

Oral History with Ray Nichols and Jill Cypher, May 3, 2021
Interview by Benjamin Spohn for Hagley Museum and Library
Hologic oral histories project

Q: Okay, we are recording. Today is May 3rd, 2021. I am Ben Spohn, Hagley's oral historian. And today I'm interviewing Ray and Jill Nichols.

A: Actually, it's Jill Cypher.

Q: Jill Cypher, sorry. I am interviewing Ray Nichols and Jill Cypher. So to get us started, can you tell us a little bit about yourselves, a bit of an overview with early life and education type stuff?

A: Well mostly, I come from a teaching background. Father was a teacher. Both of us are graphic designers, educated. Graphic designers, advertising art directors. We came from West Texas where we met to Delaware. I was trying to get close to New York City to teach. We had been at small West Texas places [00:01:07] state university in Alpine, Texas. Came here trying to get close to New York City interested in advertising. And Delaware's where I got the jobs. Been here ever since. But we – I'm sorry. I lost track, my train of thought there.

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A2: We're more used to making art than talking about it.

A: Yeah. But we both come from a creative background. Actually, Jill has a math degree on top of it. My degree is in advertising design and painting. Intended to be a painter. Ended up going to graphic design just to survive. And fell in love with design.

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A2: Yeah, I was a math major with an art minor, and then ended up turning my art minor into another major and then going to grad school. Got my MFA at Louisiana Tech. And shortly after that, Ray and I were married. He was already in Delaware at that point, and then I moved up here as well.

Q: So you were always with UD?

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A: Well, I taught three years in West Texas and then 32 years at the University of Delaware in the Visual Communications Group, which is in the art department at the university. I headed that program from 1978 till 2005, and then I retired in 2006 so we could start our letterpress shop called Lead Graffiti to maintain our creative lives.

A2: And when I moved here, I freelanced in Wilmington for a while. Lion Studios. And that was a biggie. And Aloysius Butler & Clark in – oh, what was his name, the Greek guy? [00:03:23] Anthos. And a lot of different studios around town. And then I was able to get a full time gig at the University of Delaware as the graphic designer for the publications office on campus. And I did that for about seven years I think it was. And then decided to strike out on my own. By then, I knew a lot of the suppliers in the area, the typesetters, the printers, photographers, people like that. And started our own business. Ray was still teaching. And so I did most of the client contact and the design work. Ray was my computer guy, which he did at night after coming home from a full day of teaching at the university. I taught a few times at the university, but just on a substitute basis when someone was on maternity leave or on sabbatical, something like that. And again, the classes I taught would've been undergraduate design classes.

Q: So what's the difference between painting and graphic design?

A: Clients would be a biggie. Trying to be specific is a biggie. You can paint and if people like it, that's fine. If they don't like it, that's fine, too. But in design, you're communicating. You're a person trying to communicate a client's needs and thoughts to a consumer's needs and thoughts. I think in a lot of ways, I don't necessarily think of them as very different. I think in reality, they're quite different.

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But a lot of the same sort of rules applied to me trying to do creative work – it needed to be creative. That was the first thing I always sort of thought about, how work would fit into our portfolio, that we did work that was good enough that you'd want to show it, that you'd want to enter it in competitions and that sort of thing. So, not unlike painting creatively. And I think part of the drive with both of us was a need to try to do work that was different than what other people were doing. Trying to sort of set a different set of guidelines. And that ended up being very useful for the subject of this, which is Direct Radiography to be able to do work that competed in the world with people and in the instance of the Direct Radiography were much larger competitors than just the two of us, which is – when we look back on it, we just go, I don't know – quite honestly, I'm not sure how we ever survived doing that for the three years that we did.

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A2: There were a lot of designers at the time we were working that had a style. You could tell their work just – we were big collectors of all the design annuals and stuff like that trying to keep up with what was current. And there were designers that had a specific style; you could just recognize their work. And we didn't have that style. Our style was non-style. We wanted to do whatever was best for the client and whatever market or whatever audience they were trying to reach, whatever problem they were trying to solve. I was really interested in the problem solving aspect of it, trying to come up with whatever answer it was that would help the client achieve whatever goals that they had set, whether it was a product or service or what have you.

A: Maybe even achieve things beyond what they sort of initially want. We tried to do work that affected the company itself, that people felt pride in their work and pride in what they were doing, which was quite easy to do with Direct Radiography. But we tried to do work that absolutely stands out. That would be the critical – get up in the morning and that's what you worry about doing.

Q: So are you almost trying to show your clients that they didn't know about themselves?

[00:08:14]

A: Oh, we would surely hope to find that. The ability to stand on the outside and look in – a lot of times, and I think especially in these – what I'm going to call a startup kind of environment like Direct Radiography was – they're so focused on trying to just get things to work, you know? Just to solve problems, manufacturing problems, supplies problems, worker problems, trying to get the people to in fact keep up with it. That their story is – you need to get the story from them. They can't just – I think most of the time, unless they're the kind of person who speaks to groups a lot – an Elon Musk kind of person who probably has his story down. But these are scientists and they're chemists and stuff.

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And they're not used to explaining what they do a lot. Maybe the head of it or the person who's gone after the money, the startup money. They probably would. But trying to get the story out of them is – that's part of our problem, is to get that story.

A2: Yeah, keep asking questions until we feel like we understand it, and repeat it back to them and say, "Is this right? Are we saying it the right way? Are we making a promise that's not deliverable?" We need to stay within certain boundaries, but we also needed to make sure that it worked, that it was going to achieve results that they needed.

A: And in this instance, because it was health related – you're talking about a public issue. So it's not like you just make a product and it doesn't work as well as you thought it would. I mean, this is a product in a world that can be hurt by the product. And when you're starting a new technology, there's a scariness. To me there is. I'm not sure it was to them. I wouldn't sort of put that on them.

[00:10:52]

A2: We understood that there was a big responsibility on our part as well as theirs to be honest and truthful and really steer away from hyperbole from hyperbole's sake.

Q: Right. It sounds like you needed to put in a lot of work on both sides to build up a sense of mutual trust. So, how do you build and maintain a relationship like that?

A: I tell you, that is a hard question to answer. Because a lot of times – I don't know. You can see me here now, the beard and long hair, never wore a coat and tie. So in a business meeting with the client, I mean, I looked kind of like a '60's hippie. And part of my identity in this was to be good enough to overpower that sort of sensibility that – who the hell is this guy, you know? And how is this guy going to do that?

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And my entire life, I have lived it like that. I wanted to be a person that you almost didn't want to trust, and then I would get you to trust me because then, we really had trust. And we got started on a good foot, which helps. But most of the time if you turn around and said, "Tell me about a major failure in our design career," we don't have a major failure in our design career. We've never had a disaster. We've had clients that wanted to go with someone else eventually. And we were almost always fine with that. We had kind of gotten tired of them, too. They just maybe felt somebody could do more for them, a bigger organization or maybe with film skills or something like that.

A2: Yeah, or people change. Somebody quits and goes somewhere else and you get a new person in charge. And they have other people that they're familiar working with, and they want to move on.

A: But we've never had a – even to say we've never had a failure, we've hardly had anything that was even negative. I mean, at all.

[00:13:27]

A2: We've had work rejected before. Remember we were doing the Doctor [00:13:35], the MRI? Yeah, and we did – the Doctor in the state of Delaware who had the second MRI machine that was installed in Delaware. And he wanted to do some ads, and we came up with a bunch of ads that we thought were just killer. And what his issue was was they didn't look like everyone else's ads. So he wanted his ads to look like everybody else's. He didn't want to feel different, yet he

wanted to stand out and attract people to his MRI machine instead of the other one that was in the state.

A: Like I said earlier, we get up in the morning to look different than everybody else. It's not just a goal. It's a path that you walk down. If you're on that path, you're not walking that path at all. So that was one problem. I think there might be a cultural aspect of that particular one. I had forgotten about that one. But I wouldn't call that any kind of way of failure.

[00:14:45]

A2: We were able to tone it down.

A: Yeah. We actually did work that we thought was not as good as we could've done, but you know, they're paying. It's their money. It's fine. I mean, I would almost say that we've had issues that if you wanted to turn down our work that we thought was good, that we were going to charge you twice as much for it. We were fine. But we were going out to dinner on your money.

Q: Right. How do you deal with your own feelings for that, where someone seems more eager to pay you for work that you know is not the best you can do, but that's the best they like?

A: We're fine with making money. I really don't have any problem doing that. But we never – I mean, we've literally except maybe in that instance – and I think some of that work actually stands out in the end. It took us a little while to get to it. But we've just –

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A2: If we continue to do work for someone that wouldn't let us do what we thought was our best work, I think at some point we would say, "Okay, we're done here." We'd rather move on and let that client find someone that was happy doing that. Because we were always wanting to improve our portfolio. And improve ourselves, you know? Stretch ourselves creatively. We didn't want to stay within a certain design parameter or style. We wanted to do stuff that was different.

A: And we weren't sort of overcharging people. I mean, kind of a funny little side story with Direct Radiography was there was a point in time we had been working for them for probably a good solid year. And the client actually came to us and wanted to know how we charged. How did we charge them for work? And so we pretty honestly sat down and told them how we did it. And they said, "Well, we want to talk to you about the money." And I thought, oh my god, they don't want to pay us much. And they said, "You need to double your fee." And we kind of looked – "I'm sorry?" And he said, "We want you to charge double the money."

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And my mind just couldn't do the math on that. And I said, "Why?" And they said, "We need you to be happy doing this work. We like your work and we want you to be happy. And we think if you make double the money, you'll be happier." And that was their excuse. You know, you just go okay, that's never happened before. Just double your fee. Not like 15%, but double. And we just immediately took everything we did, just went into our spreadsheet that we kept a tally of things, just multiplied everything by two. Just as plain and simple as that. But when you've got a client that appreciates your work – Direct Radiography did once we got going. Getting started with them was a little bit of a hard sell because it was just the two of us. They were used to working with an ad agency called [00:18:31] or had 80 people or the office was centered in Philadelphia. And just the two of us just scared them to death, honestly. They just didn't know how we were going to do the work.

Q: Actually, can we talk about how you got the job? Because I know we did a deep dive into that on the pre-interview, and I think that would be a really great story to commit to the record of how you got the job with Direct Radiography and beat out larger agencies to get that work.

[00:19:08]

A: Well, that sort of comes in two stages. One, we had a good friend, Jim Culley -- still is a good friend – who is the advertising manager for – I'm not even sure what the name of the company was then. I don't know if it was Direct Radiography. I think it was just them. I don't know if they really so much had a sign in front of the building that had the name on it. But they had this technology. The technology is an x-ray machine that you would lay down on an x-ray table. It

would take an x-ray of you. And what you would get is that digital scan. There was no film associated with it. So holding up the sheet of x-ray film – there was no film at all. And it just captured it. So it was like doing a scan on your scanner. And that was the critical issue with developing this product, was this ability to take this radioactive isotope or whatever, let it pass through the body, and then catch that somewhere below you after the rays had passed through you, to catch them.

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Because normally, they would just keep going. They'd just pass through the table and everything else. So they developed this selenium-based digital array that in fact caught the digital image without the film. And so, they had this. And it worked. They were still doing a lot of testing and improving and stuff like that. And what they wanted to do was name the technology, to come up with a name for it. So Jim Culley – Jim had taught at the University of Delaware and had moved onto DuPont where he was an advertising manager at DuPont, worked in marketing there. And ask if I would run a meeting of engineers to try to name the technology. And so I said yeah. He's going to pay \$50 dollars an hour or something. And I got him to meet up at the University of Delaware in a room I was comfortable in and that they would be okay in.

A2: Get them out of their [00:22:08] [simultaneous conversation]

A: We didn't want them listening to the phone and stuff like that. So we met about 15, as I remember, of them. And we just – like you are, we asked them question. And what was it, buzz words.

A2: We had the giant tablets on the wall and we would write down words as they came up with it.

A: Four of five hundred little captions with things to talk about. And then we went off and took all those notes and came up with about 15 possibilities that we thought they could name the product. And one of these names was direct ray that we came up with. Nobody else had said that. The word “direct” had come up. The idea of directly capturing those x-rays.

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A2: I think one of the ones they liked was Direct X.

A: Direct X was one that they liked trying to build off that x-ray. And so, we presented these 15 things. And I think out of politeness to us, they sort of said, “Okay, we’ll look at Direct Ray as one of the things.” Now, the slight problem which is going to come up in a moment in this story is that my name is Ray. And Direct Ray and Ray Nichols is kind of a funny overlap of these things. But we’re talking about x-rays, so the name Ray was there before I was. So they finally agreed to vote on Direct X and Direct Ray.

[00:24:16]

And Direct Ray got one vote. That was ours. We just counted once. And Direct X got 12 votes. So that’s a big – and we kind of went, okay. We didn’t mind Direct X. It has a nice futuristic kind of quality. The technology – it’s outer space stuff at the time this is going on. This is in 1996, 1997, and they had been working on this for years before that. So this is just unheard of technology. So, Direct X. So things just kind of sat there for a while. We weren’t doing anything else. They didn’t ask us to design the logo or anything like that. We weren’t doing any ads or anything. And we kept talking about why Direct X was wrong and why Direct Ray was the right idea, to take the word Direct for X and replace X with it and leave the Ray as part of it.

Because we were really convinced – we convinced each other – we were convinced that the word Direct was the crucial word. This is the word that this company, Direct Radiography, needed to own. They needed to own the word direct so that other companies – and at that point in time, we had no idea who the other companies are, anybody else who's work – there's a lot of places. Probably five or six major companies working on this same idea.

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And I went back to Jim Culley and I said, “Jim, y'all are wrong. Direct X is not the one you need. You need Direct Ray. And I want to make a presentation to you about why that’s the case.” And so, we put together a presentation – excuse me – of overheads. I’d never done an overhead

presentation in my entire life. So these – lay down these transparencies on this thing, project it on the wall. And I asked them to let us talk for 30 minutes without interrupting us. And they did. And we did that and explained the relationship to these other companies. Excuse me.

[00:27:05]

Another company like GE, who was going to turn out to be their biggest competitor. To lock this word direct with them, and that this technology was Direct Rays - that's what it was – to keep a company like GE from saying that.

A2: Yeah, digital was another big word that they were –

A: Digital was a big word. But that word we just tossed out. It's just too big. It's too broad. Apple computers or Microsoft computers.

Q: That's kind of – sorry if I'm interrupting the story with where it might go, but it's funny you should mention Microsoft and Apple because in 1995, Microsoft invented basically an API suite to help computers run programs, principally games, called DirectX. So the name had already been taken at that point.

A: Right, and we knew that after that fact when we had done this. But there was discussion that it wouldn't – the copyright of the name wouldn't overlap. It's two radically different categories, and they thought they could argue that, or it would've been easy to get rid of that DirectX. But they were not gung ho about getting rid of it. And we did this presentation.

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And at the end of the presentation, the 12 people that were there applauded. And it took us completely by surprise. They're all sitting in their coats and ties and we're making this argument about Direct Ray. One of the things back to the first vote for it they had done, which I think is kind of a funny experience for us – when we were trying to present Direct Ray, somebody in the room said, “Oh, that kind of sounds like death ray.” And it was the most unbelievable deal breaker in the room. They were not going to buy Direct Ray because now every time you said it,

all they could hear was death ray. And we were going like, I don't think that really sounds like death ray. But they were not – [00:29:51]. We liked Direct Ray and all of them went the other way. So they ended up going with it with the –

A2: And you did it as an overhead.

[00:30:07]

A: And we'd done it with the overhead. We'd done it with the little –

A2: Sheets of transparent.

A: And they voted unanimously in favor of Direct Ray. And the rest is history because once we had – I think if we'd have lost to Direct X, they would've hired the company that was already doing work for them and they would've just done the logo and stuff like that. But I think they felt obligated to at least give us a shot at doing some of the work. And when we did that, honest to god, we just blew everybody else out of the game. I've never worked on anything that was such a win as that was given who we were up against.

Q: Did anyone ever tell you what exactly it was you did that made them change their votes like that?

A: The Direct Ray thing? It was the notion of building a wall around this technology that all of these other companies could not get into. It would just block off the word “direct” in the world of x-rays. If they came up and said the word “direct,” they were talking about somebody else's product. If GE started talking about direct x-rays, you could never say direct x-rays given that the name of this company was – or the technology was Direct Ray. You just couldn't do it. And that to me was the killer. That was the deal breaker the other way. They just couldn't argue with that.

[00:32:12]

A2: Everybody else had to come up with some other name. Any time they said the word “direct”

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A: You couldn't attach x-ray to it. You just couldn't attach it to it. And Direct X wasn't going to do that. You could probably say direct x-rays. X is just too abstract. But the rays – that's really what the technology is, is dealing with these radiation rays.

A2: Because one of the things that was real important to the engineers was this – what they called a signal profile. And it's that little rectangular shape, that little – they ended up using it on their –

[00:32:59]

A: Can I share my screen?

Q: Sure.

A: Let's see. One of these keynote – here it is. So there's the logo that we did.

A2: That red and black – the red part is the signal profile of a digital x-ray. On other x-rays, it's like – with film photography and film, there's a softness to the image.

A: Because of the grain structure of the silver particles that are in the photographic emulsion.

A2: And with digital, the beam comes down. It captures part of the image, and it's digital. It's not analog.

A: It stops. If you're trying to x-ray a thin line, you get a thin line. If you tried to x-ray a thin line with a normal, a direct ray to thin line, a thin piece of lid or something, it would have a pretty hard edge to it. And if you did that with regular x-ray film, it's much softer, the edge of it. And in some instances – although at the time, they weren't doing mammography. But when you're doing mammography, the ability to see detail is critical. It's absolutely critical.

[00:34:32]

A2: If you're just looking for a broken bone –

A: It'll see them. An x-ray will see a broken bone.

A2: But mammograms, you're just looking at tissue, and being able to tell the difference between a little fat molecule and a tumor and something else that – radiologists really depend on fine distinctions in the grain structure of the film. And for the digital stuff, how finely tuned that digital image can be is real critical for them.

[00:35:05]

A: And they were still improving. X-ray film had kind of peaked. There just wasn't anything more they could do to it. But direct ray still seemed to have some potential for actually improving. And they ended up getting into mammography. That's a big, big element of their current work.

Q: So how did you get – actually no, before I go there, there was also a middle sized firm in addition to the big company from Philadelphia that you were competing with, right?

A: When they made the proposal for doing the – presenting this to the public, this new technology to the public, there were four groups. There was WB Donor, which is an advertising agency which no longer exists, that was in Philadelphia. And I think it was headquartered in Baltimore. The big part was in Baltimore. They had about 80 people in Philadelphia. There was a British design studio. Now, WB Donor's an ad agency. So we were presenting ourselves to Direct Radiography as an ad agency, not as a design studio even though we're sort of overlapping. Doing a logo – that's normally a design studio kind of job.

[00:36:47]

There was a British design studio. Very slick. I mean, very British. Really great work, great work. But they didn't get it. And then there was an agency in Greenville, South Carolina, North Carolina. North Carolina. It's in the southern part of North Carolina. Greenville, which is where Sterling was, which was the company that was buying – the company over Direct Radiography,

Sterling. So they were down there. So the main people that were involved in the higher ups were down there. So they had an agency in Greenville. And that's what they wanted. They wanted that agency. I think they were – I'm not sure that they'd ever been – well, I don't know. I just think they wanted somebody new from WB Donor. I don't think there was any big reason for a breakup, but they just wanted somebody new. And I think quite honestly, they just wanted the person that was going to be up the road from them and that they could get together and have lunch.

[00:38:11]

A2: It was mostly management in South Carolina in Greenville.

A: All the engineers were here in Newark, Delaware.

A2: Science was being done here in Newark.

A: So I'm not exactly sure what would have happened to Jim Culley in this sort of marketing group. Might've been taken – they drag them down there or something. I don't know. So they got these other three places to pitch. And then they invited us to pitch – because it seemed rude not to, just quite honestly. We had had such an important first step with them in presenting the company. And so, they did it to us. And man, did we go to work. So they wanted an ad campaign of three ads. That's what they wanted – an ad campaign of three ads. We did seven campaigns. And the one that had the least number of ads had five. So we just buried them in work. Honestly, thinking back on it, it seems kind of a stupid thing to do because you're fighting with yourself a lot. Some of your work – some of our seven campaigns' going to excel, and some of it is not going to excel by comparison.

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It might not be bad ideas, but it's just going to lose by comparison. So we tried to present our work, to go down there and present our work, and they didn't want to do that. And I think basically they just didn't want to deal with us. So they said that – just send the stuff down. It was

a stack of foam core about yay thick of foam core ads. Very carefully done, very slickly produced, good type, good images, logo in place, all that kind of stuff.

A2: Well, the big advantage we had is we had been talking to the scientists, the engineers up here.

A: Lothar and the people that had come up with this.

[00:40:38]

A2: Yeah, we really had a good handle on the technology, how it worked, how to present it. And the disadvantage that the other places had was they were taking something that they didn't really understand and trying to create an abstract ad campaign out of it that would somehow grab the attention of management and say "Pick me."

A: And that you would then get the work, and then you would do the work.

A2: Then you would go to school on just what is the technology, how do we present it? That kind of stuff. So we were a step ahead.

A: We did ad campaigns. Literally, you could just stop, clean these up, put them in magazines. You could've run ads for the next two years.

A2: We knew what we were talking about.

A: We knew what we were doing. We knew it. And we just – like I said, we just buried everybody else in the stuff. So they presented the work at it, at the headquarters. And the person who was really the one choosing the ad agency shows the Greenville ad agency as the one they want to do. And one of the people who was at this meeting, my understanding is – now, I'm getting this secondhand, telling us about the meeting – was the president of the company down there.

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And the way they told it to us is he sat patiently and listened to all these arguments for why it should be this Greenville ad agency. And he made a comment at the end of it. They said, "What do you think?" And the guy said, "You are seriously not going to pick Cypher-Nichols design?" That was the name of our design company. "Seriously, you're not going to recommend them?" and it was clear that he was in disagreement with the Greenville office. And the people started to back down on what they were interested in doing. And they said – so they gave us kind of first shot at doing the first campaign, cleaning up the logo, getting everything, choosing typefaces to use and stuff like that. And we did that. And we had the work and kept it for three years until we had a bit of a falling out, I'm going to say. And actually, at the end of three years, we were fired. We were burned out.

A2: We were a two-man band. That was it.

[00:43:22]

A: And we were playing a lot of concerts. But honestly – and they got – Jim Culley got the work that was presented in the presentation dinner and brought it back up here and let us see it. And when we looked at it – I mean, quite frankly, three quarters of the work the other people had done was embarrassing, I thought. Our worst piece beat half of everything everybody else did, seriously.

A2: And again, it was just a lack of knowledge on their part. They just didn't have the preparation that we had. We just knew too much.

[00:44:09]

A: And the kind of enthusiasm. We knew we were up against the wall.

A2: We totally didn't expect to win the –

A: Oh, no. We were just having fun. We couldn't quit, quite frankly. We were just doing ads and we were just – oh, here's another idea. We were throwing these things against the wall.

Q: So how did you get the access to get in there and talk to the engineers and then – I interviewed [00:44:38] last summer. How did you sort of translate his technical language into a compelling ad?

[00:44:47]

A: I don't think it was terribly hard to do it.

A2: They're just people.

A: They're just people. They make a thing and you turn around. And quite frankly, you can say it as simple as this – it's an x-ray image without the film. And you sort of go – oh, okay. That makes a kind of sense in a way that you can say that – you can scan a picture on a scanner without using a camera. So you don't have to use a camera and record it to film and then do it. You can just make a digital image. Quite frankly, in theory – in practice, it's a little bit tougher than that. But it's really quite simple. The idea is really brilliant idea. Lothar just – holy cow, man. That guy is – he is outer space.

And they would just – as patiently as you can imagine – explain it to us. And I think a lot of times, we would act slightly naïve. We wouldn't want to come in – we're not going to compete with these kind of people. And we would ask questions. We tried to ask good questions, not look stupid, like you don't know anything. But they would just stop what they were doing and let us go through the process, how this works. And we tried to understand the process like we were going to work there is an engineer. We wanted to understand what this chemical, these selenium – what it did in this gizmo.

[00:46:46]

How it worked and how it was different than other x-rays, normal x-rays. And we just asked a lot of questions. And we were – let's see, what are we, about five miles apart, the company and where we live. We worked out of our house. We could drive out there on a moment's notice. If they were doing something, they could say, "Hey, we're going to do something cool this

afternoon at two. You want to come see it?” Yeah, sure. And we’d go out there and we’d see it. So you could do that better than you could do from Greenville, quite frankly. It ended up being a great choice for them.

A2: It was a great group of people. Everybody clicked together, and we clicked with them. And we made ourselves available, and they made themselves available. We took advantage.

[00:47:48]

A: We did stuff on short notice. If they needed a little something for some presentation they were going to do, you need topography or something, we would bang that stuff out for them real quick. And we could also do it in the visual quality of everything we also were working on. It all fit together. If you were going to do a – their badges, their security badges. It just all worked. And oh, we need a sign for the front of the building. Okay. And we could just do this. And we could keep it all together so there was just a nice visual flow to everything. So we did a lot of that. Not a lot of promotional work, because most of the ads that we did were multi-page ads. And we would just print them as a brochure. And that’s what they would in fact give out.

A2: Yeah, a lot of the medical magazines and stuff that they presented there with Direct Radiography stuff in would be – the magazine would not only give them a copy of the entire magazine with the ad in it, but they would reprint the ad. The ad was always either four pages or two pages. And it would come back to them as a stack of brochures basically that they could then hand out and use as extra promotion.

[00:49:14]

A: And we weren’t really familiar with this kind of advertising. But there’s a kind of insertion ad that we weren’t really aware of. When I think of a magazine ad, I think picking up *Vogue* magazine, there’s an ad in it. But there were a lot of magazines, these specialty radiology magazines. These are very specialized. And we would print the four page ad, let’s say, on a heavier stock. And they would glue it into the magazine. So when you picked up the magazine, it wanted to open to that ad. It would just open right to it. So they would pay a premium for that to get that in the magazine, which I think probably overall by the time they weren’t paying us, an ad

agency – if they were doing this with Donor, oh my god. How much more Donor would be than us. We were getting rich. We went out and bought a new Audi and we just wrote them a check. We were making money hand over fist, quite frankly. But an ad agency has got to make way more money than that to pay all the account executives and all those people down the line. We didn't have any of that expense.

[00:50:44]

So they would do these – I remember one time, we did an ad that had to be inserted in Singapore. And we sent the ads to Singapore to be inserted. And the FedEx charge was \$14,000 just to get the ad to the magazine. We were going, holy cow. It was like, five times more than we made doing the ad.

A2: Yeah, that's not coming out of my pocket.

A: Yeah, it was eye opening for us. It was a great – I was teaching advertising at the university, and it was an incredible sort of high. Getting knee deep in this stuff here, and then you could go back and you could talk in class and know what you were talking about. It was real time stuff. That seemed like a long answer to what was probably a simple question.

Q: Yeah, but sometimes a long answer will answer three other questions on my list. So it all evens out in the end. So who is your main audience for this sort of advertising? What is mostly medical professionals?

[00:51:52]

A: Radiologists. People that read x-rays for a living. Because they have control of that part of the world. I mean, they have to do that right. You know, you've got a disease and they've taken an x-ray of it, you cannot make a mistake reading that x-ray. So these people worked at hospitals. And what Direct Radiography wanted to do was to sell these to the hospitals. Sell the machines to the hospital. But radiologists. So, one of their biggest –

A2: It was a pretty sophisticated audience to begin with. We weren't talking to the average consumer.

A: Their largest sort of promotion, get together was a thing called RSNA, Radiologist Society of North America. A just gargantuan McCormick center in Chicago. Just a gargantuan building. An airplane hangar for 747s. It was just huge. And there would be, over a couple of days they would have their conference, like 60,000 radiologists.

A2: It was always held over Thanksgiving weekend.

[00:53:23]

A: Yeah, which was kind of weird to us. We didn't do their display work except to the degree that we might do some of the graphics for the walls of the display. But they had somebody else designing these things and making these things. It was huge. Huge project. Film and meeting rooms and telephones and –

A2: Yeah, it was a two story fair.

A: Yeah, the booth, their booth was two stories so they could take people upstairs and get out of the hustle and bustle of the ground floor.

A2: Private meetings.

[00:54:08]

A: Yeah. An astounding event. When you walked in the building, you were just like, where are we? And keep in mind, it's still just Jill and I. And we're in there being introduced as the agency for Direct Radiography going, oh my god.

A2: Well, we were probably the only ad agency there. I don't think most places probably had a representative from their ad agency on the floor.

A: We weren't doing anything. We weren't selling. We weren't talking to people. We were just walking around and seeing what other people were doing. Like, you could go to GE or –

A2: Yeah, we were scoping out the competition.

[00:54:53]

A: Swiss Ray was one of the other competitors. And we would go around and listen to – try to get them to explain their stuff. And we were looking for some buzzword that we could steal from them if we could.

A2: We wanted to see how our stuff compared to what other companies were doing. So it was a good chance to –

A: There was never any company that quite frankly I think we envied. We didn't think our work was less than anybody else's for sure. And better than almost everybody's, including even GE's, I thought. GE had a ton of money. They could throw photographers at projects and stuff like that. But their photographs weren't better.

A2: They could command more square footage of the RSNA show than anybody else.

A: We were using a photographer friend of ours named Bill Dearing who shot a lot of work for us. He understood our system and the kind of things that we needed. And we used him almost exclusively for all the work that we did for Direct Ray.

Q: And it seems – admittedly, I haven't talked to anyone else who's been an advertiser for a medical supply company – but I have talked to a few other advertisers now. And it seems like you guys had a tremendous amount of access to the company.

[00:56:36]

A: Quite honestly, we had as much access as anybody else had. Except that they were just in the building.

A2: About the only place we didn't go is where you had to wear the bunny suits, the clean room.

A: The clean rooms. And we did that. We surely got the tours and – they're putting this selenium layer down. I forget the way they named those clean rooms. But there's the ultimate clean room. Ten trillion, ten flicks. It had to be clean. Because if you had a dust speck on this thing, it was going to be cancer to somebody. So you couldn't do that. But you know, I would think that most people could have access. I don't care who it was. They could've had access.

[00:57:44]

I think for the most part, I would say I don't think people would want as much access as we had. We were always looking for anything that would give us an advantage, that would in fact translate to an advantage for them. And I think they knew that. So when they were talking to us, I think there was a sense that they were talking to the general public at the same time. Because these things could show up.

A2: We were just interesting. And we expressed our interest in showing up and asking questions and making sure we did it right. We're wording it this way. Is this correct? We wanted their information. We wanted to make sure we were doing it right. And we put in the time that it took to make sure we were doing it that way. Like I said, this was medical. This was life and death stuff. And it was important that was got it right.

Q: And eventually, you had the opportunity to use some of the x-ray machines to help make the promotional calendars.

[00:58:58]

A2: Yeah, yeah.

A: Have you seen those things?

Q: No, I haven't.

A: I'll show them to you. I have them here. Here it is. So we photographed these objects just in the front yard here. They did the x-rays. We figured out what we were going to do [00:59:44] pump ins and July was leaves, and sea shells was – that's January for some reason. I have one of them in there twice. But they would shoot these x-rays – we had seen some photographs of a guy that shot x-rays of roses. Some point in our creative lives, we had seen these. And we kind of wondered how this would work. I mean, doing something like a leaf there on the right, and then that nautilus shell that's at least pretty dense, that conch shell is pretty dense – of how they would do that. And so, over maybe three or four days, they shot anything we brought in to them. We would just go out and buy shells or pick leaves out of an oak tree that's in our front yard.

[01:00:49]

A2: Because we didn't know what the insides looked like either.

A: Yeah, ears of corn.

A2: And it was experimental for them. They're mostly concentrated on shooting human bodies, flesh and bone. And we're bringing them all kinds of weird objects. So it was a learning curve for them too, to take the time out to shoot these inanimate objects. The beauty of it was that they didn't have to worry about over-x-raying stuff. The amount of x-rays that these things were getting. But yeah, they had to fine tune their equipment to pick up these objects that have very different densities than human flesh and bone do.

[01:01:32]

A: Now, these are done three years after we had quit there. The images were there, and they would just change the dates. And the idea was they would have it framed, have them framed. And give them to a doctor's office so they could put them up. And they were beautiful images. I mean, they were fabulous. They're 18 by 24 inches, so it's a pretty good size image. The color is just wonderful. Clean, that glass shelf is just wonderfully clean. And they could swap out a year's worth of calendars just in the frame. So they would be there all year, and then the next year, they would send them a new set of them.

A2: They were a pretty good size, like 18 by 24.

A: Eighteen by 24, yeah. They were pretty fabulous. And completely done digitally, too.

[01:02:41]

A2: Yeah, it was done on their equipment.

A: That glass shelf is not there. Completely. But that's been a particular piece that really – if you turn around and say, “Tell me about a portfolio piece that you ever did,” this is one of the first couple that come to mind. Given that it's not a brochure, an ad, something like that, but a calendar. It was a neat project. And it was fun getting the images because you would just – then we would take the images. The images are all individual. They would do the corn, they would do the pumpkin. And then we would get the digital images, and then we would put them together in Photoshop.

A2: Yeah, because their array was about 18 by 18.

A: I think 18 by 18.

A2: Yeah, because the calendar was bigger than that. Plus, you could tell that the images were duplicated. They were mirrored.

[01:03:55]

A: And they're done right size so that you're not reducing something down and faking the fact that the – you could make them half the size and you'd get double the resolution. So they're not done like that. They're done real size.

Q: What was it like when you showed up there one day with a pumpkin and said hey, can you --
?

A: I don't think these people were surprised at all. We were odd characters out there. We didn't fit the marketing vision of the marketing department, the visual look of the marketing department. So we would come in, but a lot of times, we would be dealing with a really important person out there who would be shooting the actual x-rays for us. He would be doing it. They wouldn't give us to the guy sweeping up the clean room. But they had somebody who was seriously good.

[01:05:14]

A2: We put in the time listening to them, and they were comfortable putting in the time of going along with our oddball projects shooting ears of corn and seashells and stuff.

A: It's not like we did this all the time. Just this one project once we had done that, that that was in fact done for years after that.

Q: So how important is it when you do something that it can last for years like that?

A: Well, quite frankly, it's hard to do something that can last for years, that you can put it up and people that – you know, when I go to my physical every year, every year I'm put in the same room. I lay down to have my heart, do my EKG. I'm laying down on the same bench of table, and I'm looking up at this same poster of birds every year, and I've been doing it for 15 years. The same thing. And you just – I have to admit that it doesn't feel good to be looking at the same poster for 15 years. It doesn't make me think that you're staying up to date, quite frankly. And this is a good doctor. We pay a reasonable amount of money for this doctor.

[01:06:47]

But to have a calendar in there that's up to date, it's got the image, it's going to change every bit – maybe if your physical is April 1st every year, it's probably going to have the same image year, even though the year changes. But you can see that the year has in fact changed. But I mean, if you just took an average – the Nike store. Can you put up a poster now that'd be good in a year? No way. There's no way you could do that. No way. So it's cool that it was possible.

A2: It was just serendipity, really. It's a medical image without being gory.

A: I believe that we told Jim about the roses images. And we were talking about – we were thinking it might be interesting to do ads, like for Mother's Day. You could do lilies. Roses on a particular day. That that might be useful. And Jim did the – that was his idea, not ours.

[01:08:12]

A2: It was a way of gently inserting an ad into a doctor's office by having a calendar with their company name on it.

A: The company name was small. It was soft. It wasn't intrusive. And it was useful. It told you what day it was, just like calendars do.

Q: Sounds like you hit on the exact dot of where timeless and timely hit each other.

A: Yeah, that's a good point.

A2: Accurate description.

A: And like I say, it's nice that we found that, found something that would do that because we did that. We did that close to the end of the three years that we worked with – close to the year. We quit as the millennium present to each other – my present to Jill and Jill's present to me was we quit. So I think we had done that pretty much in that 1999 year, I believe.

[01:09:26]

A2: Yeah. Of course, the technology was changing and moving. We came in just as they were getting it started. They didn't have any x-ray machines when we were starting with them. They were still working on that selenium digital array, fine tuning it, tweaking it. And then the first machine they actually developed was a chest x-ray. And it was sort of a vertical stand with a big, square box in it that had the digital array inside of it. And they could raise and lower it depending on how short or tall someone was, or if they were standing or sitting in front of it. But they were

developing mammography I think, by the time we had left. So it had come from doing chest x-rays and x-raying broken bones to doing mammography. So it had changed over the three years that we had worked with them.

[01:10:33]

A: This is four different ads. There's actually five of them. I put them in to show some different versions of some things. But the machine – that's the machine right there in the center of it. And you can just raise and lower that. And the digital array just sat in here, captured the image.

A2: And that's the array right there.

A: The array is down here at the bottom. That's what the array looks like. Actually, I don't think I have a –

A2: Just an image of just the array?

A: Yeah. Was that it? Yeah, so here's the array. We had them cut this for us so we could see the inside of it. I think that cover, which is really interesting – I think that cover's about \$10,000 dollars or something like that. They had to cut that because it ruined it after they cut it for us. But these x-rays have to pass through this cover and have no impact on the image whatsoever. That's the money stuff right there.

Q: Wow. Do you have any other ads you can walk me through some of your creative processes on? This is fascinating.

[01:12:02]

A: Well, this is one of those four pager things. So this is the opening page, and then this is when you opened it up. These two pages hit each – and we were doing this x-ray. You can see that x-ray wraps around and goes into it. And then this – kind of a close-up of what the array does, the arrow drawn between these two to kind of show that. This particular campaign is one of my

favorites, which had these – let me see if I can get these things out of the way – this is two of them. Two ads in a campaign.

[01:12:50]

This was the comp that we did, this one down over here, with the idea of an x-ray with holes in it. That somehow, you were missing some things if you didn't get this ultimate clarity thing. So the idea of missing data. So we're talking to radiologists. And we thought that this was really one of the most serious, effective ads because the idea of a radiologist missing data – that is the ultimate worry for them. This is – that there's something going on that is not in the x-ray, and they miss it.

A2: It's a whole new technology going from analog to digital. And so, you have to make them feel comfortable with this new technology, that it's going to give them information that they're missing. They just don't know they're missing it.

A: So this talk – everything needs to talk with everything else fluently. We'll start with the idea that this is a one in a package. You just push the button, and this thing comes out the other end. There's no – you're looking at it on a computer screen that you can do it, and then you can pass that image through email to somebody. So you could have a radiologist anywhere look at this if you felt like you needed a differing opinion. Because what they had to do before you had this Direct Ray is you had to make a duplicate copy of the film. And you're adding potential problems to do that so you can send that.

[01:14:49]

Because you don't want to give up your original x-ray. You want that as part of the patient's records. And you could shoot two of them at the same time, but you're double dosing the patient. That's not good.

A2: And sometimes, you needed a piece of physical x-ray film with the image on it. So they had special printers made that could print the digital image and print it onto x-ray film that most radiologists were already comfortable with. And then they had display units so that you could

look at it digitally on a computer screen. And then they had the system wherewithal so that you could send it from one radiologist to another in a different building or a different part of the country or around the world.

[01:15:44]

A: This is that Model T thing. This is the one going at GE. And we did these as a series of numbered things. So the numbers were getting bigger, which we kind of lifted from a series of Porsche ads. And we liked the – they numbered these things. They just looked terrifically technical. And nobody read them because you just looked at the car and went, “Yeah, that’s nice.” So we sort of lifted that numbered series from them. So Bill Dearing, who’s the photographer that I mentioned, had a friend who had this car. So Jill built this air foil for the back of the car. So we’ve got all this gizmo stuff holding this thing about a quarter of an inch off the car. We didn’t want to scratch the car.

A2: Yeah, we had to be careful.

A: Careful, scratch the car and all this whole tent work back behind it to lock that thing into place and shoot it. And then we did this – which I don’t know. Probably doesn’t have any effect on anything. But to make that license plate called Agent, which has GE as the middle two letters in it, I think is a really kind of a funny stab at this. Because we’re sitting here – you’ve got to sort of imagine that here’s Ray and Jill sitting in Newark, Delaware working on an ad, and GE has got – I don’t know, 1000 people working on theirs. Golly. I mean, it’s just –

A2: It was funny to try to tweak their nose.

[01:17:32]

A: Funny to think that we were competing with those people.

A2: It was David and Goliath really. That’s how we felt.

A: Except I don't think David had the slingshot. So this was one of those four page – I don't have the other pages to the inside of this. I just grabbed these things this morning.

A2: I don't know if you want printed copies of some of this stuff.

[01:18:01]

A: Or as part of Hagley, have y'all gotten these things?

Q: Oh, boy. Honestly, I don't know. I have not been physically at the office in quite some time. And nothing I do touches on our physical collection. So I genuinely don't know.

A: Well, we've got all this stuff somewhere. And I would assume that Jim Culley's got it. And he would surely be willing to share that with y'all. So we'll talk to Jim and make sure that y'all have copies of these things.

Q: Cool, thank you.

A: No, I think it's really amazing that y'all – I have to admit, when I think of Hagley, the thing that we did with Hagley was their annual report for about a decade, ten or 12 years, that we did their annual report. And what I mostly know of Hagley is what was in all those annual reports. And that we have a cutter, a paper cutter that Hagley gave us once to get it out of their second floor. They had built a library on the second floor of that main building around the cutter, and they wanted to get rid of it. And they gave it to us. And it's one of our favorite, favorite things that we have in our studio.

[01:19:33]

A2: It's a fabulous cutter.

A: It's like nothing else I've ever seen before.

Q: Is it like an antique?

A: Yeah, it's at least back in probably '40's or '50's.

A2: It was made to run on factories of any sort. Machine shops would have those big straps running around the ceiling, and they would go to different pieces of equipment. And the equipment would have –

[01:20:04]

A: There'd be a steam engine on the end of it somewhere turning it.

A2: Yeah, and you could engage or disengage certain pieces of equipment as you needed it. And it's set up for that. But it's also manual. It has a rotary handle on it that you can just turn and crank down in the cut paper, or board with it.

A: If you go to YouTube and you go to LeadGraffiti, one word, in there is a tour of our printing area. And one of the things we do is we show a little bit of that press operating. And it's really – it's an amazing piece. And everybody that ever comes into it that has a shop just goes, "I've never seen anything like that." A paper cutter unlike any paper cutter I have ever seen. And we've seen a lot of paper cutter I guarantee.

A2: Most of them have a big handle that you have to pull down. You have to have a lot of upper body strength to be able to pull the blade down through a stack of paper. But this is – it's just got a hand crank on it. And you just gently turn the crank, and it just slices down through paper like it's butter.

[01:21:23]

A: Oh my lord, it is nice.

A2: Yeah, it's made by a company called Oswego.

A: About 3500 pounds, too. It'll cut a 31 inch sheet of paper. So it's a monster thing. But it's cool.

Q: Cool. So when were you doing the annual reports for Hagley? From about when to when?

[01:21:44]

A: Early '90's. But maybe the middle '80's to the middle '90's.

A2: Yeah, I haven't looked at them in a while. I'm horrible with dates.

A: Actually, I meant to pull one of those out to show you. But I apparently just got all this other stuff and didn't do it.

A2: When we started, we wanted the annual reports to match the size of the ones we had before. And they're small annual reports. They're not like a big affair like GE would put out. They were – what were they? They were odd, almost square, like seven by eight or something. And then at some point, Glenn Porter was the director then. And he wanted to do something a little special and different, so we bumped it up to an 8 ½ 11 size. So, *Time Magazine* format. And that was a big move for them. And they always had a photographer on staff who shot all the photography for the annual report. And Doctor Porter the –

[01:22:57]

A: Give me just a moment and I'll show you.

A2: The director – he would always set whatever the theme was going to be for that year. But it was interesting. I enjoyed working on it. They were nice people to work with, a wonderful environment. That's one.

A: Yeah, I wanted to do the table.

A2: That's the 8 ½ 11 format. I don't remember what the first one was.

A: Let me find that. Get a blank page here and then – see how big these things are. This is a little bit of a small image, so it's a little bit fuzzy. But one year – I put a couple of pieces in here just to – because talked about wanting to do things different all the time. We don't want to copy ourselves doing it. But one of the years we did Hagley's annual report – Hagley has a photographer. And he would go off and shoot these photographs. No idea what the annual report is, but he would just shoot photographs. And they would give them to us. And they gave us this stack of about ten photographs. Ten or 12 photographs.

[01:24:35]

And what they wanted to do was show that the library was accessible. And one of the images they gave – this is the one I always show – is this dining room from about – I don't know, 1850 or something like that. But it's a dining room table set up with no people in it. And you want to do it and say accessible. It's the most inaccessible looking dining room you've ever seen. So we came up with this idea to do these photographs of people. We would treat the photographs as if they were giant photographs in an exhibition, and the people would walk by and sort of be looking at them like this. So that's that one. Here's another page in it. This picture actually had people in it. And you'd get a nice sort of change in scale between the people.

Q: And I know right where that mill is, and it's getting replaced again right now because the wood and the water doesn't last forever.

[01:25:50]

A2: Right. But it was fun doing that particular annual report because we were trying to emphasize the director's theme of accessibility and show, here's people coming to the museum. Because they were increasing their children's programs and tours and stuff that they offered of the site as well as the accessibility of the library and all. So we were photographing all these people to prove that yeah, the museum is geared up and ready for you to come take a look at what we've got.

A: I mentioned to you when we were talking together the other day that we really liked doing things with people that made things. This is another client in that same weird technology. They make these wear products that they just don't wear down at all. So this was an ad campaign we did.

A2: Yeah, they had a special material that they used to make parts for mining equipment, things that lined shoes, or the teeth that would go on those steam shovel things.

[01:26:54]

A: Grind up the road when you're taking the asphalt off a road.

A2: That and things that dig the ore out of the earth out of the mine. And they would last a really long time. In the mining world, things wear down quickly.

A: This is another guy that we did for the Delaware Manufacturing Alliance. When we went out there to do that, they wanted to show different kinds of people and different kinds of technology. They wanted an annual report, but all compressed into a logo I think.

A2: Trying to get a cornucopia of ideas in one small logo. They wanted white collar workers, blue collar workers, men, women. They wanted different kinds of technology, manual tools, heavy duty machinery tools, and then digital computer kind of references as well.

A: This is another kind of interesting logo for taking an idea that is incredibly complicated – critical incident stress management. So if you had an earthquake, say in Wilmington, and buildings fell down, it's trying to deal with people to get them past the event, the critical incident. And so, we did this just by taking this logo and sort of throwing this rock into this pond and letting it sort of taper off.

[01:28:25]

A2: It was mainly aimed at first responders. Firemen and hospital personnel, what have you. People that would have to – people who were first on the scene having to deal with the most horrible aspects of fires and floods and –

A: Just one other serious project here was we did the 250th anniversary of Newark, Delaware. We did their hardback book, 300 pages of it. You can see we also used – we lifted that same idea that we used in Hagley’s annual report to do a citizen band that ran through all 300 pages. It would have people from town. They would come in and we would take their picture and put them in the book. Anyway, back to the story at hand. Let’s see, where am I? I’ve got to get back to Zoom. Stop share. Sorry, sidetracked there.

Q: No, it was a good sidetrack. I like to capture a bit of everything that you’ve done. We’re here to talk about Direct Radiography, but it’s not everything.

[01:29:44]

A: Direct Radiography really fit into a world that we liked. We love technology. You love talking to people who know stuff. It’s really great. You just feel good when somebody’s explaining something you can’t understand. You feel like you’re in play. And us sitting – just the two of us sitting here with our studio and our house – we had a nice studio in our house, but it was just in the house nonetheless. But god, it was just so much fun being with them out there.

A2: People really like talking about what they do. And so often, the only people they can talk about it with is the people they work with. And it’s nice to have somebody new to talk about it. Like, we’re really enjoying talking to you about what we did.

[01:30:38]

A: And they loved our work. They really did.

Q: So from sort of conception to completion, how long did it take to make an ad? Like, say with the car with the spoiler on it.

A: Honestly, that's probably three weeks. Let's see – three weeks.

A2: Yeah, because you had the idea pretty quickly, but finding the car –

A: The car was easy. What GE was doing was taking their array that they were doing and plugging it into their old x-ray equipment. Because they didn't want to have to retool their whole manufacturing thing, which Direct Radiography didn't have to worry about at that point in time. They didn't make the machines. I think most of the photographs we were doing were probably invented images. They weren't real machines to start with. So we were trying to think of things – I mean, you could be riding down the road and you see a sports car with a spoiler on the back of it, an air foil on the back of it. And all you had to do was then switch cars. I like old cars. I had an old Corvette for a long time. I probably might've had it during that time.

[01:32:21]

But you know, then you start asking around. We said to Bill what we were going to do and he said, "I know somebody that's got a Model T. It's great. The guy shows it." And we said great. So we went over to look at it and saw it, and then to write it – so typically, most of the text would come from us kind of inventing the text. What the story is and here's the stuff we need. And then we would run it through a number of people for the copying it thorough, completed. And then design it. But I would say three weeks. Without breaking your buck. If you had to do it in ten days, we could've done it in ten days. But I think a little bit, you're letting it just ferment a little in your head exactly how you want to do it. Because we weren't gung ho about redoing work. We almost never have work that's rejected. We don't present it unless we think it's on target.

[01:33:37]

A2: Yeah, we didn't present anything that we didn't like.

A: So we probably just said what this was going to look like. It's going to be a Model T. It's going to have an air foil on the back of it. And then Direct Radiography is way more worried about the words than they are about that image.

A2: You always had to go through legal.

A: Yeah, all the legal ramifications of what you're saying, what you're promising and that sort of thing. And then it would be maybe the – not that Model T wouldn't do that, but some other ads – we would do them in different languages. We did ads in 14 different languages for them. Turkish. Oh, wait a minute. Maybe I swapped off. We did a lot. We did them in Russian, didn't we?

A2: No, you did Europe. So you did France. We did Japanese. And German? Give me a second here. I'll look it up. Because I had them pulled out the other day.

[01:34:57]

A: So getting them translated, that was a little bit of trouble. They might go in different magazines, or maybe if they use them as a brochure.

A2: Here's the French version.

A: There's that ad but in French. Is that forwards or backwards to you?

Q: Forwards.

A: Okay.

A2: Yeah, just Japanese, French, and German.

A: Japanese, French, and German.

A2: The mining stuff that Ray showed earlier, the –

A: That's the 14 languages.

A2: Yeah, because there's mining all over the world.

[01:35:46]

A: And we love doing this stuff in foreign languages because we always would – if they could give it to us – because we wanted the right typeface. So a lot of times, we would type this back in. And you're typing it in, trying to be careful and stuff like that. Foreign languages were really fun. Also, we're sitting here in Newark, Delaware doing something in German. So, you know, Japan.

A2: The Turkish thing you're thinking of is the wedding invitation that we did.

[01:36:24]

A: Oh, okay.

Q: Did you have to worry about how to translate messages and images to different cultures then, too?

A2: Yeah, that was definitely something that we had to keep in mind. Of course, most of the things that we're talking about in Direct Radiography – it's mostly pretty scientific and it's mostly straightforward. We probably would've had to have been more careful about doing the car with the tailfin on it as an image because that means more in America than it does in Europe or Japan.

A: One of those ads that we did for [01:37:15] is – it shows a picture of the moon, and it talks about – the moon would be a lot smoother if it had been made out of this [01:37:24]. It's an aluminum and silicon carbide. Very futuristic way that these things are melted together with fumes. It's unbelievable. So we were doing it for the Spanish market. Mainly in Mexico and South America. And we said the man in the moon would have a smoother face. They don't have a man in the moon. They don't say that. It's a rabbit and his whiskers, is what they talk about when they look at the moon. They see a rabbit, not a man, old man.

[01:38:04]

A2: They have a different legend.

A: So we had to find that out, then have somebody write that up in Spanish. So that kind of stuff did happen.

[01:38:15]

A2: Yeah, you had to be careful with certain imagery and things that are very cultural oriented. But we didn't run into that too much. I think probably the car with the air foil on the back of it would've been the most oddball thing. We would've probably had to substitute a different image for that so that it would be understandable in the European market it.

A: We maybe would've done it with a Ferrari or something.

A2: I don't remember.

Q: So how did the work and expectations for it change over time? Because I've heard from other advertisers that it's gotten to be much more of a breakneck pace than what it used to be.

A: It's awful today. I don't know how people do it today. I still have a lot of my graduates – I taught advertising at the university. And I have a lot of graduates who are in the really higher upper echelon of ad agencies, all the big ad agencies in America. I've got creative directors and executive creative directors and stuff that work at it. And I don't know how they do it anymore. With attention span – and I see so few good ads. Typically in a Super Bowl, which is the pinnacle of advertising in TV commercials, I've had up to five TV commercials in a given game that were done by my graduates. I think there were three this past Super Bowl. So there are people that still do this. They do it.

[01:40:20]

A2: I don't think we could compete today like we did back then. I think it's a whole different world. Like you say, the pace of it has just increased so much. And Ray would've had to have given up teaching. I don't think he would've been able to do the computer work and stuff like it's in demand today. The pace of it has just increased too much. We don't have the – before, you had to have lots of other suppliers that you had to wait on. Gosh, I can remember the first time when we first started doing ads and we would go down to Photo Color, is that what it was? And you needed something retouched, you needed a little something done to a film. And you had a lag time there.

[01:41:13]

A: Like two weeks. Two weeks, you just went into pause mode.

A2: And it just cost an enormous amount of money.

A: Thousands of dollars to do it.

A2: And then Photoshop came out.

A: You just do it yourself. But quite honestly, the world is so different today. I wouldn't want this somehow to get back to students in the visual communications programs, but I wouldn't go into this field today. I don't think there's enough work. Jill and I were talking last night about the fact that one of the problems is – say with me – now, I'm 75, so I'm sort of past the working age of people doing it. But let's say I was 60, and it had my same career. Fifteen years ago. I had a good career at that point. But the people that you're generally working for in most companies are fairly new MBAs out of school. And they don't have nearly the experience that I have. And your ability to argue with them is really lessened.

[01:42:34]

They've got an MBA. They think they're cool. And I just – god, you'd just be at war every time you wanted to show something and you wanted one of your ads to go and they wanted the other one.

A2: And I also think the time crunch. We spent so much time getting to know the people and the product, the technology at Direct Radiography. And I don't think people have time for that anymore. You've kind of got to go with a gut instinct or something. I really don't know how the people producing advertising today do what they do.

[01:43:24]

A: You've got so much more technical help. Computers and the internet and things like that. You've got some advantages. But man, everybody wants it yesterday. We used to say that back in the day. "Everybody always wants it yesterday." Now they want it a month ago or something. I don't know what kind of time restraints you work on at Hagley to get this kind of stuff done.

A2: You remember when FedEx first came out? You could get something delivered overnight. It's like, oh my gosh. And it just got faster and faster after that. Even computers aren't fast enough these days it seems. I don't know where it's going to end.

Q: Somewhere worrying. That's for sure. Excuse me. So, what was the difference between a good day at work for this sort of thing and a bad day at work?

A: I remember you asking that question. I don't remember bad days.

A2: Yeah, we don't really remember having bad days.

A: Tired days, maybe. But it was because that life – our life as Cypher-Nichols design bumped heads with my teaching life at the University of Delaware. That would be it.

[01:45:01]

A2: You went teaching as hard as you went at Direct Radiography as our business. There was no slacking off on one or the other. We went at both of them hard.

A: We had clients that we would rather work for. If we had five different clients we were working for, we could rank them by what their expectations were, whether they were willing to give you the resources that you thought were necessary. Sometimes with a lot of clients, we were having to kind of cheat to get images. It was hard to get good images because they just wouldn't pay enough to do that. So we would shoot images instead of hiring Bill to do it. It was much more fun to have Bill do it because he just had a better eye.

A2: Yeah, he had the equipment. He had the eye. Sometimes, we just had to get by with what the budget would allow and do it ourselves.

[01:46:11]

A: But honestly, there really weren't bad days. Just at the end when we quit. Quite honestly, we were just really tired. But it had been – at that point in time, the only client we had was Direct Radiography. So it was just tired, quite frankly. And you're kind of starting to rehash – they're not coming – we were in right at the beginning of a completely new technology. And that was a blast. But after three years, other companies were catching up. They were more in line to get bought. Hologic bought them. All of a sudden, we were still in good graces with Direct Radiography, but we weren't known at all to Hologic.

A2: They had their own ad agencies and people they were familiar with and comfortable with.

A: They didn't take work away from us or anything, but we didn't feel connected to them. But bad days just didn't – I mean honestly, when I look back at my entire career, I got a couple days that sucked, but not very many.

A2: We mostly remember it being good times.

[01:47:55]

A: Absolutely, absolutely.

Q: That's good.

A: Yeah. I mean honestly – and it’s really a shame to say - if somebody came up to me and said, “I’d like to have your career. I’m in school now. I’d like to have your career. What do I do?” And I would go, “Change careers.” I don’t know how you’d do it because I don’t think you could have my career anymore. You might be able to do it in film. But I can’t imagine building a website. When’s the last time you dug deep in a website? So now, the most fun – we do letterpress. So we do that. But the most fun I have is doing films to put on our YouTube channel. Editing, because I used to teach editing film when I was at Delaware. And I love the act of editing. I love watching movies and thinking about the editor. And I don’t think that that’s changed that much except for the fact maybe it’s a little bit faster. But I think the pandemic is going to make everybody slow down, for a little while anyway. There’s no way you can work at breakneck speed and dealing with the pandemic.

Q: Hopefully. Did any of your advertising work ever happen on film?

[01:49:40]

A: No, we never did film. Which is – if somebody says, “So, what did you miss in your life?” And I go, “That I didn’t go into film.” As much as I love film – I loved movies when I was in school, and I had a number of friends around me who made films, and I just never did it. It makes no sense to me at all that I wasn’t in film, or astronomy. One or the other. Because I love watching Hubble telescope photos. And I just don’t know why I didn’t stick with some things. But I never started film. Never even occurred to me to make a film.

Q: So I see we’re starting to draw rapidly toward our time for the day. I know this is really kind of a boiler plate question that everybody gets asked and no one likes to answer, but is there anything I didn’t ask you today that you were hoping I would?

[01:50:48]

A2: I actually came up with something earlier. Now I can’t remember what it was. I should've written it down.

A: Where's my notes?

A2: We got a cheat sheet here we're working on.

Q: Oh, by all means.

A: I answered all your questions in writing so I wouldn't feel totally – I'm looking for the one that's got my notes written right at the top.

A2: Oh, you'd handwritten something? There you go. Here's the question.

[01:51:33]

A: I realize that, but I wrote that. One thing that I think might be interesting – I don't know if this is going to be in the world that you want this thing to be in – but one of the things that – thinking about this and thinking about doing this interview with you that is really crucial to, I think, our success a lot is the fact that we tried to do new things all the time. We tried to not look like other people's work. Their work was different. We'd approach it differently. And one of the things is the relationship. Because at least to me, I have the design world, and I have my teaching world. And while they overlap, the subject overlaps, they're really quite different. And one of the things I was thinking about is, what helped teaching? What did design do to help teaching? And outside of just the experience of doing design and working with marketing people and stuff like that, one of the things that I did when I taught is I would develop grading systems.

So normally, a grading system is 90, 80, 70, 60. Ninety to 100 is an A, 80 to 90 is a B. And I would develop these grading systems to try to help students be able to understand two things better: one is how well they're doing while they're doing it, and the other thing is to anticipate what – or to understand what my experience is going to tell them about it.

[01:53:26]

And so over the three years – sorry, over my 30 years of teaching, I developed these three radically different grading systems. I mean radically different. The last one being what I called

tennis tournament grading, which is divide a problem down into seven stages. Take the hardest stage, and you get one point for succeeding at it. If you don't succeed at it, you get no points and you're not graded after this. Like a tennis tournament. You lose the first game, you're out. Go home. And the farther you got through the problem, the easier the steps got, and the bigger the payoff got when you did it. And it was really an interesting way to grade because the students could sit around and do it themselves. They could anticipate what was going to get them in trouble and solve it before it got them in trouble. And I spent 30 years doing that, teaching. Ended up doing these three different grading systems, sort of each one for a decade.

[01:54:49]

After a decade, I got kind of tired of it. But doing this work at Cypher-Nichols design really helped me do that, to try to have this work where every client was its own kind of work that we didn't repeat ourselves. So I think that ended up being kind of interesting to think about that at the end of this. I don't know what question you could've asked that would've gotten me to that.

Q: Maybe how you would evaluate the difference between a good ad and a bad ad.

A: Yeah, this really – doing that for them, for Direct Radiography really helped that for sure. Helped me explain it in a clear way for students. Oh, 12 o'clock right on the money. You're good. You're good, Ben.

Q: I try.

A: Or are you getting paid for two hours? That's what you're doing, so you're done.

Q: Oh no, if it needs to go on, it can go on. I just try to be mindful of your time since you're not getting paid.

[01:56:01]

A2: This is show and tell for us.

A: Yeah, this is great stuff. I mean, it's a lot of stuff we hadn't thought about in a while. And we have this connection to Hagley, which is undeniably important to us. We just did wonderful annual reports for y'all. We won a bunch of major awards, design awards for those annual boards. Best of show in shows and stuff like that. A lot of – what did you say the guy's name was that worked there?

A2: Glenn Porter, yeah. He was the director then.

[01:56:41]

A: And he was wonderful as a client because he never thought anybody read the annual report. So he didn't care what we did. We did one annual report in all upper case. The entire annual report in upper case. You should go back and look at these sometime when you go over there. You should go get him to dig these things out. We did one where we didn't use left and right margins on any of the type. It's all centered.

A2: And the margins are only about –

A: Inch and a half wide or something.

A2: Yeah, inch and a half wide.

A: And they would just do this – Hagley was a client that you would think would be a total pain in the ass on the surface. And we would do these annual reports, and they wouldn't care. One of them we did one time – they shot the photographs, the photographer shot the photographs. And we hated them. They were just like, "Go shoot some pretty pictures at Hagley." And so he would just shoot pictures of hills and stuff. We hated them. We liked the pictures of –

A2: One was the bench.

[01:57:49]

A: A bench, an empty bench. Stuff in a collection. That's what we wanted to do. And he gave us all these photographs. And the problem is they were all black and white so he's a photographer, so he's real into doing arty photographs. And we didn't want arty photographs. We wanted arty design. So he had done these photographs, and we hated them. So we were trying to figure out how to make the photographs go together. They just had nothing to do with each other. So if you're going to put two photographs on a page, what can you possibly do to make them go together? So what we did – and the photographer was pissed. Oh my god, he was pissed. We took –

A2: You might not want to put this in the –

[01:58:35]

A: Yeah, you know, find out who it is. If he's died, that's okay. You can put that in it. But we would take the photographs, and we would lay the photographs out. And we would put two photographs per spread. And then we would tear two sides off of the photographs. So it'd just be a ragged, torn edge. And we would put those two sides kind of together. They didn't align or anything. They would just overlap. And so, the two photographs had this giant tear down one side of them. And it was really wonderful, and we entered it in the advertising club of Delaware. And these photographs were awful. I'm not kidding you. You could have a high school sophomore doing them. They were clean. I'll give him that. They were clean. And it won a gold medal for photography. It didn't win it for design, but it won a gold medal for photography. And we were going, what? Where the hell did that come from? You should go look at these things and look for that. Like 1990 and go forwards and backwards five years. But those torn edges – he was furious.

A2: He was at the school – you took a photograph and you didn't crop it. You showed the entire photo the way it was given to you.

[02:00:00]

A: Done. I took this photograph.

A2: Type didn't overlap it, nothing. It should just be pristine and left alone on its pedestal and admired.

A: Quite frankly, I thought it was a great idea for the way to create some continuity where there was no continuity at all. These black and white photographs were just – [02:00:20] all black and white photographs is really kind of dead unless you get some scale. But these just didn't have that. It's pretty funny. You should look that up. I'll take some photographs. I'll scan it. I'm not sure where it is, but I'll scan one and send you a couple of spreads that you can look at and go, "Yup, this would piss me off if I was a photographer."

Q: So I'm looking through my notes, and it does look like we did get to everything. Is there anything else that you'd want to offer your own views or thoughts on yet?

[02:00:58]

A: I think it's wonderful that Hagley exists and Hagley does what it does. I'm telling you. I think it's kind amazing to live in the area with Hagley. It feels good. And it's incredible that there are people trying to say this stuff. I just don't tend to think in the past. I never have. And you know, that this stuff gets recorded somewhere – it's like a library. That's what libraries do, but I just never appreciated these in the early days of my life. I never appreciated what a library did. Special collections and then special libraries like Hagley's.

A2: It's like the field that we're in, it's like everything's temporary. You don't really think of it as having a lifespan or any value beyond.

[02:01:59]

A: Beyond the month of the magazine. It's done. Next.

A2: And the fact that Hagley, or any museum anywhere for that matter, but particularly Hagley has taken on this business history aspect. And it really gives value to the work that we have done. It's way beyond just the simple paycheck that we got once we did whatever job we were asked to

do. It really – it's nice. It's a nice pat on the back for us. Hey, you did something special or important.

A: And Jim Culley's dad, who was a film director – Hagley has purchased or something – I'm not sure what the relationship is – his father's films. And digitized them and made them available. Here's a thing that was destined to be in the trash. And apparently, according to the people at Hagley, there have been some real gems found in these old industrial films that this guy did in Cleveland that you would've thought – when Jim told me he was going to show them to y'all, my mind just went, “No. That's never going to work. They're never going to be interested.” But not only interested, but enthusiastic about preserving them and stuff.

[02:03:35]

And that's just astounding. That's just amazing. I think Hagley ought to be on some kind of tour of every student within 100 miles. Ought to come there and have some attempt on y'all's part to make the value of what y'all do known to kids who don't give a shit anymore. You know, things are so fast. I should do that. I should make a proposal to y'all. I don't know if y'all want me to be the spokesperson. But, pretty good. I could put on a –

A2: A red velvet suit?

A: Yeah, a red velvet suit. I tell you, honest to god, I should stop and write that down to you and let you send it to somebody. That there are 99% of the people that don't know what y'all do that should know what y'all do. I don't know – we'll do an ad campaign for y'all. We'll do it for free. We'll do letterpress. Hey, if you need any letterpress done, don't forget us. We appreciate you doing this. We really do. It's really been a blast. I hope it's useful and I hope somebody listens to this sometime.

Q: Yes, absolutely. So I guess I'm at a good point to turn off the recording. Any final thoughts before I do it? Going once, going twice.

[02:05:12]

A: Nope, just appreciate that question list. Wow, what a set of questions. Very good.

A2: Very thoughtful.

A: Yeah, covered the territory, gave us plenty of diving boards to step off of really.

Q: All right, okay. Well, thank you so much for sitting down with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW