

THOMPSON: Yeah, yeah. Well, see all of those things are--they're intangible. I mean, they're there, but how do you do it. I mean this is the problem. There are no symbols that can create that kind of an emotional effect in the viewer. A symbol doesn't do it--

THOMPSON: --and so you have to--what you want to try and do in sculpture, at least what I want to try and do in sculpture, is to make my forms vital forms, because I want to make them in sculpture, as energetic as the Senator was in life. And I want them to be--to have as much integrity as sculpture as the Senator had integrity as a person in life. So, therefore, what I try and do is, I try and make my forms be strong, simply stated, well-organized in terms of three-dimensional sculpture. That is, they, the rhythms and movement, should give movement around the piece. And that movement around the piece should really be such that when you look at that you're conscious of a form, and when I say that, the reason I say that is so much sculpture is not a form in itself. It's a symbol of something else, but there's no validity in the sculpture itself--

RAESLY: Uh-huh.

THOMPSON: --which works on two levels. It works on the level of the symbol of the Senator and then it also works as a form, a three-dimensional sculpture like music would be.

RAESLY: That's right.

THOMPSON: Yeah. And so those are the two distinctions. Yet they have to be dovetailed together so that they are one, when you look at it. And that's really the problem that I have as a sculptor is to try and make this something that has strength and power in its own realm, as well as the realm of symbolism, see.
had actually known the man.

THOMPSON: Yeah, I really did. When I would work with him and when I began to get--for a long period of time things don't come off. I mean you have a lot of odds and ends up there, but you haven't pulled them together. And in the process of pulling them together and in the process of working hard on the statue, I really felt that I knew the Senator, not in the sense of verbal language but in a, I suppose in a nonverbal or--the only word I can really think of is the spiritual life. I felt that I knew him in a way that hardly anybody else knew him, you know. And as I said yesterday, I also felt that I knew his mother and I don't know precisely why, because when I would pray and ask God to help me that day with my work, I would really feel the inner--and I'm not saying this, but I would really feel a sense of the change and it would almost bring goosebumps down your back and at that time I began thinking of his mother and what a woman she must have been ^ to have raised all these kids, and I got a tremendous sense of a spiritual person. I had known a little bit about his mother from Jeb, but I felt that his mother was helping me in a way, you know.

RAESLY: Well, I think I do know. Did you know before I told you yesterday of the exceptional closeness between the Senator and his mother?

THOMPSON: No, no, I hadn't. I didn't know about it. But Jeb had told me one story that stood--stayed in my mind, that stuck in my mind, and that was that I think it was Fielding had hurt himself in some sort of an accident, and they told Mrs. Russell and she would always--she must have been a person with phenomenal faith and trust because she said, "Well, now don't worry because Fielding was God's before he was mine."

RAESLY: Isn't it marvelous?

RAESLY: This is--I never had the privilege of knowing Mrs. Russell. She died before I started to work for the Senator. Rut the--you're telling me the same-- I had not heard that particular episode.

THOMPSON: Yeah.

RAESLY: But this is all so much of what I've heard from all the members of the family about her; and the closeness between this particular son, her first son--

THOMPSON: Yeah.

RAESLY: --and her. As I told you yesterday, he always called her "Dear." And over in the family record room there is a Bible to Richard B. Russell, Jr., 1904, I think is the date in it, and it's from "Dear."

THOMPSON: Isn't that great? Well, you know to get the flavor of the man, I, really., talking with Jeb gave me kind of an insight into the beginnings of this man because in his--Jeb would talk about the early days of the Senator and he talked about one time Judge, the father, took up practice in Athens here. Evidentially to help bring in enough money to support the--I've got a large family so I can sympathize with the Judge there. But he said that he was in a court suit. He was representing somebody, the Judge was, and the other person, the opposing party, said something to the Judge and called the Judge a liar, and the Judge hauled off and hit the guy. He said that he just felt like he couldn't have somebody call him a liar and he hit the guy. Well, the son of the man that he hit was in the courtroom and he pulled out a pistol and hit the Judge over the head. Well, Jeb told me that when the Senator, I think--was the Senator in the navy ever?

RAESLY: Yeah, he was in the enlisted reserves at the University.

THOMPSON: In the enlisted reserves of the navy. Well, the Senator went after-- went looking around town for the son of that man with the only weapon he had which was a knife, he said a navy knife, and I didn't quite understand what it meant but I thought he might have been in the navy. But I thought that it was a lucky thing that he didn't find him. It was a real lucky thing that he didn't find the--

RAESLY: Oh, yes, that would have ruined him.

THOMPSON: --son, because I thought of the change of history that might have occurred if the Senator had found him, and if he had lost his cool and done something that he would regret and I--

RAESLY: Or had gotten killed himself.

THOMPSON: --or gotten killed himself. I never even thought of him getting killed himself.

RAESLY: Yeah, he was human.

THOMPSON: Yeah, right. But I have often thought, and I have thought that perhaps too that his mother prayed with this kind of faith that maybe she just let God handle it, you know. the devout attitude of her whole life. I mean, she--you hear of devout Christians and you think, well, they're the ones in the church every Sunday, but to her God was you know, just as much a part of her life as her children or her husband or the cat or the maid.

THOMPSON: Yeah, it was a real reality. It wasn't something in the pages of a book.

RAESLY: That's right.

THOMPSON: Well, it certainly shows with the boys.

RAESLY: Right, and I think all of the children were required to memorize so many passages out of the Bible each week.

THOMPSON: Oh, well, I wouldn't--that would be great. That explains Jeb's ability to--

RAESLY: Oh, yeah, and the Senator could quote the Bible too. Oh, yeah.

THOMPSON: --Quote. Oh, could he? Oh, yeah, that's great.

RAESLY: Fact, many is the time that he would take something out of the Bible and I'd have to run find a Bible to make sure that I was spelling all the words right.

THOMPSON: Well, I tell you I really feel that I've known the family in a way, without ever really knowing them, in a verbal way or--I probably was--I probably got to know them better, you know, sometimes you can do that without--you can get to know somebody better by not knowing them--

RAESLY: That's right.

THOMPSON:--because you're not hung up with all the superficial aspects of it.

RAESLY: That's right. When you finish and, now this is the clay finish, now, your next step will be to go into plastic.

THOMPSON: Right.

RAESLY: After this is approved.

THOMPSON: Right, that's right.

RAESLY: And you'll make a negative cast first.

THOMPSON: Make a negative cast first and then I take that off the clay model and into that negative cast I make a positive plastic cast.

RAESLY: Aren't you going to miss the clay model?

THOMPSON: Yes, I will.

RAESLY: It's going to be like losing a friend, I would imagine.

THOMPSON: It really will be. I'm not going to tear it down however until I get the plaster positive to the foundry so that I have some insurance--

THOMPSON: --you know, that I--

RAESLY: Come over here every day and water it if you have to.

THOMPSON: Oh, yeah, I'll have to water it and keep it--because even though it might become damaged, it would be better than starting all over again. It would be terrible if anything like that happened. It's quite a complex procedure making a mold of that because you have to take it off in sections and those sections will have a fine fidelity to what you see there. It'll pick up all the texture. And then when you pour your--or when you put your plaster positive in there, then you have to chip away that mold and you have to--

RAESLY: The negative.

THOMPSON: --and you have to chip away the negative. So you no longer have a negative mold; you only have the plaster positive, and they call that the waste mold. And then when it goes to the foundry--

RAESLY: That's why you've got to keep the clay, because you don't have any negative of that thing.

THOMPSON: That's right. Then when it goes to the foundry they'll make a piece mold of it. They'll make a rubber mold of the head and that will allow--then if anything goes wrong, if for example, when they cast that head in bronze, they might get a gas pocket or something and they would come back to the rubber mold of the head and recast that section.

RAESLY: Now when they--when you say, "They cast it," how do they cast it? Do they take and cover the plaster with--

THOMPSON: With other--the head they'd do with rubber. They would separate it.

RAESLY: Uh-huh.

THOMPSON: And put a rubber base material over that. And then over that rubber they'd have a shell that they put over that which is made of plaster. That's the mother mold that keeps the rubber so that it retains the form of the head.

RAESLY: Right.

THOMPSON: Then, down in areas in here, they would do a piece mold and plaster on the coat all the way down. And there might be in this--by the time this piece is finished, there might be, oh, there might be seventy pieces to that mold.

RAESLY: A giant jigsaw puzzle.

THOMPSON: A jigsaw puzzle. And then that has a mother mold behind it, and then, they take that off. And it's all a hand operation. And then into that mold they make a wax positive and that wax is hollow probably a quarter to a half inch thick and probably it would be mostly a half inch thick in a piece this size. Then they take that and they submerge--they put a pouring cup, which allows the metal to come in and then they put vents off the piece to allow the gas to go off, and they do it in the material which allows some of the gas to escape, but you have to have a channel to carry off the gas as it fills up as the metal comes in, And then they pour that with hot tongs, a temperature probably about 2100 degrees, depending upon the conditions, but it would range between about 2100-1900 degrees and they knock that investment off and then they weld the whole piece back together.

RAESLY: And then you have your finished--

THOMPSON: Then you have your finished. Then you have to go over it and check all areas--

RAESLY: Then you'd go out to the foundry at that point and check it yourself.

THOMPSON: I'd check it myself. I'd check them when they've got the mold made; I'll go to Detroit and check that. See, the reason I do a plaster positive is to make sure that they do this just the way I've got it here.

RAESLY: Uh-huh.

THOMPSON: If you send them a mold, the position might change or something might happen to it. The positive is more work, but it guarantees better results, so that's what we'll do. We'll do it that way.

RAESLY: Now, when this is cast in metal, you said you've got 4,000 pounds of clay up here, what's it going to weigh in metal?

THOMPSON: It'll weigh about fifteen to two thousand pounds of of bronze.

RAESLY: That's a lot of bronze.

THOMPSON: That sure is. Today it's a lot of bronze. Bronze is getting like gold it's expensive. have some of a reddish hue.

THOMPSON: Yeah, I thought that we'd--we can put an oxidation on there through chemicals that will tint it and I think a reddish brown would be just handsome in that section. It would give a richness to it, and it would also give the sense of the reddened clay of Georgia. And the whole earth quality, I think, would lend itself to the flavor of the man. He was a man from the people and a man from the soil of Georgia. And he certainly--Georgia was never far from his heart wherever he was, I don't think from, from what he did for Georgia, it doesn't look like it was far.

RAESLY: You know this man exceptionally well--

THOMPSON: And, and--

RAESLY: --for someone who never met him. But you're right, he did come from the soil of Georgia, and I don't think ever got the red clay of Georgia off his shoes.

THOMPSON: Well, that--he certainly--I can remember hearing about him when I you back to teaching art? was in college before I,I lived in Georgia, and of the wonderful things he, you know, he did for Georgia. He really brought industry and research and education and, I guess, you'd call him Mr. Georgia in a sense and, of course, the greatest gift, I suppose, was himself.

RAESLY: Ah.

THOMPSON: --and so I'm going to start in on that and--

RAESLY: Well, this has opened doors for you then.

THOMPSON: Right, it really has. I won the Andersonville competition, I heard about it the same day that I won this one. They were conducted in different--one committee didn't know the other committee and it was just a happenstance, a luck that I won both of them. And--

RAESLY: Yes. Almost too much for one man to take on.

THOMPSON: Yeah, it really was. That was a great day. That was the best day I ever had when I heard that I--See, we were back visiting my wife's folks in Cape Cod. And we didn't have a phone where we were staying and so they reached the school and George Beatty in the art council called up the school and they were trying to find out where I was, and he knew where I

was. So then he called me and told me that I had the won the Senator Russell competition and that people from Americus were trying to get in touch with me.

RAESLY: I bet you hurried back from Cape Cod.

THOMPSON: Yes, I did. I really did. That was a real thrill. day you unveil it up in Atlanta.

THOMPSON: Well, I'm looking forward to it too. I really want the whole thing to be just an excellent work, and I'd like to have it a good commemoration to the man.

RAESLY: Now, we were talking yesterday that instead of having quotations around the statue where other people were talking about Senator Russell--

THOMPSON.: Right.

RAESLY: --you wanted to use some quotations from Senator Russell--

THOMPSON: Right.

RAESLY: --on different matters affecting the state and nation.

THOMPSON: Right, right, right.

RAESLY: What is your reason for that?

THOMPSON: Well, the reason is that we know the Senator is a great man. And people could say things about him, but the people who said it in history might not prove to be great, so I--

RAESLY: Pretty good reason.

THOMPSON: --so I--I would like to have his thoughts. And I think that we need thoughts and we need people like the Senator--to have things that younger generations can come up and look at and see and be inspired from him. And maybe there'll be another Senator Russell that will come out of that.

RAESLY: Marvelous.

THOMPSON: And the Bible tells you a grain of wheat has to die--

RAESLY: That's right.

THOMPSON: --so that you can multiply and get a whole field of wheat and maybe--

RAESLY: That maybe between the statue and the library we can do something.

THOMPSON: Right, right.

RAESLY: And get another one.

THOMPSON: That's right.

RAESLY: But that's one thing I will be looking up for you and I'll try to have them within the next ten days, get you some--

THOMPSON: That would be great. I think that that would be an important addition to giving the flavor of the man too.

RAESLY: We've organized those boxes over there now so we have all the press and speech material in one section. There's about twenty-four boxes of it, but they're all right together.

THOMPSON: I see.

RAESLY: So, it's a matter of sitting down and reading.

THOMPSON: And I've never seen so much material in my life as you have there.

RAESLY: Yeah, I don't think we're going to run out of things to do very soon in the library.

THOMPSON: That's phenomenal. It really is. But I think that when all of this is put together and it's seen, that your Georgia will really be saying to the Senator how much they thought of him.

RAESLY: I think so.

THOMPSON: And, I really think that he'll understand somewhere, you know.

RAESLY: I think you're right. I don't think that this is going unnoticed.

THOMPSON: Yeah.

RAESLY: --any further. Well, anything else you want to put on here?

THOMPSON: Well, I don't really know. As I can say, you know, again, that I really felt like I grew and I felt like I've had a real opportunity to grow in my knowledge of the Senator and my knowledge of myself. That was a great experience.

RAESLY: I imagine it would be. When you do go back to teaching art it's going to be a little set back for you, I think.

THOMPSON: Yeah.

RAESLY: Be a little let down there.

THOMPSON: Yeah, it really will. I love doing this because it's such an exciting thing in its own way. And again, it's a very spiritual thing.

RAESLY: But having had this experience, particularly the spiritual experience that you've had, perhaps there was just a little obligation to go back to the young people.

THOMPSON: Yeah, I think that's true, and I think we have to pass it on, you know.

RAESLY: That's right.

THOMPSON: Yeah, spread the good news.

RAESLY: Although if you want to put any part of this interview under a time seal, I was recording your early comments about sculptors, that's what I'm referring to in particular. We can seal it and lock that in the vault, and it would not be available for researchers for whatever period of time you say, up to and including your death.

THOMPSON: Well, that first part about the National Sculptors Society and so on--

RAESLY: You'd like to have that time sealed until your death, or for twenty years or so?

THOMPSON: Well, for twenty years, let's see, I'd be sixty-eight. I think at that time they'd forgive me if I— [note: time sealed lifted of this portion of interview released in 1994]

RAESLY: Yeah.

THOMPSON: --spoke of it, don't you?

RAESLY: Okay, I think they would. So we'll time seal that for twenty years until. . .

THOMPSON: I don't know what's going to happen to the National Sculpture Society--

RAESLY: In 1994--

THOMPSON: --it might prove to be a very fine one. Those are my feelings about it as of today.

RAESLY: Yeah. In light of the comments on there, I thought I would tell you that we can do this. And I didn't think that you'd want to be quoted on that, and you didn't really know I was taping at that point.

THOMPSON: Yeah, right.

RAESLY: I had to give you--

THOMPSON: So if you could, if you could take that--

RAESLY: Till 1994, that whole discussion on--we can block that tape off. And we'll make a--

THOMPSON: And regarding Julian Harris, I wouldn't want to--

RAESLY: Right, and the tape that will be made available to researchers will not be this one. We will make a copy, which deletes that portion.

THOMPSON: That's great.

RAESLY: And it will just have my introductory remarks, and then picks up my introduction, so that the next thing you'll hear I'll be inside talking to Bill. And then we take up what will be after those comments.

THOMPSON: Great. That--that sounds--

RAESLY: So this original tape and the transcript of those portions of remarks I will type it--

THOMPSON: Oh, oh.

RAESLY: And I type from this transcript. Anything that we put under a time seal I type myself.

THOMPSON: Oh, I see. So, you are the only--

RAESLY: Right, I'm the only person to know about it.

THOMPSON: Oh, I suppose you have a lot of knowledge like that--

RAESLY: That's right.

THOMPSON: --from a lot of people.

RAESLY: That's right. I can assure you, I have never gotten anybody mixed up with somebody else because if you were to come back to me and say, "I want to talk about that part under time seal." I'd say, "What part did you put under time seal?"

THOMPSON: Yeah.

RAESLY: I wouldn't say, "Oh, you mean this and such," that somebody else may have put under--

THOMPSON: I see.

RAESLY: I let them identify it.

THOMPSON: That's very tricky, isn't it?

RAESLY: Yes, it's always up to the person to identify what they're talking about, they talk about something under time seal.

THOMPSON: I see.

RAESLY: Unless I can go back and look at my records and see what they've put under time seal, and that means going, unlocking the vault, and going in and getting it.

THOMPSON: I'm glad you mentioned that because I hadn't thought of it--

RAESLY: Right. I thought we'd give you that--

RAESLY: because of some--

THOMPSON: Well, he could--he would really--

RAESLY: Julian Cox.

THOMPSON: Julian Cox, he said that I really had the Senator. [He] said, he was there, is what he said, that's--

RAESLY: That's a very good way of putting it. And Julian knew him well over a number of years. What I wanted to ask you, yesterday you mentioned people coming by--

THOMPSON: Right.

RAESLY: --Would stop and talk to you. Did this bother you?

THOMPSON: Sometimes it would, sometimes it wouldn't. I picked up a lot of information about the Senator. Some of it, I'm not sure was accurate, but it let me know that everybody liked the Senator. Everybody was interested in the Senator and the Senator was able to speak to very common men and he wasn't patronizing them, he was really speaking to them--

RAESLY: That's right.

THOMPSON: --and the thing that everybody mentioned was that he always call them by their name and that he always spoke of the last occasion they met and that to me was just fantastic because I could never--it would seem so impossible to me to be able to do something like that.

RAESLY: I'm the world's worst on names. I see you on the street and (snaps fingers) I know I know him, you know.

THOMPSON: Well, I get panicky. Even if I know the name, I cannot remember it.

RAESLY: Yeah, that's bad. Well, one time in Atlanta I may have told you this, I was with the Senator and we were going through the lobby of the hotel. He stopped, shook hands with a man, called him by name, he said, "I'm Dick Russell Harry," whatever his name was, "How you doing?" And they got to talking and the Senator said, "The last time I saw you I was running for Governor, and we were down in Blakely, and we were talking on the street and you had got word that your son, and I cannot remember his name, but your son had broken his leg, and I ought to be able to remember your son's name." Now, mind you he hadn't seen the man since he ran for governor--

THOMPSON: Amazing.

RAESLY: --in 1930. He called the man by name--

THOMPSON: By name.

RAESLY: --he called the man's wife by name, and he was upset because he couldn't remember the man's son, whom he never saw.

THOMPSON: I'm telling you that's fantastic.

RAESLY: It's enough to discourage any secretary.

THOMPSON: Yeah, I can imagine so.
that--I'm going to call--

RAESLY: Oh, you want to call Dr. Jeb, too.

THOMPSON: I'm going to call Dr. Jeb. But this is a letter that he wrote me yesterday, and I scribbled these two telephone numbers on top of it, but I think that's a beautiful letter. (long pause while Raesly reads letter)

RAESLY: Yeah, (laughs). That is great. He will be in Lavonia seeing Ernest Vandiver today.

THOMPSON: Yes, see, but I'd like to get him down here now. I don't know, I wouldn't want to put a burden on him or try to influence him but he could stay at our house once he got here, you know. So he could come down and take a look at it because they're going to ask him to represent the family.

RAESLY: He's one of them they're going to ask?

THOMPSON: They're going to ask him and his sister.

RAESLY: Well, you know the sister that probably could help them as much as any- body. I don't know whether she'd do it or not, but I mean she hasn't been invited to look at this from what you're saying, you mentioned Mrs. Peterson.

THOMPSON: Oh, yeah. Well, the only thing that I have to worry about out of this thing getting through--what I'm afraid of is getting so many people that I can't deal with them.

RAESLY: Yes, You can't please them all.

THOMPSON: See, this is the problem--

RAESLY: Yeah.

THOMPSON: --If I get so many people--I'm going to invite the whole family to come down and take a look at it, but if I could get approval--

RAESLY: If you could just get--

THOMPSON: --especially Jeb and--

RAESLY: --you could just get three and let it go at that.

THOMPSON: --the sister--listen, if I could just get three, for the--you know, have them represent the family. I don't mind showing the statue but I hate to have it caught up, you know. They could really, in a sense, tie this thing up and I could never get it done.

RAESLY: Right. And you've got to have Richard and Hugh, don't you?

THOMPSON: Well, I'm pretty sure that I've invited them--