It in—maybe it includes people of color or people with different ethnic backgrounds, but it doesn't go deeply enough into the diversity within those populations so that we have people with mental retardation or mental illness or people with incredible wealth or resources or—you know, there's a range within the particular boundaries that creates a different kind of diversity, a diversity of depth and breadth. And I do—I have this incredible archive of work. And after I'm gone, that work will become the property of an agency that collects archives like that. So that the hope that these images will

always be available like fifty years from now, or a hundred years from now, if there are people around with—who are curious about this time that we're living in, they'll be able to come—to look through that whole archive and find images that reflect for them what this visual history is about. Am I rattling on too long?

SL: No, not at all. You know, for me, in my world, it's basically storytelling.

AK: Right.

SL: And I'm just wondering if each of these images—if there is a story with each one that is available.

[00:22:55] AK: There's a—there are stories—a lot of them, but not all of them. You know, it was hard enough to collect the images themselves, and I, you know, and I must admit that I have not been good about collecting verbally the information that would go with each one of these images. Some of the exhibits have more text accompanying them than others. It—the—one of the things—the—you know, this is the fiftieth year of my doing photography. And one of the things that I would just love to see happen would be a major museum like Crystal Bridges or the—there's a museum in Fort Worth that collects a lot of huge collections of photography, and you know, and the ones in New

York and Chicago. To have one of those museums say, "We'd like to do a retrospective of your work," and then send somebody, a curator or an art historian, who would sit down with me and record my memories, image by image by image, of a broad cross section of these pieces. The stories I could tell about Bill Clinton for example, or people in your family, you know. Good stories, you know, but I thi—but it needs a partner who's a writer, who collects that kind of information. That's not my role. My role is to take as meaningful a photograph of that person—a photograph that communicates something of who that person is. And then to have a partner whose role would be to—through like very much . . .

SL: What we're doing.

AK: . . . like what we're doing.

SL: Yes.

[00:25:07] AK: I mean, if somebody came along and said, "Scott, curate Andrew's retrospective exhibit. Sit down with him for a year." Like what we've done yesterday and today, if we could do that for six months or a year, you know, like a couple three times a week, and just go through each one of these exhibits and pick my brain for—and my—and the resources that I have collected. I mean, I have a huge storeroom back here that's

filled with paper, a lot of which was is ha—was part of the exhibits that I created. [00:25:45] I created over twenty major collections of work with these kinds of boundaries. So I think a retrospective exhibit would—you know, I've always—you know, like when you look at Rotten Tomatoes, you know, you—they have a score for the critics, and they have a score for the audience. And sometimes the critics will say, you know, "Eh, 30 percent," you know.

SL: Audience rating . . .

AL: But the audience says, "We love this movie. You know, we'll give it a 98." Well, I think I've been a lot more popular with just ordinary people who will walk through a collection of these images and be moved by them, whereas I actually the—sometimes I have been—I've had some people who supposedly knew more about photography make disparaging remarks about my work, while, you know, a thousand other people will come along and say, "You know, I was in there for a half an hour, and I walked out with tears rolling down my cheeks." So . . .

SL: I would guess that . . .

[00:27:03] AK: I remember—this is a nice—an interesting story that you might enjoy. The—back in the [19]70s, late [19]70s, there were a group of guys in Fayetteville who wanted to start a men's

group. You know, the women were all having their women's groups, and then the men wanted to have their men's group. You know, Robert Bly and all that stuff. So iron-man stuff and all that. So about twenty to twenty-five of these guys got together, and we were sitting in this big circle, and the organizers said, "Okay"—this was the first meeting of the—what became a men's group that apparently went on for a long time. I only went to the first one, but the leader said, "Okay, so let's each of us tell a story about—that was important to us realizing our manhood."

SL: [*Laughs*] Okay.

AK: So each one of these guys told stories, and they were all about killing an animal or a sexual conquest. That—and that—it was one story after another about going out there and, yeah, and shooting that deer with dad and granddad, or about, you know, the first time they got laid. I mean, that was [*laughter*—so it got to me, and I was just kind of like, "This is not where I wanna be."

SL: Right.

AK: So the story that I told was about when I—the first—oh, I had been photographing for about eighteen months, and there was this big national competition, photograph competition, and I

thought I would enter it, which I did. So I had all these photographs that I'd made in the institution where I was working with totally blind re—severely retarded, institutionalized children. So I put together a collection of twelve of these images, and I was ready to mail it off to this national organization. I think it was LIFE Magazine was having this big, huge contest.

SL: Right.

[00:29:07] AK: But I had this friend who owned a little bookstore, and I thought, "Well, you know, I think I'll go show it to him." I can't even remember his name now but—"I think I'll go show it to him and see what he thinks about these photographs." So I went over. They were in a little brown envelope. They weren't even very big, they were just these little 5x7s. So I took them over, and I said, "I want you to look at these photographs and see what you think." So he was sitting at this table, and I didn't wanna, you know, be hovering. So I sat down, oh, maybe fifteen feet away and kind of kept to myself to not influence . . .

SL: Impolite . . .

AK: . . . yeah—his experience.

SL: Yeah.

AK: So he pulled all the photographs out, and he set them down in a stack, and he looked at the one on top for a really long time.

And then he took the whole stack without looking at any of the other ones and put it back in the envelope. And I was thinking, "Oh, that's—he didn't even want to look at the rest of them. He just looked at the one." So he picked up the envelope, and he turned around to come and give it back to me. And I saw that there were two tears just running down both cheeks. And that was the first time that my work—that I saw my work bring someone, move someone to tears. And that was the story that I told about my manhood. [*Laughs*]

[00:30:33] SL: You know, that's a great story, you know, and that's something—that's a signal that I get. Also, before we go on, you got a seed or something right here in the corner of your mouth. Yeah.

AK: Coffee, probably.

SL: Yeah.

AK: Thank you.

SL: Sure.

AK: Isn't that weird? I do that. It's like people who do portrait work and hairdressers have this license to say, "You know, your fly's down," or . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] Right.

AK: . . . "you got some spinach in your teeth," or whatever.

SL: Right. Well, I would love to be a part of that for you. I don't know what kind of arrangements can be made. I think it's important.

AK: We just need \$100-, \$200,000 to put that together.

SL: Well, maybe not, but I think—I do think the narrative is important.

AK: Yes.

SL: Because it supports not only . . .

[00:31:33] AK: I think we cu—you know, with the help of people like Bill Schwab and some of the people that he knows, I think we probably could find some major support for a retrospective exhibit, because I think if a big museum like Crystal Bridges put together a really good, deep, well-publicized and documented retrospective exhibit that it would be incredibly popular. I think they . . .

SL: I think it would make a difference.

[00:32:01] AK: Yeah. I thi—I mean, I think that people would come up from all over to—once it kind of—people could see what it looks like to have a display of maybe—I visualize 200 or 300 pieces because each—I—there's so much work in this archive that I've produced. That's fifty years' worth of work. I really think that it would be a really moving document, but it really,

seriously, would cost a lot of money to put that together. It would mean, you know, someone like you and maybe another person—their—all the money that they would—their income for a year. I mean, when you think about it that's—and not to mention the physical costs. I'm rambling now. Sorry.

SL: No, no. Well, it's exciting to think about this . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . in terms of a holistic body of work.

AK: Yes. Which brings me to another—I'm sorry.

[00:33:06] SL: Well, some of the things that I was thinking about as you were talking—all the work with disabled souls. You know, of course, for me, I enjoy interviewing the subject. So all those disability headshots—you know, those folks probably couldn't speak for themselves.

AK: Right.

SL: So we would be relying on your memory of those sessions and those people.

AK: Right. And we could find—like when we did the movie—like there's a picture over here that I took in 1980 of Suzanne Stoner.

SL: Okay.

AK: And which is one of the most popular images from the whole

archive. Well, she was interviewed for that film. Bill Clinton was interviewed for that. There are—we could find a lot of people who were parts of these exhibits going all the way back who are still available to be interviewed. We, I mean, we could do some incredible stuff that way. That'd be great.

SL: It would be great.

[00:34:18] AK: I th—I—one of the things that I really—that I wanted to talk about just because it, I think—well, I've always thought that I did two different kinds of portrait work. What I—and the way that I think of those two different streams of work is client work and what I call third-party work. And client work, which is what I've lived on and still live on, is when people come to me. And I've solicited people—come to me and say, "I want you to photograph my children," or "I want you to photograph my family." And I have a fee schedule like anybody who does this kind of work. And people write me a check. And they're my clients, you know, they're my customers, and I—and the tension there is to produce an exhibit—I mean, a photograph for that family which is true to my artistic values of clarity and a kind of beauty and a kind of truthfulness, but that also meets the needs of my client. So there's this kind of balancing act that I do, because I want them to pay me. I want them to give me money

so that I can keep working. And the—and when the person is sitting in front of my camera, the—somewhere in the back of their mind they're thinking, "I just gave this guy a bunch of money to take my picture. I've gotta show up for it," you know. So they present themselves in a way that is part of this client relationship. So that's one whole—and there's a huge amount of that work. And a lot of that work has a lot of value in terms of the history of this period of time. I mean, the—and some of those photographs are really beautiful and I think significant in their own right, but they're not—but the third-party work—I call it third-party work because the subject didn't have anything to do with the financing of the photography.

SL: Right.

[00:36:53] AK: So their interest doesn't—they're not sitting there thinking, "I paid this guy a bunch of money," 'cause they didn't, you know. Instead they were solicited by the advocacy organization that helps them get through life. Or when we did the exhibit about Arkansas sesquicentennial, what we did is we went to all these sesquicentennial celebrations, and we set up the lights and the backdrop, and we would just call it—we would just tell people, "Hey, we're doing a project for the sesquicentennial. Come let us take your picture." And they

would just come and fill out a little form and sit. And so they weren't paying us to do the work, and they weren't anticipating even collecting the images of themselves. They were just kind of being part of this weird guy that was at the [*SL laughs*]*—*you know, because they asked them, and they're just nice enough to do it. [00:37:45] And we got a, you know, a—cops and teachers and farmers and just all kinds of people in small rural towns and Little Rock and—but there was—in that relationship or in the r—or when I photographed people in mental health ins—hospitals, or any of that kind of work, there was—I—it gave me a kind of freedom because I knew that I didn't have to satisfy the person that I was photographing. I only had to satisfy myself and the overarching goals of the project itself, so that instead of making a photograph that satisfied the client, that they could hang in their living room and just be part of their family's history, I was creating an image that told a larger story about somebody with mental illness, or somebody with mental retardation, or somebody who was stigmatized because of their ethnic background or, you know. So you see the difference between those two different . . .

SL: Absolutely.

AK: . . . kinds of photography, and maybe you've experienced

something like that as well.

[00:39:08] SL: I—you know, when I—while you—I was thinking that—you may not be aware or think of it in these terms, but I think your activity in that second stream has created a bit of a movement here, locally at least, that I know from associations with fellow photographers.

AK: Yeah.

SL: And I'm talking specifically about the Help Portrait event, where there will be half a dozen photographers, and . . .

AK: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . they set up their lights and their backgrounds, and . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . people just come in, and Tysons will donate food for them.

AK: Right.

SL: It's a major social event for the community. And I think that pa—that is based on your work. I think that you broke the ground on realizing the value and the importance of photographing community.

AK: Yeah.

SL: So . . .

[00:40:08] AK: I think you're right. I think—because I, you know, I was the first one around here to do that kind of work, and I

promoted it. You know, I wanted people to see it, so. And I know—I can think of at least a couple of photographers who came along and worked out of this same kind of genre, who kind of modeled their careers somewhat on what they had seen me doing.

SL: It's inspirational.

AK: Yeah.

SL: It . . .

[00:40:39] AK: But it—but the, you know, the reality is that I had modeled what I did on the careers of other photographers who had come before me whose work I was aware of because I saw it in a museum or I saw the books that had been made about their work. So I didn't invent this genre. I may have moved it forward a bit, you know, I may have—I think that I did make some significant contributions to how this genre works that maybe—it's weird to evaluate your own work. But I think that there are qualities in the images that I've made about—of people that nobody else has quite been able to match in terms of the intimacy, the sense of connection that you f—the empathy that you feel for the person in the picture. I don't—I really don't see anybody who can do it quite as . . .

SL: Convincingly.

AK: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. I agree with that.

AK: As powerfully as I do. I mean, I see even very famous photographers who make wonderful, interesting portraits of people, but they don't have that inner depth that a lot of my work has. I don't . . .

SL: It's an undefinable focus . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . that emits . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . from the images. It's not a technical thing.

AK: Yeah.

SL: I mean, it's—it took the technical abilities to . . .

AK: I had . . .

SL: . . . do that, but there's something breathing off the . . .

[00:42:32] AK: There was a—thir—back in the, oh, late [19]70s I had—I've always put up a lot of pictures of—you know, I like to—I like looking at my work, so I cover the walls of my house with the pictures that I've taken of people. And I had them all up. And this friend of mine brought this guy who was a big advertising guy in a neighboring city.

SL: Kay.

AK: And he was here to visit my friend, and he came to see my studio. And he looked around at the pictures, and he said, "Okay, Kilgore," he said, "What's your gimmick?" And I was kind of taken aback by that. And I said—and what I remember just coming out of my mouth was, "I just love these people as much as I can." And I thi—and at the rite of—at the risk of being saccharine, I think that's accurate. I think that's what I—when people come in here—when I go to someplace and photograph people—I remember some of the wonderful people I photographed in mental institutions that were psychotic, and I just felt this deep sense of affection for them, this deep sense of—not the kind of empathy where, "Oh, look at that poor person."

SL: [*Unclear words*]

AK: Not like that at all.

SL: Right.

[00:44:12] AK: I—when I did the—my major piece about people with serious mental illness, I—it's the only exhibit I ever made where I included a picture of myself. Because as I learned more and more about mental illness through the creation of that exhibit, I began to sense my own brokenness and, you know, and remember the major depressions that I'd worked through and

the self medication with alcohol and drugs that I'd experienced. And I realized that I had a place in that exhibit about people whose lives had been deeply affected by mental illness. So I put a picture of myself in that exhibit. And that sense of affection for my subjects that comes from a feeling of shared humanity, not a—without any, hopefully, without any condescension in it just a—well, I think I've worn myself out here.

SL: I think that the—your subjects respond to that.

AK: I think that . . .

SL: They recognize that and [*unclear words*]

[00:45:35] AK: I think they do. Even little kids. I mean, for a long time, I thought, "Well, I'm not gonna photograph children. You know, I don't need to do that." And this wonderful woman that I'd gotten to know in church in Little Rock persuaded me to photograph her grandbaby. So [*laughs*] she brought her grandbaby over and then—and I had seriously thought that I was just gonna photograph adults. So she brings this grandbaby over, and she's—it's small, it's an infant. So it's, you know, like three months old, maybe. And so I just started playing with this infant, and the infant just made eye contact with me and just obviously really liked the kind of attention that I was able to share with it. And I just loved doing that. And we made some

incr—really good photographs of this little three-month-old kid.

So that sense of the kind of—the ways that people respond to what I'm doing when I'm photographing them, it works even with little teeny kids, with little babies, and old people, and . . .

SL: It's—don't you think it's because we're still babies?

AK: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

SL: That we're sti . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: That we still listen through ourselves . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . that we still . . .

[00:46:56] AK: Psychologically, I think there is a lot of that, that it's just that, you know, that eye contact that babies make when they're first becoming human beings.

SL: There's a—you know, I often say that our—when I'm talking with interviewees that I feel like that the paths are established before we can remember. [*Unclear words*]

AK: Oh yeah. Oh, absolutely.

SL: I mean, it's the environment, it's our models that are in front of us.

AK: Yeah.

SL: And all of that. And I think we carry that with us forever.

AK: Yeah, absolutely.

SL: And we may pile on to it with other experiences and . . .

AK: And I think we return to it.

SL: Yeah.

[00:47:40] AK: I have this friend who's in hospice care at home, and he's pretty much not able to speak anymore, and he can't get out of bed. He's bedridden. And you know, realistically, these are the last days for him. And there's this quality about him. He makes eye contact, and there's this quality about him which is very reminiscent of a three-week-old baby, you know. And it's ver—it's heartbreaking, and at the same time, there's a kind of beauty in it which is deeply moving. My buddy, Joe. It's—when you, you know, when you live long enough, you begin to experience the deaths of people that you've been close with. And that—there is a mirror there to experiencing the—of people when they're babies, you know. There's—one of the things that I think about—I think about my son Jack a lot, and I didn't know Jack as an infant because he was my stepson, but I knew him when he was two years old, and I knew him for the rest of his life. So you know, usually the people that we know, the people that are older than us, we know the last part of their lives, and the people that are younger than us, we know the first part of

their lives, but to know someone's entire life from their first days to their last days is a very strange experience. To see—to be able to think about Jack's whole life from when he was a little teeny baby to his death is very, very powerful. [00:49:41] I could—I wanna do a whole book about Jack, and but also—I know I said this be—yesterday, but you know, to do a book called *Jack and the Silence Within*. That—a book about—that's biographical about Jack and his struggles in life, but it's also about that deep, inside experience that you were just talking about that's nonverbal or preverbal, that's just that kind of—like the guy in India that I talked about yesterday, you know. That experience of life, which is so physical and mental and spiritual and emotional, but is just so ahh. I think it—I think that that quality, that spark, that exists in everything.

SL: I do, too.

AK: In, I mean, in atoms down to the—at the . . .

SL: [*Unclear words*]

[00:50:45] AL: You know, they talk about the God particle. I think that the God particle is awareness. You know, what holds the whole universe together is awareness. And I think that that uni—the awareness that is the universe as a whole is what we think of as God. And that—I—one time I was driving someplace

with Kathryn, and I asked her three questions. I said, "Kathryn, do you believe in God?" And she said, "Yeah. Yeah, I believe in God." I said, "Do you think—do you believe that God is aware of you?" She paused a long time. "Well, maybe." I said, "Do you think that God loves you specifically and uniquely just for yourself?" And she said, "No, I don't think so." And I think that that path from a kind of basic awareness that there's something going on that is beyond our ability to describe and that is common for everyone, that most people share that level of awareness. But to dive deeply enough into your inside and into the insides of other people to realize that that awareness that is the universe actually knows you personally by name and loves you for just exactly the person that you are, that's incredible.

[00:52:38] SL: You know, I think that that particle is inherent in everybody be—and it has to do with some awareness of self, that you hear yourself, that you are watching yourself becoming aware of what's around you. And I think that we carry that openness about becoming aware of what's in front of you for the first time or becoming open to experiencing what is in front of you. like the gentleman sitting down next to you on that road in India.

AK: Yeah.

SL: So but I guess what I'm—I think that it's not unlike a child that has just learned to walk and all of a sudden touches the stove that's hot and learns, "That's hot. That hurts." You know, and so we risk—every time we open up, we risk . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . ourselves.

[00:53:51] AK: I have this image in my mind. I'll neh—I don't think I'll ever forget it. It's so clearly etched in my mind. It's very simple. My one-year-old grandson—I was—I went—I was out in the yard just kind of keeping company with him as he explored the yard. And he did this weird thing. I just—I can see him doing it. He turned, and he looked at something that was like at least ten feet away, and it just totally caught his attention. And he kind—and in that one year old, kind of just learned to walk kind of thing, he kind of waddled over to this thing. And he bent down, and he picked up this stone that was less than a half an inch. Just this little bitty, tiny stone. And he picked it up, and he just looked at it for the longest time. Just really—and that—you know, he was preverbal. I mean, he was just this little kid. He hadn't learned to talk yet. He could barely walk. And to—and for him to become aware of that stone that was like ten feet away and be irresistibly drawn to it and just to totally examine it

just blew me away.

SL: And it—I—what doesn't speak to us?

AK: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

SL: Whu—it's a mystery as to what we are attracted to, but really all around us . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . all the time.

AK: All the time.

SL: Yeah. It's . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . thrilling and dangerous at the same time.

[00:55:25] AK: Yeah. And there are—you know, we live in a time when there are a lot of writers who've had this experience in a really deep way and have found ways to communicate. Eckhart Tolle comes to mind, you know—who've found ways to help us to move more deeply into that deep sense of awareness of our—of just what's around us right now, you know, and the people that are right in front of us right now.

SL: I've, you know, I've had Beatlemania from the beginning when I first heard them, but I was reading an interview with George Harrison . . .

AK: *Revolver* was my introduction to the Beatles.

SL: The what?

AK: The—*Revolver*.

SL: Tapping again. Don't . . .

AK: Oh, sorry.

[00:56:19] SL: [*Laughs*] Okay. So I was reading an interview with George Harrison's wife, and he was aware that he was going to die. He was ill. And so he spent the last two years of his life preparing for his passing. And his goal was that when his spirit left, that the room that his—he was in would light up. [AK *laughs*] And that's exactly what happened.

AK: Oh, wow.

SL: So, you know, it's just a—there's something else going . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . on all the time. And I think it drives us . . .

AK: That's a great story. I love that.

SL: . . . open—to be open . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . where it seems like we're looking for some kind of affirmation or some kind of signal . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . or a solving of the mystery . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . of it all all the time. And I was just amazed at that, that he concentrated on that.

AK: Yeah.

SL: And I don't know if it was his . . .

AK: Well, you know,

SL: I don't know if . . .

AK: There's so many s . . .

SL: . . . his songwriting is part of that . . .

[00:57:26] AK: There's so many stories in the gospel, you know, where people, his disciples particularly, would say to Jesus, "You know, what's going on here? We don't get it. [*SL laughs*] What are you talking about?"

SL: Right.

AK: And he would basically say, "Just pay attention. Just—I—it's me. I'm right here, you know."

SL: Right.

AK: "Just love each other. Love me the way I love you." You know, it's just . . .

SL: There is something in all of us . . .

AK: Yes.

SL: . . . that speaks to us individually.

AK: The Buddha is same way. I mean, you know, it's not a unique to

religion. Any religion. It's everything. It's what's happening.

[*Sighs*]

SL: Well, what a . . .

AK: Thank God for pictures.

SL: [*Laughs*] Yes. And for me, I'm also attracted to moving image as well.

AK: Yes.

SL: There's something living as well in moving images.

AK: Yeah.

SL: And . . .

[00:58:32] AL: I totally agree with you. And if I had—you know, I got to the point where I was so—I had developed my still images to the point where I just didn't have the space left in my creative domain to move into moving pictures. But I dearly love film, and I spend a couple of hours a day, you know, or more looking at other people's use of the moving image.

SL: Me, too. And it's gotten so much more available.

AK: Yes.

SL: The archive is endless now.

AK: Yeah.

SL: There's so many moving images out there that are done in so many different ways. And of course, I'm particularly attracted to

sound because it's invisible.

AK: Yeah.

SL: [*Laughs*] You know, so you don't have to look at it.

AK: Oh yeah. There's a mystery about music and about words and the way that people use words.

SL: Or just the human voice.

AK: Yes.

SL: It just . . .

[00:59:40] AK: I tell people all the time—I ask people all the time, "Do you like funny voices?" And some people just look at me kind of weird. And then some people say, "Oh yeah." And I've had friends where we'd just drive around town, just talking in as many different fake accents as we could [*SL laughs*] dream up, you know, just—and making just weird sounds, you know, just playing . . .

SL: Playing.

AK: . . . with that ability to create sound, both with words and with just weird, shrill nonsense.

SL: Don't you think that even our most serious efforts are really just an extension of playing?

AK: Yes, absolutely.

SL: That we spend energy . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . being satisfied with our play.

[01:00:34] AK: Yeah. Absolutely. And—yeah. Yeah, I hope I—and I hope I—you know, and I do that. I play with stuff. I play with little nonsense stuff. Toys. You know, kids leave toys here. I've got on my desk probably at this point ten or twelve just silly little things. And I spend time just playing with them every day. And I have a camera body there with a macro lens on it, so I can arrange my little toy giraffe, and my little toy elephant, and a Christmas tree ornament that somehow ended up on my desk, and rocks, and candles, and different stuff, and I'll just play with that stuff. And then I'll pick up my camera with the macro lens, and I'll take some pictures of it. And then I can zoom into the—I can put the image on my computer and then zoom into it and find all these strange little ways that these little toys fit together. And it's absolutely like that little one-year-old did who found a teeny rock ten, five feet away. You know, that's just this fascination with edges and textures and shapes and just color.

[01:01:55] SL: As we continue our work, I—remind me to share with you an effort that I've got going with an artist in Camden. His name is Terry Mashaw. He actually changed his name to Indigo Rocket. And he constructs an alternate universe.

AK: Oh. Far out.

SL: With found objects. Many of them toys.

AK: Yeah.

SL: He actually builds toys.

AK: Does he photograph them?

SL: He doesn't.

AK: Ooh.

SL: I—and he's very reclusive. Lives out on a lake outside of
Camden . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . by himself. He has—his sister lives in the area.

AK: I've known a couple of people like that over the years.

[01:02:41] SL: But he builds these towers . . .

AK: Oh, wow.

SL: . . . that are, you know, ten feet tall . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . in his studio. And you can't—and we're trying to figure out a
way to get his stuff up here . . .

AK: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . for a show. But I've got moving images of Bob . . .

AK: Yeah. Oh, I bet.

SL: . . . Cochran talking with him and me just doing pans and tilts

and [*unclear words*]

AK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SL: You would be fascinated. You . . .

AK: Oh, I want to see that. Yeah.

SL: Yeah. You . . .

AK: Both what he's made and also how you've captured that . . .

SL: Well . . .

AK: . . . and your imaging . . .

SL: It's with a phone.

AK: Oh yeah. Why not?

SL: He hadn't acquiesced to a formal interview yet.

[01:03:26] AK: My last—I just bought a new Apple phone and—or iPhone, and I noticed that the fir—when I bought my first digital, professional digital camera ten or twelve years ago—it was 2006. It had the same megapixels that my telephone does today.

SL: Exactly. Yeah. It's amazing. The technology is amazing.

AK: Yeah.

SL: And that arms people . . .

AK: Yes.

SL: . . . with the ability to make art.

AK: Yes.

SL: Immediately.

[01:04:00] AK: I, you know, I've always—I can remember back in the [19]70s, you know, when I was first getting to be known as a photographer, you know, you'd go to a party or a gathering of people, and somebody would pull out their little packet of pictures that they just got back from the drug store, where we often got our pictures.

SL: Absolutely. [*Unclear words*]

AK: Collier's, yeah. And they'd be just these little, you know, pictures that they had taken of their kids or whatever.

SL: Right.

AK: And they'd be showing them to their friends and going through them, and I'd go over, and I'd say, "Oh, let me see." And they'd say, "Oh no, we don't want you to look at them." They were afraid I'd critique them or something. I don't know. But I always—I mean, I loved looking at people's pictures that they make that way.

SL: They're all slices of time.

AK: You know, I have people on Instagram and on Facebook that I love looking at the—just the pictures. Sometimes people make better pictures of their kids than I can make, just because they're with them all the time. You know.

SL: They have more opportunity.

AK: I've—I get an hour with a kid, and I do the best I can. And sometimes I get something really good. But you know, their mom is with them all day, every day. And with a \$1,000 telephone in her hands, she can create all kinds of stuff.

SL: That's meaningful for that family.

AK: Yeah. And sometimes it's great art, you know.

SL: Right. Exactly. Yeah. So we could go forever.

AK: Yes, we could.

SL: I—and we—I think we both know that.

AK: Yes.

[01:05:38] SL: So is there anything else that we wanna wrap up with for this session? And let's just say that I don't feel like you and I are gonna ever be done.

AK: No. I think we've discovered some possibilities. I, you know, I seriously think—you know, I think we need a—well, let me ask you a question. Are you a writer?

SL: I don't really think . . .

AL: Just be honest. Are you . . .

SL: No.

AK: Okay. So what we need is a third person to work with us and a fourth person, like Bill Schwab, who can get us funded. So it's like you and I talk out stuff, you bring stuff out of me about my

memories of the work that I've done and stuff. And then we have a third person who takes the transcriptions of those interviews and turns them into usable text that can go with an exhibit or with—or create a book. You know, somebody that can write about what you and I have talked about and—or what you and I have photographed. I think we could create something really cool that way.

[01:06:51] SL: So you've mentioned that you've deployed . . .

AK: I've always wanted to . . .

SL: . . . or you've used Instagram. You're aware of Instagram.

AK: Yeah. I've got about fifty images on an Instagram account. So I don't add to it very often.

SL: The Pryor Center has an Instagram account.

AK: Oh, cool.

SL: And I'm just blown away about it because I don't really have anything to do with it. They just take what we've already done and . . .

AK: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . and put up an image.

AK: Yeah.

SL: And someone in our group writes about it and then of course points to the actual interview.

AK: Yeah.

SL: But I have nothing to do with it. And I'm just amazed at how effective an image is with some kind of text with it.

AK: Yeah. I . . .

SL: And I can't imagine what—how effective it would be to have that kind of thing applied . . .

AK: To this whole . . .

SL: To this image . . .

AK: . . . deep archive of work. Yeah.

[01:07:49] SL: Yeah. So I'm not exactly sure who does all the writing. Some of them I think are graduate students . . .

AK: Yeah. We need . . .

SL: . . . and then we have an editor, too.

AK: We need somebody who's as good a writer as I am a photographer, and as you are a videographer. We need a real writer to work with us as a—in our partnership. And this is just an idea of a way that we could go.

SL: Oh, you know, let's maybe talk with Bob Cochran.

AK: Who?

SL: Bob Cochran, he's written about eleven books.

AK: Oh, okay.

SL: He's written prefaces for a number of books.

AK: Okay.

SL: He's reviewed a book that I'm trying to get republished . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . for somebody. And so he—and he's in that—I mean, you know, he . . .

AK: Between you and me and the people that we know . . .

SL: We oughta be able to find someone.

AK: . . . we oughta be able to find a writer who would be willing to . . .

SL: Suffer with us.

AK: . . . devote some serious time . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

AK: . . . to create something special.

[01:08:51] SL: Well, let's—we'll pursue that. And we'll—we need to probably bring Bill into this conversation.

AK: Yeah, absolutely.

SL: He'll look at it in a different way than we're looking at it . . .

AK: Yeah.

SL: . . . but it's valuable.

AK: Well, you know, he was there when I created my first exhibit.
Did I—you know that. Did you know that?

SL: I—no, but yeah, I . . .

AK: I told you that story.

SL: The first grant.

AK: Yeah.

SL: I know he helped you with the grant [*unclear word*]

AK: Yeah. The first major exhibit . . .

SL: Yeah.

AK: . . . that I created, he was there.

SL: Yeah, he's mentioned that to me.

AK: He was part of that. His kids are in it.

SL: Yeah. And we talked about that.

AK: Yeah. Yeah, so . . .

SL: Okay, so let's—why don't we just go into detail . . .

AK: Are we done for today?

[01:09:30] SL: Well, what—unless there's something else you
wanna—you feel like—we've covered both the threads.

AK: I can't—I think—yeah, I—we've talked a lot about my early
childhood, relationship with family, the work, the contemplative
stuff. Yeah. I think we've—I can't think of any . . .

SL: We've got a good start.

AK: I think we've—I can't—without, you know, sitting down and
looking at a bunch of pictures and really getting into the—to that
kind of more detailed look at what I've worked on and your

response to it. I think we've done what we can in this set.

SL: In this time setting. Yeah.

AK: Yeah.

SL: Okay. Well, let's just—I don't feel like we're done.

[01:10:21] AK: Yeah, I don't—I, you know, I think that—I've had this longing for something beyond what I've done already, and I think that you get that and that you have something to contribute to that movement forward. So I would really love to examine that with you.

SL: Okay.

AK: Feel a real kinship with you. And we've known each other for a long time—I—*[SL laughs]* since you were a little kid.

SL: Yes, we have. *[Laughter]* It's an honor.

AK: Yeah.

SL: It's an honor to sit across from you.

AK: Yeah. Likewise.

SL: So . . .

AK: Absolutely.

SL: Let's just commit that our stuff's not done.

AK: Yeah. All right. We did it.

SL: Okay. Thank you.

AK: And we can drink lots of coffee.

SL: Yes. Lots of good bulletproof butter coffee.

[01:11:13] AK: Do you know today's—oh, there's Jay. Huh. The—I'm starting to get a bunch of messages from people that want me to do stuff. So the—I think the winter hiatus is about over.

SL: Yeah.

AK: The—oh, today's Ash Wednesday. So I'm changing—I'm making—this is not part—I didn't—this is just off the wall stuff. I think I . . .

SL: This is valuable, so . . .

[01:11:44] AK: Oh. I'm thinking of how to observe Lent and how to change my daily practice in the observation of Lent. I've gotten—I'm getting a little bit more into the whole Christian tradition.

SL: Regimen?

AK: Yeah.

SL: So there's a—about Lent . . .

AK: I kind of resist the word regimen. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, but it's . . .

AK: But yeah, discipline. I think discipline.

SL: Yeah. Discipline. So the idea with Lent is that you choose something to stop or to give up, is that right?

AK: Well, or to create or to add, you know.

SL: Or to add.

AK: So my—oh, here's something. Oh God, this is something we really do need to include in this set.

SL: Okay.

[01:12:36] AK: I've been struggling with being fat since I was a little kid and sometimes struggling with it to the point of its becoming a major obsession. I have a eating disorder, and you know, right now I'm probably at least fifty pounds overweight and maybe as much as a hundred pounds overweight. And yesterday I ate a bunch of cookies, and I've eaten pie, and you know, I—if I could live on cookies and ice cream and pie and pudding and cake, I'd—you know, the whole cookie monster thing from Sesame street is just like, "Oh God, yeah." [SL *laughs*] And I've paid a price for that. It's a miracle to me that I'm almost eighty years old, I'm as overweight as I am, and I'm not diabetic, and my—and I don't have any problems with my heart. You know, it's like I'm just kind of sometimes waiting for the other shoe to drop.

SL: Yeah.

AK: So I've been reading this wonderful book by this nun about the contemplative experience. And she breaks it down into the bad thoughts that the desert fathers and mothers conceived of as the

ways that we—that block us from the light. And one of them is thoughts about food. So she's a Benedictine, and the Benedictines have a model of moderation with respect to food. And there's three different parts of it. You eat on time. You eat enough, which is to say, not too little and not too much, but enough. And you eat what's served. So you don't snack between meals, you don't, you know, you don't demand, you know, special foods or foods that you particularly like. If you're in the monastery, you eat what they—what the . . .

SL: What is brought to you.

[01:14:56] AK: What's brought to you. Yeah. So I'm trying to develop that as a mo—I snack. You know, I started eating about mid-morning, and I just keep eating until right before I go to bed. And through the course of the day, the things I eat get sweeter and sweeter until I'm eating candy before I go to sleep. And I just need to—I just wanna break that. And I see the way to break that as a spiritual exercise, not some kind of health—I've tried every health regime there is. I mean, I've been struggling with this literally for seventy years, you know. I went on my first diet when I was in junior high. You know, it's—I mean, it's like a lifelong obsession for me. And so what I'm thinking about doing, what I'm committing myself to doing

during this Lenten period, is to adapt that Benedictine model of moderation to my life as a semi hermit, you know. And I—and that's—I'm real fascinated by that. So I'm gon—so I'm determined to eat just three meals a day. Each meal is just the food that I can put on a plate or in a bowl without any extra stuff to—if the package the food came out of says, "This can has two servings in it," then I just eat half of it. I don't eat all of it. You know, I eat the serving that's suggested. And I plan meals that are normal and just eat three of them. So to—and to observe that through the Lenten period, but with the anticipation that it would become just a part of the way that I live. And what this writer says is that when you get far enough into this way of eating, that your obsessive thoughts about food just naturally go away.

SL: Yeah.

[01:17:09] AK: And I think that that's—I have experienced that at times, but I've never been able to kee—to organize the program adequately so that I could just continue with it. So that's the Lenten discipline that I'm starting today on Ash Wednesday. And that's a little bit of a reflection on what's consumed me, no pun intended, for my whole life, is this—these obsessive thoughts about foods that taste sweet.

SL: I need to address my diet as well. I actually had some pretty great success this past year. I came very close to my high school weight . . .

AK: Far out.

SL: Which I was, you know, an athlete at that time.

AK: Yeah.

SL: I just didn't have any fat on me at that time.

AK: Yeah.

SL: And I felt really, really great. Well, over the Thanksgiving and Christmas and traveling and all that stuff . . .

AK: When I was in . . .

SL: . . . I gained back weight.

[01:18:15] AK: When I was in India, just because of what life in India is like, I lost—I got down to where I weighed 150 pounds.

SL: And that's pretty great.

AK: There are pictures of me when I weighed 150 pounds, and I look like I just got out of Dachau. I mean, I was seriously underweight. But what I thought was, "If I could just lose five more pounds, then I'd be okay." So there's this sense that I've always had that I could never be thin enough. You know, this—that's an eating disorder, and it's—people die from that, you know.

SL: Yeah. They become emaciated and—yeah.

AK: 'Cause they starve themselves to death. And I probably came close to that when I was in India just eating what was available. You—there was no refrigeration. So you went to market every day, and whatever was there was what you had to eat. It was a monodiet a lot.

SL: I read—at one point, I read that your serving should be about the size of your fist.

AK: Yeah. Yeah, I've read that too.

SL: You know, on a plate.

AK: Yeah.

SL: So you know, th—I think that's a great clue.

AK: Yeah.

SL: Quantity.

[01:19:36] AK: Yeah. That's number two in the three Benedictine models is to eat enough . . .

SL: Right.

AK: . . . which is not more than enough, not less than enough, but just the appropriate serving, you know. And to eat whatever—what the—what's offered. Now that's—because I live alone, th—you know, I have to create a—you know . . .

SL: Your offering.

AK: . . . the sense of—yeah, what's being offered to me. I have to offer it to myself, but I have to not make that offering come from my obsessive thoughts about all this. You know, I just—I eat automatically a lot, you know, I just—I go—I moo—I'm doing some work in here, and I'm doing some work in the other room. And I walk in there, and I just find myself in the kitchen with a jar of peanut butter in my hand and a—in one hand and a jar of . . .

SL: Loaf of bread in the other?

AK: . . . and a jar honey in the other. And I take the honey, and I squirt it on top of the peanut butter. And then I get a spoon, and I just dig out a little peanut butter and a little honey on the same mouthful. And I can just stand there and eat that until I'm ill. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well . . .

AK: And we laugh, but it, you know . . .

SL: I know. I understand.

AK: It's like there's probably more people dying of food related . . .

SL: Obesity and diabetes, yep.

AK: Obesity. And diabetes.

SL: Yep.

AK: And I don't—you know, it's—I've just been so fortunate not to

have that yet.

SL: Well, I think you're on the right path.

AK: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

AK: I wanna live to be 100 because I wanna live to see Elon Musk's
starship land on Mars. [*Laughter*]

SL: There you go. That's a great goal.

AK: Yeah.

SL: Okay. Let's wrap up.

AK: Yeah. Far out.

SL: Thanks again.

[End of interview 01:21:32]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]