

Transcription from “Designers of Mad Mad Era” event

Organization/Project: Portland Design History & Portland State University

Interview Date: 10/7/2014

Interview Location: PNCA

Video/Audio File Type: Video recording

Text Transcription

About Charles Politz

Narrator: Joan Campf

What you need to know about Charles, he was a gentle man and a gentlemen, and he was a funny man and he was a terrific designer, he was a terrific artist. If you knew Charles you knew that he stuttered, and he really suffered from that all his life, but when it got to his artwork he never stuttered a bit. It was fluid, and gorgeous, and honest, and real, and it came out of the inside of him. It either came out of the inside of him as a piece of elegance or it came out of the inside of him as a piece of humor. He really could have ended up as a writer, as a really talented writer, but I think that art bug took him down the road.

I had the privilege of working with Charles for years, and I loved every minute of it, you never knew what was going to come out of him. One of our clients was Emanuel Hospital this inelegant piece was a piece that went out to physicians at the hospital. When I was hired to do this project to come on as their advertising agency they said to me ‘We’ll send this out to doctors and they’ll never read it, they hate it. Do something.’ So I interviewed a bunch of physicians at Emanuel, and they said ‘Okay heres the deal; we don’t have time to read this stuff. All the junk on our desk all the reports, and all the blah blah blah blah.’ I came back and I sat down with Charles and I said ‘ya know I think they’re wrong I think the reason they don’t read it is that it’s pretty boring.’

So, we decided to create something that was actually twenty pages long. Bennett was the illustrator, Charles was the graphic designer, I was the writer. What we did is we did a series of

stories that we knew doctors were talking about when they went out to lunch and dinner with each other. Talking about alcohol addiction among doctors. We did stories about orthopedic surgeons who didn't want to operate on people with AIDs. We did stories we knew they were talking about in the back room. Suddenly the piece went from one page to many pages, and I think it got read. I think it got read because of the talent of Charles as a designer, and the talent of Bennett as an illustrator, and the stories that really come out of the physicians at Emanuel Hospital.

They then said 'Well okay that seems to be pretty successful. Here's what we send out to the community. We send out this newsletter to the community, and we don't think its very good. What can you do?' I was wandering around the hospital one day and I was in the kids unit, which of course is now Randle Hospital, and all along the walls were these fabulous pieces that the children had done. I asked the hospital if I could take them off the walls, took them off the walls, came back and sat down with Charles, and said 'Charles this is what we need to do. We need to make a newspaper that is really going to feel like this community.' The first one was tilted Kids and Family. Charles just went nuts with this, and they're better than anything I could ever do. One was the front of the newspaper, and one was the back Those stories that we did, again sort of like the physicians, were real stories. They were not nice stories, they were about in this case abused people, people with addiction, we did stories about people who died, we did stories about children who lived through certain things, but just told it all we just told the whole piece. I think what happened is people really began to understand that Emanuel wasn't just a knife and gun club. If you're an old Portlander you'll remember the news, always at five o'clock, about who got knifed and who got shot in northeast Portland and they would be hauled off to Emanuel Hospital. These fabulous doctors, great hospital, and they were the knife and gun club. This was a way to say these are great doctors, this is a great hospital, good things are happening here, and we're going to tell you the truth. We are actually going to tell you real stories about real people.

Every month they would introduce new physicians into the hospital medical staff, and they said 'You know we send out these invitations, they're kind of boring, and nobody comes.' So I sat down with Charles I said 'Charles could you design a front of famous physicians throughout history? Just your fabulous drawings.' I gave him a list and maybe two weeks later he came back with stunning pieces, and so we did a whole series for I think about a year and a half. Then the medical staff came in and said 'What about us?' So, I made a long list of famous women throughout history and I gave it to Charles, and he, as only Charles can do, did this amazing job. I think when you look at his work you see his elegance in the designs. Not only his elegance as a person, which was remarkable, but his elegance in design. He paid careful attention. These guys sat down at the "board" to design. It was done beautifully, there was no room to make mistakes.

Charles had an amazing sense of humor. People would kid him that he looked like Alfred Hitchcock, and he like that. He took himself seriously in design, but he never took himself seriously as a human being. He would go around and introducing himself as "O'Gogerty, Politz

and Raskolnikov” and he stuttered. He persevered through the stuttering, he persevered and out of that came some of the most pure and beautiful design this city has ever seen.

~ Joan Campf

About Byron:

Narrator: Jim McDonald, accountant worked with creative agencies, ad agencies.

Byron was a bit of a curmudgeon when it came to technology.

From Carol:

It has been quite an experience to walk through Byron’s work and to think that these pieces of paper can convey how big of a life he lived. In the times he came to success and to think those times can be characterized by 21st century TV shows gives one pause. I hope that those who came out tonight, perhaps looking for slick, handsome, womanizing, cutthroat martini drinking ad men, find something else. I hope they find the creative drive, the humor, the commitment to client service and the impeccability that puts Northwest design on the national map. Yes, there was martini drinking. Yes there were a few womanizers. But Byron, Charles, Homer, Rob Reynolds, Roger Bachman, all were devoted family men. They supported them and were supported by them and their monster work ethics. They were also part of a larger community. Designers weren’t isolated to the blue light of their computer screens yet. Designers were connected to the entire community through working relationships with photographers, engravers, copyeditors, typesetters, writers, the cab drivers who ferried copy and proofs to and from the craftsman to the accounts and to the considerable expertise of the printing industry. Press check stories are some of the best you can hear about those times.

This isn't nostalgia: it's the foundation on which today's design and ad business was built.

From Meridel:

I was hired by Bachman Ferris in 1969 and worked with Roger and Byron for 30 years.

My favorite Byron story is on my first day on the job, he handed me artwork and told me to get a velox. I had no idea what a velox was and was too proud to ask.

So I called a nice lady who sold printing and asked her what a Velox was and who was our vendor. She told me and I proudly presented Byron with his velox in record time.

That secured my position with Byron for the rest of his life.

We worked together on the The Old Spaghetti Factory account for 10 years. They are still using the logo he designed.

He rented me space when I formed Prideaux Sullivan Pattison and we worked together on the American Advertising Museum Board.

He instilled the love of travel in me which is why I am in Paris and not with you.

Jim McDonald:

On American Advertising Museum

I had the honor of working with Byron on the board of directors for the American Advertising museum. The museum was born in the mid eighties, it was primarily the brainchild of Jack Metlack Executive Director of the Portland Advertising Federation and he had the largest chunk of the museum's collection. One of the stories I heard was that the reason the ad museum formed was because Jack's wife said, "get this junk out of our house!".

But the Portland Adversing Museum was incredible. I remember after I was recruited to join the board as the treasurer, I had to put together a budget. I was very serious, I am an accountant after all. (shows slide of the "juggling books" sketch). Byron could find a cartoon in the most boring subject matter. I went through my serious presentation. The secretary of the Ad Museum at the time was Homer Groening. Needless to say, he found a way to make reading board minutes interesting. On top of that, Byron would sit there in the meeting making sketches of other board members under the conference table and those were incorporated into the board minutes.

The man (Byron) had a way of seeing things that the rest of us just couldn't see.

Bennet Norrbo

Narrator: Marilyn Murdoch

Bennet Norrbo was my friend for 8 years. Bennet didn't talk about deep things when we were together. He would rather joke around and attempt to shock me. But I had 5 brothers and 2 sisters so I am not easily embarrassed.



This is a picture of Bennet at 20. It's a self portrait and you can tell that his is a handsome man as well as a great portrait painter. He has his tools as symbols of his art and his career. Note his brush is perpendicular

to his center shirt line, becoming the cross that he bore. The cross was his art. He loved it and hated it at the same time. He was constantly doodling, but then telling me he was tired of the whole thing. I think the most dramatic thing in the painting is the light and dark division, showing his gemini personality, half lit, half in darkness. Perhaps he was functionally bipolar, I'm not sure.



Now this is when I met Bennet. Here he was in his 70s. He had stopped painting by the time I met him, both his commercial and fine art. In this painting writes "guilty artist" in the top right corner. He had self condemnation of his own work.

You might see the shy eyes and the drawn face of sadness. He had a life of bright paints, fuzzy cats, princesses and all kinds of cute things that he created, but did not seem to dislodge a bitterness and abandonment of the world. Humor was in everything, but so was a darkness, both in his art and his writing. A quote from a piece he wrote is, "All pictures are lies everything that is seen and heard and felt is either a lie or an illusion."

This is a portrait of his father, you can see the likeness, similarity with himself. Bennet said he spoke daily with his dad after his mother's passing. His father was a financial wizard and left him a considerable amount of money.



This picture is one of himself and his family at the theater in Minneapolis before his family moved to Portland. It is painted in bright colors and we see the only know picture of his mother. His father is the one confronting the viewer. This was Bennet's personal favorite painting.

Neurasthenia, This is what Bennet blamed for his shyness and his weakness. "Neurasthenia" is a mental disease originating in the Industrial Revolution, in where one experiences nervousness and exhaustion as a result of urban progress. The only hope for recovery is to stay away from the urban scene.

This one of his beautiful landscapes. A token defect in the art, some ruins, and he has a plane, always a plane, or a boat or a vehicle, he loved old cars and planes and did a book of drawings about the aspects of them.

What I think is interesting is that Bennet lived in a stately home surrounded with mature gardens. Thanks to his mother's nursery called Krisdale. He managed to keep the gardens up, but, let the house go to rot and ruin. And the structure in the lower part of the painting, the box like structure is similar to something that appeared in his own yard. All parts of life has this

personal dichotomy of personal life neglect and chaos but then too his obsessive compulsive behavior. Everything was sprinkled with humor though.

So you've heard about Studio 1030 where Bennet worked as an illustrator, creating classic images in graphic design. But he was also squeezed into post modern simulations with trivial projects being given vast importance like picking the right sweater to make or break your gold game. Or a symbol can evoke intense emotion like the chalice raised you'll see back in his work. I'm seeing the 60s effect of transforming the viewer with promises of luxury, leisure and prestige and ultimately, he sold us the City of Portland. Bennet absolutely loved Portland, he called it the perfect city.

In this picture you see this drawing of himself put in to his own ad. (Jantzen jacket)

His commercial work was very well done and they knew he was good at it. It was only human relations that were difficult for him. He had a 15 year career and then gave it up to pursue fine art.

He was one of Portland's best-selling artists. He was prolific. He was used to sell-out shows at Gallery West, White Bird, and Portland Art Museum Rental Sales. But for all his success, he couldn't attend his own shows without liquid encouragement. He attempted to break away from the cute and fuzzy, but his audiences weren't so sure that they could support that. Bennet's abstractions, I found to be stilted. His strong suit was to show people interacting, posturing and narrating in the forms he gave them.

Later in his career Bennet longed to portray the other side of life, the ones he enjoyed at night. The images usually involved, guns, skeletons, mobsters, strip joints, brothels, illness, death, sex deviance that humored throughout.

A quote from his writing, "Reality is plastic. Life is a disease of matter. Art is a disease of life."

Bennet never married or had children. But he seemed to have an endless supply of models. This piece has been identified as a girlfriend.

This I would call, "Thanks dad". Bennet took great care of the money left to him. With careful shepherding of funds, no foolish spending and weekly watching "Wall Street Week", he managed to leave us a financial history of the stock market, with his incessant doodling to the side.

This seems to be a comment on his own sexual desires. "Something society does not like, a pretty dance and a leering man with fleshy hands. Innocence and the taker of innocence."

The inscription on this piece is, "The artist as a masked child in a super car and the artist as an old man among houses and windows in the houses." So this shows to me the stunted maturity

of a man with all the haunts, taunts, toys of a 15 year boy reflecting on how he is judged poorly as an older man.

An here, himself as Toulouse-Lautrec, the chaser of forbidden beauty and the painter of vice. Bennet was opposites. The show we up is called, "Nice and Naughty". And it is the perfect title for the show. He was a compilation of seeming opposites. He seemed to be a happy man, yet he would say, "I was born depressed." He said he was too shy to come to his opening yet he would talk to strangers easily in public and affably. He had no trouble getting up in front of a crown at Cheers belting out a song at karaoke. He took care of his mother until she died at 103. Yet claimed he never had a close relationship with her. He was quite wealthy yet lived frugally in self-denying manner. He would frequent some of the shadiest spots in town, but carried a wad of \$100 bills in his pocket for bar drinks and tips.

I'd like to tell you about how I met Bennet. I have a frame shop. I had a client who brought in a piece of Bennet's work to be framed, and I made the comment "How much I liked it and how I would have liked to have met him" because I read that he had passed. Apparently it got back to Bennet because two weeks later, in he came through the door of my frame shop. He said, "I'm looking for Marilyn Murdoch" and I said, "Well, I'm she." Then he dropped to his knees and kissed the hem of my garment. That was very typical of him, a very gentle and sweet man.

I have a few take away points:

To remember that Bennet loved Portland throughout his commercial art career and through his filming and the books he wrote it was all evident how much he cared for Portland. He was a fine artist who gave us a portrayal of humanity across paths.

His life was reflected in his art. We went to art openings often, and when he looked at other artist's work, his comments were always about technique, and never about content. I thought that was interesting. All in all Bennet was kind and gentle and a dear friend who made lousy choices but I miss him a lot.

Panel Discussion: Joan, Marilyn, Joe Erceg

Joe was a working designer for 6 decades.

Joe Erceg:

I was a graduate of University of Portland, I took electives in design at Museum Art School when it was located at the lower levels of the Art Museum. I was as a high school kid and an early college student interested in automobile design. I didn't know anything about graphic design. So I wrote to the Los Angeles Art Center and I showed them some of my sketches of automobiles,

and I asked, "Am I good enough to be accepted down there?" And they said, "Yes." I asked if they had any tuition support. And they said yes, but I couldn't go to LA, no question about that. So I took this catalog to the museum art school and talked to the dean, and I asked, "Do you have a class on automobile design?" He kindly said, "No, we don't have anything like that." But we have a graphic design course, would you want to take that? Well I was in the graphic design course for two days, and I knew immediately that was what I wanted to do. I was taught by Doug Lynch and was one of the premier designers in Portland. From the few classes I had the MAS with the instructors that I had at the time, I devoted sixty years of my life to design, and I am still working in design. My son here, has worked with me for 20 years. We both started pre-computer days. We had to count type. We had to know how it was going to fit, then order it, then be able to put it into a layout. Subsequently, when computers came around, I still design on a dry board, do my sketches, I count the type, I figure out what I need, and then and I turn it over to my son and he executes it on the computer. I am very precise about what I turn over to my son.

So that's sixty years going from when Portland had no 4-color presses, just a 1 color press. If you wanted 4-color, they ran it through 3 times. At the start of my career, they didn't run black, that cost extra money. They overlapped cyan, magenta and yellow to make a really lousy black. You had to learn how to prepare a paste-up, that's the way I got started. Nobody really knew me as a designer. Agencies hired me to do mechanical paste-up because I could draw an exquisite line with a ruling pen. I could draw arcs, I could join the arcs with the line, I could do clean, mechanical paste-ups. They then allowed me to do a little bit of design work. Slowly but surely I gained clientele. The skills that you needed back then would be very difficult for people who depend on a computer today. I don't have computer skills, I have to rely on people like my son. But it was a wonderful time.

When I got out of art school in 1955, Doug Lynch got me a part summer time at the Oregonian in the art department, cleaning up doodles, doing little drawings, etc. When that job ended, the precursor to Studio 1030 was ArtWorks Associates. It was run by Doug Lynch and Don Macgregor, Stanley Putnam, and Millie Eaton, John Stringy. That was the primo art studio in town in 1955. They asked me to join them as an apprentice, at 85 cents an hour. So I was there and I had a little stall, about 8ft square, and very short time thereafter this young fellow named Bennet Norrbo, an illustrator came in and shared the space across from me. So I knew Bennet from 1956 until he passed away. Bennet was one of the most gifted of all of the artists I've ever known. We both had a love of a miniature scaled model cars like Ferraris and Bugatis or scale model airplanes. We'd communicate over the last 6 years of his life, I would send him my catalogs, and he'd tell me, "Joe I look through them all the time, I read everything in there." If you notice in his paintings, nearly all of them have a painting or an automobile in them.

Charles, Byron, Bennet, these are wonderful men. They meant a lot to the design community in this city. I came in, about 15 years younger than them, they were the people I looked up to and the generation that I started with. It might be of interest to you that the three people that

worked at studio 1030 1958- 1959, one was Frank Rohr who started Young & Rohr, one was Mark Norrande, who started Borders Perrin Norrande. So out of that studio came two top notch art directors.

I became a freelance designer and stayed that way all my life. I have a studio down in Old Town. My primary work is for colleges and universities at the time. I designed many books with Joanie Campf here. Some massive three volume history books. Filled with glorious pictures of the logging industry.

Mille Eaton was one of the few women I knew who was working as a commercial artist. She did children's books and stuff like that.

Joan: Eiko Politz was Charles's wife. If there was ever a perfect partner for Charles it was Eiko. You know we talk about these guys, as we women know, it takes two. This person was the other end of that man. And in her life she not only gave Charles companionship, but she also in her own right, was a beautiful artistic woman. They lived in a gorgeous home. Together they bought beautiful artwork. Eiko supported him. I think we just continually forget the other end of artists.

Joan: They were handsome men. Byron always had the exact right handkerchief in his pocket. Charles wore these gorgeous shirt. They were impeccable. Everything was always tailored. They would never make a presentation when they were not looking perfectly put together.

Joe: I have a huge collection of CA magazine, *Graphis*, I have one of the first issues printed. I was able to see everything that was done at a national scale because sooner or later it would appear in a magazine. Plus I have the full collection of Upper and Lower case that was the tabloid newspaper that was such an elegant publication. If you wanted to find out about a new typeface, that had just been issued, you couldn't do better than looking at that publication. They had the best designers.

We knew we weren't east coast. We knew who Milton Glaser was and Herb Lubalin and Seymour Chwast. We strove to be like them. They were people we looked up to. Milton Glaser came out and gave a presentation at the old PCPA which was an avant garde art gallery for 20 years. He had a show there, and I was fortunate to have him come to my house afterwards and meet the big man.

Joe: I the one who said, let's go down and take classes on the computer. The amount of paste-up I had to do for college catalogs was enormous. So I had to design all weeklong and then I had all weekend long to do the paste-ups. That means hand-drawing every page, every column and doing the paste-up.

Joan: The early graphic designers they were at their core, artists, that's where they began. Their work reflects that.

Joe: Irwin McFadden taught me lettering. I learned a lot from him. He was the first to introduce the Helvetica typeface to the city of Portland. At the time it wasn't used very much. He got the subscription from Switzerland of Neue Grafik and introduced us to Swiss Modernism. He taught private classes. He was a constructivist painter. Mary Ellen, his wife, is carrying on in his same style of work. His lettering was exquisite. He was always thinking. He was very progressive in terms of his political views.