

**Oral History Interview of
Jean Caslin**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
June 18, 2019
Lubbock, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Jean Caslin, who discusses her education, her experience in photography, and friends she met through the photography field, such as Emmett Lynn Baldwin, Maggie Olvie, and Ken Hatch.

Length of Interview: 00:22:43

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Emmett Lynn Baldwin photographs	05	00:00:00
Personal history	06	00:03:55
Her journey with photography	09	00:05:30
Her career as an arts administrator	11	00:08:00
Houston Center for Photography job; meeting Emmett Lynn Baldwin	11	00:08:58
Her friendship with Baldwin	13	00:11:20
What she appreciates about Baldwin's work	14	00:13:06
Maggie Olvie	17	00:18:30
Ken Hatch	18	00:20:18

Keywords

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Andy Wilkinson (AW):

This is Andy Wilkinson June 18, 2019 in the afternoon with Jean Caslin. J-e-a-n C-a-s-l-i-n. We're going to be talking about photography. So there's that part. [Pause as papers shuffle] While you're getting that together—

Jean Caslin (JC):

All right. So this was—this gives you his parent's names. The only place I have found that.

AW:

Okay. Let's see. Has that got Mark Baldwin anywhere on it?

JC:

That needs to be—

AW:

[Coughs] Excuse me. I'll mark that. Baldwin. All right.

JC:

And this gives his exhibition history, from the beginning, up until about 2006, and the most recent one—

AW:

Isn't that when he passed away? Two thousand six?

JC:

He died in 2015.

AW:

Twenty-fifteen?

JC:

Yeah. So there's another ten years that we don't have. I'm going to keep looking for it.

AW:

Okay. We've got that.

JC:

And one of the most interesting things of his oral history—I added it to this documentation. He was taught photography by his father in Hampton, Iowa. His father was a second generation

pharmacist. And the—he and his father made the dark room out of the wooden crates that coffins where shipped in. [AW laughs]

AW:

Dark in more ways than one.

JC:

So, I did a little research and show you a vintage casket from 1941. [Laughs] So he was in the dark room with his father on Sunday, December 7, 1941, when he heard the announcement of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and they went upstairs and talked to his mother, and he joined the navy soon thereafter. So I indicated a little of that in one of those bios and it was one of his most significant stories.

AW:

Oh, that's cool.

JC:

Isn't it cool? [Laughs]

AW:

Yeah, it is very cool. And we are speaking about—

JC:

Emmett Lynn Baldwin.

AW:

Yes. Lynn Baldwin, whose photographs we're getting by the good offices of Jean. And so, let's—for—as we talked with Robert Weaver just a little bit ago about information about you, which is important because it's about you, but it's also important because it gives us the context and the provenance for the images that we're getting not only about—from Baldwin, but also Maggie Ovie and Ken Hatch. And then, various in sundry, miscellaneous things, like the sack of old books from the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, which is really nice stuff. And a number of other things, which we hope to collect here very soon. But I need to get some basic information on you so that a hundred years from we know which Jean Caslin [laughter] we're talking about. What is your date of birth?

JC:

10/30/51.

AW:

Just a child.

JC:

Just a child, yes.

AW:

Compared to me. And you were born in?

JC:

Washington D.C.

AW:

But if I remember correctly, you didn't grow up there, right?

JC:

We lived in Washington and Connecticut. My father worked for the U.S. Patent Office as a patent attorney. And then he moved the family from Bridgeport, Connecticut, where he was working for General Electric, to Louisville, Kentucky.

AW:

And how old were you when you got to Louisville?

JC:

Second grade.

AW:

Oh, so pretty small. And so you went through public school there?

JC:

Went through Catholic school there.

AW:

Yeah, okay. [JC laughs] But I mean, K-12, or whatever was left of your—

JC:

Yes, yes.

AW:

And where did you do your college and university?

JC:

And then I went to Boston University for college.

AW:

Oh, great. What did you study?

JC:

English and Art-History.

AW:

English and Art-History. And you did an M.F.A.? Is that right? Also?

JC:

I went to Stanford University and did an M.A. in Art-History.

AW:

Stanford University?

JC:

Um-hm.

AW:

Now, what is Stanford University? Where is that?

JC:

California.

AW:

So, Stanford as Stanford?

JC:

Right. South of San Francisco.

AW:

Yeah. I don't know what I was thinking of.

JC:

There's a Stanford, Connecticut.

AW:

Yeah. Okay. All right. So what—how did you come to photography?

JC:

[Laughs] I started photographing, I guess, when I was in high school.

AW:

And was it something that your folks did—

JC:

My mom and dad both took—

AW:

--Your friends? Siblings? Something?

JC:

Yeah. My parents both took a lot of family photographs, yeah.

AW:

Yeah, and so you just took it up?

JC:

Um-hm.

AW:

Were you—by the time you got to college and university, were you already interested in photography as a focus of your interest?

JC:

Oh, yes. Yeah.

AW:

Yeah. Why?

JC:

[Laughs] I had been photographing for a few years at that time. Always on trips, always looking for interesting things to photograph. Black and white photography, primarily. Colored slides. I was interested in nineteenth century art and culture, particularly, British. I did a master's—or I did an undergraduate's thesis on the British Pre-Raphaelite's use of photography.

AW:

Really? That's interesting.

JC:

With Carl Chiarenza, who was teaching at Boston University at that time. He went on to Rochester Institute of Technology after that. And then, I went to California, continued to study nineteenth century art, American and British, and I started taking photography classes there. And that's when I did black and white, dark room work.

AW:

So you did your own dark room work as well?

JC:

Right.

AW:

Baring among the old adage of [JC laughs] black and white images made in the dark room? The color images made in the camera, then?

JC:

Yeah.

AW:

The old saw. So was your intent to be—make your way as a photographer?

JC:

Unh-uh.

AW:

Never?

JC:

Always as an arts administrator.

AW:

Really?

JC:

Art historian and arts administrator.

AW:

Yeah, and that's tough to avoid the temptation of being the person on display in the gallery, as opposed to the person putting the display up.

JC:

Right, yes.

AW:

How did you dodge that bullet?

JC:

I guess I thought that my greatest talents were going to be as an arts administrator. So, my first job out of graduate school—I got an M.A. in Art-History from Stanford—was to go to Boston, and start working at the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University, and that was fairly early on in its history.

AW:

Yeah. How long were you there?

JC:

I was there for nine years. But I also worked for a Polaroid corporation, part-time, in the International Marketing Publicity Department. Worked for the Clarence Kennedy Gallery. Organized the International Polaroid Employee Competition. Did a bunch of things.

AW:

Yeah. Gosh, I still have about three SX-70s at home [JC laughs], including one in a really nice leather case.

JC:

Well, that's a collectable.

AW:

I know it. They're just such interesting cameras, though, and that process is so interesting. I guess, it's true, it's completely devoid of grain, you know? Since it's a chemical dye process, right? Nice, nice images. Very cool.

JC:

So after that, I was recruited to apply for the job as executive director at Houston Center for Photography.

AW:

Um-hm. And so, what year did you go to Houston? Wind up going to Houston?

JC:

Nineteen-eighty-eight.

AW:

Nineteen-eighty-eight. Tell us a little bit about the Houston Center.

JC:

I'm trying to remember the exact year it was founded. I've already forgotten. I can look it up and get that too. [Laughs]

AW:

Oh, we can look that up.

JC:

It's probably on their website. I think it was six years old when I got there, and I stayed seventeen years, full-time. And that's where I met Lynn Baldwin.

AW:

Um-hm. And the center, is it a like a museum? Like an educational facility, where photography is taught? Is it—

JC:

Um-hm. It's more like an arts center. It's not a collecting institution. They do have a book collection, and they teach classes, do outreach.

AW:

So they don't collect photographs and negatives?

JC:

No.

AW:

They have exhibitions and—

JC:

Yes, changing exhibitions.

AW:

Yeah, yeah. So that means you would meet lots and lots of different—

JC:

Right. And I was the executive director and the curator there. Worked with an exhibitions committee to choose exhibits.

AW:

Real quickly, when did you graduate from Boston?

JC:

Um, '79.

AW:

And Stanford?

JC:

Let me think about that. That's not right [laughs].

AW:

So, fifty-one-eighteen [JC laughs], you would've been seventy-nine when you started?

JC:

Graduated from high school in '69.

AW:

Sixty-nine? Okay. Right, right.

JC:

Graduated from BU in '74. Went to Harvard for a semester, and then went to graduate school, '75 to '77, or something. Seventy-eight? I'd have to look those dates up.

AW:

That's all right. That's good enough. We talked a bit, out at the storage unit, about Baldwin. What, in particular, is of interest to you about his work? Him and his work?

JC:

So, he was born in 1922. And I met him around 1993. He would've been around seventy years of age. He had just retired heading up the Biomedical Communications Department at MD Anderson Hospital—Cancer Hospital. And he was a visitor at Houston Center for Photography.

He was looking for a new direction and I was looking for a volunteer. [Both laugh] We became fast friends and we were friends for twenty-two years, until he died. So here was this exciting man, who was ready to take off. He had—although he'd done artistic photography throughout his biomedical career, it was primarily slides, and three projector slides with music. His resume will show you he presented those at many places, and national conferences, and throughout Houston. But he was really ready to start making prints, and doing new series, and submitting to exhibitions, and having solo shows. It was remarkable to see a man that was seventy years old, ready for a whole new chapter of his life. And when digital photography came—happened he embraced it fully. People were delighted and amazed at his interest and ability to shift from a chemical dark room to a digital dark room.

AW:

Yeah. Well, and not only that, from the way that you capture things in the camera so different—so very different. Especially, if you've developed a set of reflexes and such, to go with setting the F-stop and all that sort of thing. What about his work? Besides him, what do you like about the work?

JC:

So, he—[laughs]—you know, in this collection that you are receiving—and I'm so grateful that you are doing that—he has vintage work of family members. He has work in amazing places in Europe. But his work in the United States is probably the ones that have made him most known. So he loved Americana. He loved small Texas towns. And I traveled with him some of the time, and can help you identify things if you end up with something that you don't know where it's from. But he loved Texas towns. He loved small towns. He was deeply moved by roadside crosses and did a long series called *Guardians of Memory*, and he would often go back to the sites and talk to family members.

AW:

Oh, that's interesting, too. I think when we talked at the storage shed, we also noted that he was early because there are a lot of people who are doing that now, but he was early in that recognition.

JC:

Pretty early on. He was working with two-and-a-quarter camera for that series.

AW:

Yeah. But I mean, he was doing it before a lot of people were doing the same thing.

JC:

Yeah.

AW:

And he was doing it with film.

JC:

Right, absolutely.

AW:

Yeah. Great. What else do we need to know about him and that collection, right at this moment? I mean, we'll dig into it and have questions.

JC:

You'll learn. You'll learn more. The series he's best known for is "The Statue of Liberty" series.

AW:

Yes, and we have a book that you—yeah.

JC:

Yes, a blurred book.

AW:

Yeah, and you helped him organize those books, is that correct?

JC:

Um-hm. Right. I was the one that sat in the computer and created the book with him right there. But he loved the way that icon was used in offbeat ways. [AW laughs] And people would send him snapshots of iconic things, and if he could, he would go there and photograph those statues. So, it was statues of liberty in town squares, or in front of schools, you know, in Las Vegas, wherever he could find them. He was a great patriotic person, based on his military history. He also collected small statues of liberty, which can be part of this collection if you want them. [Laughs]

AW:

That may be a box too far. [Laughs]

JC:

That may be too far. He also has a postcard collection of statues of liberty.

AW:

Now, that might be a little more amenable to, or suitable—

JC:

Okay. It's in one book.

AW:

Yeah, we could do that.

JC:

It's two-dimensional. Statues are a little—even small ones are—

JC:

You might just want one up for your shelf.

AW:

Well, we wouldn't mind having one. We do like to have things that we could—for instance, if we do an exhibit on this collection, we would have, you know—now, I don't believe we're getting one of his cameras, but let's say we did, we would have one of his cameras, and one of the statues, and a postcard, that kind of thing. So yeah, we would take something like that. Now, how did you come by having the authority over the collection? And that's just for our provenance.

JC:

So he—I advised him. And he—I helped him make smart choices about what he applied to because a photographer, at the beginning of exhibiting, applies for everything. And I helped him be selective and so, he used his money, and his time, and his effort, wisely. So, he was very successful because I, from being a reviewer at Photo Fest for many years and just being involved in selecting work for many, many years, I knew what curators were looking for. So, I just was his volunteer advisor [laughs] for many years, and went to a number of shows that he had. At the end, I was his health advocate. His children—his son lives in Virginia Beach, Virginia. There's a daughter in Columbia, Missouri. There's a daughter in the Hill Country in Texas, and none of them were in Houston, so I took care of him the last couple of years. And he had a short illness of just three months, towards the end, and he died at ninety-two and a half years of age.

AW:

Wow.

JC:

But he was active until the very end.

AW:

Yeah. That's great.

JC:

So because of my background in photography, he had already determined, in advance, that he would like me to take the collection and try to place it.

AW:

So in that sense, you are officially his artistic executor?

JC:

[Laughs] Very good.

AW:

I know people have literary executors. So, an artistic executor. Okay good. What about Maggie Olvie?

JC:

So, Maggie Olvie was a friend of mine and she worked for many years with Anne Tucker at the Museum of Fine Arts. And, there's a brochure, here, that you will have. We did a show, a memorial show, at Houston Center for photography, and we held a memorial service before this for the community at HCP. So she was born in nineteen—um, no. She died in 1994, at the age of forty-two. She had a B.A. from Rice University and a M.F.A from the University of Houston. She worked in the print room at the Museum of Fine Arts with Anne Tucker for many years. So these are four unique artist books that she created. I think it was during her years as a graduate student. And there's an essay by Suzanne Bloom and Ed Hill, who were two of her major teachers. And so, I was her friend and looked out for her.

AW:

So the intellectual property for these items, still, is retained by Maggie's estate?

JC:

I would say so, yes.

AW:

Okay, great.

JC:

I could find her children, if I needed to. I think they live in Washington State, but the books came to me.

AW:

Well, we—yeah, no—if they're books, then that—anyone who wants to do something with them, other than research, will be coming up on them to find it. Whereas, with the Baldwin material, we can send them to you, et cetera. Okay, and Ken Hatch? What about Ken Hatch?

JC:

So, Ken Hatch was a corporate pilot and passionately involved in photography for many years. I am in the process of getting a biographical statement from him.

AW:

Oh, nice.

JC:

And because corporate pilots work limited schedules, as we discussed earlier, he had a lot of time to devote to his photography. He had a lot of time to devote to Houston Center for Photography, where I was the executive director and curator. So he worked with me for a number of years on the annual photography auction, and after he gave that up, then Lynn Baldwin took over and he helped on all phases of the auction for many years. So those were huge volunteer—and they were both—they both, at various points, served on the board of HCP. So, I have been in touch with Ken Hatch, who is delighted at this partial donation and he would love to be able to donate other things to you because he and his partner have been discussing what's going to happen to his archives.

AW:

Well, please share with him my contact information.

JC:

I will.

AW:

Where does he live now?

JC:

So he's in Tucson, Arizona. And so, he has agreed on his next trip to Austin, Texas, to visit relatives, he'll stop in Lubbock.

AW:

Great, great.

JC:

And bring you some more.

AW:

Yeah, and we don't mind going out, also, if that's—

JC:

So I don't know how much stuff. We have four or five Hollinger boxes full of matted prints, primarily, but he has more.

AW:

Yeah. Well, we will certainly be interested in adding to this collection that way. So, as I said, share my information.

JC:

I will.

AW:

Okay. What else do I need to know at this moment to get us going on this?

JC:

I don't know. I think that's probably a good bit of information. I haven't contacted the family yet to know about the donation, but they will be thrilled.

AW:

The family?

JC:

The family of Lynn Baldwin will be thrilled.

AW:

Lynn Baldwin, yeah.

JC:

Because they had hoped that this would go to an archive.

AW:

Good. Well, and we would like to get contact information for them, too, when you get that done.

JC:

Sure, yeah.

AW:

Okay. Well I'm going to—because we could talk for a long time about other things, but let's leave this where we have it now, and we'll add to it as we get into the collections. So, thank you.

JC:

Terrific. Thank you so much.

End of Recording



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