Mount Hope Cemetery Walking Tour Transcript with Bea Nettles and David Hayes

Bea Nettles: Alright well here we are in Mount Hope cemetery.

David Hayes: And it's amazing to be with you here, be because anticipating this I was thinking of this is it's a, it's a return trip.

Bea Nettles: It is.

David Hayes: Yeah return has been like a return trip has been an important theme in your work and it's actually the name of part of your work. So, how does it feel to return to Mount Hope cemetery 51 years after I think your first visit here.

Bea Nettles: Well I've been coming back since then, but to come back and actually try to retrace my steps of 51 years ago was fun. I first went and found the proof sheet of the one roll of film that I shot. And it would have been shot I believe about the same time a year. The trees are bare. And I didn't tend to spend much time, anywhere on campus but the darkroom, and my studio, but something possessed me to come over here which it's not very far from the art department, and take a roll film and checking where I walked. I believe I must have started right here in the military plots fairly near the office,

David Hayes: and we're walking right now or an amazing better of pine needles. Plots fairly near the office, and we're walking right now or an amazing bed of pine needles. Yes, from a tree that would have been here, it would have been here 51 years ago. So, you said that you didn't spend a lot of time out of the dark room kind of run a building, but something possessed you, what was that something?

Bea Nettles: I honestly don't know why I did it. Perhaps I had some time to kill. While Prince for washing and the crew right or between classes. But at any rate, I came over ahead. My two and a quarter camera which shoots 12 shots on on large format, film, and that was it, and it wasn't even a full roll I think I'd shot two previously out in the prairie somewhere there's some prairie landscapes, and I hope we'll be able to provide people, a copy of the proof sheet, you can see I expose film point not not the be. At any rate, I would have come over here and it wasn't even the grave so much, the stone so much that I was interested in. But the stars. And so the first couple of shots were right here at these rose uniform rows of military headstones. And I zeroed in on these metal stars that are on stakes and photographed the same stone maybe two or three times, focusing on the star in front of the stone. And now I've talked to the groundskeeper because they're not there anymore. Except for one, one is here, sort of in the middle of everything. Not in front of any particular stone. And he said it's because of over the years, 51 years, people have hit them with lawn mowers, weed wackers, that sort of thing. and they don't put them back in the same place. And I think people have stolen them.

David Hayes: Yeah, and to explain that these are the GAR Grand Army of the Republic stars that commemorate service in the Civil War.
Bea Nettles: I knew it was the Civil War but I didn't know what G A R was. I would have guessed

David Hayes: So, just in walking over here with you, I’ve been through this cemetery a lot. I find everything or more, it’s really interesting to see these from this angle, because when you come in from the entrance it's easy to not even know that these rows are here. But if you just walk along and look back to where we were standing a moment ago, they are- it is a military cemetery.

Bea Nettles: They are and I looked it up I mean this cemetery was actually here before the Civil War, it goes way, way back. I'm not sure where that old, old section is but at any rate, this was a necessity, obviously they had some casualties. And I spent a lot of time last week, trying to find that particular headstone but I couldn't. It's possible, there are some military headstones, and this would be fun for viewers or listeners to see if you spot them other places too because there are interspersed occasionally out other, other places in the, in the graveyard. And even the little, even the little stars are out there.

David Hayes: I'm thinking about those stars, where you came on an impulse. I mean who knows why you came here but there was a sense that maybe you. I don't know if you are aware that the cemetery was here and you said I think I'll explore that. Or if you were wandering around and spotted it and haven't really noticed it. But in either case, the stars are what grabbed your attention because you were using stars. A lot was so you were you are looking for material, what, what were those stars about and also again. How does that feel to see one star still persisting in this cemetery?

Bea Nettles: It's good I found a couple more in miscellaneous areas here, but this was the purpose of them to mark, some kind of military service, and it's sad to see that they're not all here.

David Hayes: But that one seems pretty magical to me right now.

Bea Nettles: Yeah, yeah it’s standing in for everything. What happened was I took that picture of the headstone with a star. And you’re going to see when we go across into the middle of the cemetery there were two more stars in front of a family name Hall, H-A-L-L. And I photographed that not thinking about the words not thinking about the stones just looking at the two stars and I like that as well. The very next role of film that I shot was shot down in Florida, which is where I'm from, and where I was from as a grad student and I had gone home for Thanksgiving. And the very next role had palm trees on it, so there's a huge contrast of the cold, and the warm. And the only image that I made of using any Gravestone stuff happened to be a multi layered image with the star in front of the tombstone and then you can see through the photo paper to those palm trees and it's a layered image. And the fact that while I was a student here I was often longing to be in Florida, even though it was my second year here I was still pretty homesick, especially this time of year. I always think of getting South about now.
David Hayes: There's a lot, because there's this layering, there's a juxtaposition of place but I'm thinking about the techniques you were using at the time. So, in taking a picture of a star in front of a grave, given the methods you were using that wasn't the end of the work.

Bea Nettles: I wouldn't know what I was going to use it for.

David Hayes: But you had a sense that you were banking material that you could then incorporate in work in a layered way.

Bea Nettles: That's right.

David Hayes: So, in responding to your work curators remark about how often you had to totally change your process. Yes. And yeah, it's also interesting how often that idea of collage or composite juxtaposition bringing things together, was part of the work no matter what.

Bea Nettles: That's right.

David Hayes: You're layering lucky accidents.

Bea Nettles: Yeah, I mean, and then the themes of cycles. I mean the fact that we're doing this 51 years after I was here and back, more or less at the very same spot in space. I love that.

David Hayes: It's amazing and it's a, it's a point of consistency in your work. Yeah, because you mentioned a moment ago, about how you weren't paying attention to the name Hall so that's referring to the work you've been doing.

Bea Nettles: Yeah we'll talk about that too. We should probably walk along.

David Hayes: But I have a question about place because so much of your work is autobiographical. And so much of your work is, maybe all of your work is autobiographical.

Bea Nettles: Pretty much.

David Hayes: But it's always also, I think, so place oriented. Place based. So and image like that you just referenced how you blurred and image from “here” and an image from “there” the place that you were from -- it actually blurs it blurs some places.

Bea Nettles: Right I'm trying to recall now what I actually call that print, I might have called it Tablet but I'm not I'm not sure, I'd have to look it up. So we're rounding the bend for people who might want to try to follow this walk, we're staying to the dirt road, you can hear the traffic. We're this close to the...

David Hayes: The Stock Pavilion.
Bea Nettles: ... to the main road as we can be. And we're beginning to walk through a beautiful avenue of trees, of fir trees, David would know...

David Hayes: Walking due West.

Bea Nettles: Yes. And it’s a beautiful symmetrical real trees which was another thing that I actually was painting the first year I was here in grad school, roads with trees on both sides and, and I was very impressed there is a different sort of tree than you would have in Florida so the palm tree represented home for me. But there were paintings that I did of the trees, particularly on Springfield Avenue at that point in time that leaked out, and there were fall colors and all that sort of thing. And you don't have that.

David Hayes: Right, here we have a mix. I mean the fact that we're walking through some evergreen trees tells us that we're in a Midwestern cemetery. Because one way they would be marked is by trees that didn’t have seasonal – they are eternal life, they're always green, and now it's easy to spot rural cemeteries for example because you just look for a standard evergreen trees. There’s a wide variety of deciduous trees here that make this seem autumnal. Right now I'm very conscious of the fact that, you know, we're, we're in, let’s say the slightly bleaker side of Autumn. Right now the red trees have dropped their leaves. There's a kind of interesting mood to it.

Bea Nettles: I'm particularly fond of old trees and cemeteries because they do have such a history, like the one we're passing now is hollowed out it's really a terrific Halloween tree. Yeah, for sure.

David Hayes: It's amazing and pretty ancient. Yeah. So, we're coming up now though to on the left to the Potter's field and I know that so many teaching and landscape architecture as they do so many students if they're taking here for project or whatnot think of this as the part of the cemetery that has yet to be developed. And we know, we know otherwise, right, in fact it's the most densely used area of the cemetery because it's people who don't have stones.

Bea Nettles: That's right. You don't know how many people are in that in this area buried already without markers.

David Hayes: And you took a photograph here?

Bea Nettles: Mmm, you know, I couldn't quite identify the roads. And what was surprising to me, though, looking at the at the pictures. Is there are actually hills! I mean, you don't think of there being any hills in Illinois.

David Hayes: Oh, I was so struck by that too. There's one, one of your photographs on that contact sheet, there's a lane with a slope up and I was thinking, wow, it must have settled down a lot, or...
Bea Nettles: I think so but it really yeah, we don't have to go the whole extent we can go this direction, let's go between these yeah, but, um, yeah there's quite a, quite a rise here, you'd notice that if you're riding a bike. I think we're actually going probably to the high spot of the whole cemetery. And there's a couple of beautiful bare double trees up here, that other people have shown me what they photograph here often are drawn to these, these particular bare trees.

David Hayes: When you were in Rochester, New York, which was after 51 years ago here, right? That's where you went next? They also have a cemetery near Mount Hope, did you explore that cemetery?

Bea Nettles: No, no, to tell you the truth, I had felt that graveyards were real risky subject matter, because they're so full of cliche images you know when people photograph in them is pretty predictable, the sorts of things that happen so that could explain why I didn't return or do much more, um...

David Hayes: When a friend in high school, back in the Rochester where I'm from, was taking photography in high school. She walked me to the cemetery across the street from my house. And I was wearing a long drape-y coat and had a scarf on and, and she asked me to lay down in front of a grave that had the name blood on it right to make that kind of image. But what was very funny about it. I don't remember the name on it but it was a woman's name. So it's meant I was meant to lay there as if it was my grave. Haha, but of course there was this gender detail that hadn't, hadn't been noted.

Bea Nettles: Everybody's got those kinds of pictures!

David Hayes: We’re walking by a stone right now where the names or German but also the texts are German. The Dorjhn’s, D-O-R-J-H-N.

Bea Nettles: So we're coming across to the next road which is really a mess at the moment. It's easy to spot because it's peat-colored dark soil. They, they, I think drive back and forth and go to the brush pile and dump debris. And I'm sure at one point that all of these were not necessarily paved but they were in better shape if you pick up a map, at the office, there's many more roads on that on that office map then exists today. They're in pretty bad shape. The one road we're going to go on soon isn't even a road anymore it's just a dent in the grass. But I know there was a name for all of them.

David Hayes: As we're walking along here too. I've always enjoyed actually walking through cemeteries. And in part because you see these names and you can sort of think about who they might have been. But there seems to be so many idiosyncrasies within them so I'm just seeing this family, the Holden's.

Bea Nettles: Yes.
David Hayes: And when you look at the name of the man and the woman. The man, named Arthur V. Holding, above it, it says “Daddy”, but above the woman's name, Georgia C., it says “Wife”. Which is an interesting, lack of parallel, right. It is “daddy” and “wife” and I'm thinking about one of your works, which is Rachel, and going through that exercise of matching masculine and feminine, and there's an example of a mismatching.

Bea Nettles: A lot of inequality. Right. Yeah. yeah. We'll talk more about my current obsession visiting graveyards but when you said that. I don't know if this is an X rated tape or not but I was looking for the name “Crap” in in St. Louis, in the Jefferson Barracks military cemetery, and we could only find a “Wife of Crap”.

Laughter

I don't know what happened to him but it was just “Wife of Crap”, not her name or anything, that's who it was.

David Hayes: But let's talk, as we walk across this..

Bea Nettles: I want to say one more thing before I forget, this was another strong impression I had when I moved to Illinois, was the soil. The color of the soil. This isn't necessarily natural because I think there's a lot of organic matter, because of the trucks bringing land waste and that sort of thing, but the soil is so much darker and richer here. In Florida it's sandy, it's gray, I had never seen such dark soil. So, when you see my show there's The Imaginary Prairie is a sort of homage to black, rich Illinois prairie soil and here's a little taste of that right here in the middle of town.

David Hayes: It would be so interesting to do soil samples from the various places where you lived and worked. My mother was from Illinois. And when they moved to Rochester, New York, she was so struck by how like the soil was.

Bea Nettles: Light in area or light in color?

David Hayes: Light in color, yeah, because she was used to soil you throw the seeds down and everything just grows because rural Illinois. That would be the case. But going back to the, what your current obsession as you described it, so 51 years ago, and after going to a cemetery as a photographer seemed cliche.

Bea Nettles: Oh yeah, but it's no, there was no matter in there that I could deal with.

David Hayes: But you've been spending a lot of time in cemeteries and making work that's not cliche, so you figured out something to do and a good way to use it, do you want to say a couple things about that as we walk along with that project for people who are familiar.
Bea Neattles: What we're doing now is we're headed back towards the East. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Due East right now, straight on and we're kind of going up the major rise on this muddy road which would be very muddy on a bad day. I wouldn't, I tried driving on that the other day and I could feel that that was a bad idea. But I stuck with it, I'm sort of used to driving in kind of backwoods situation so I didn't get mired down but it was lucky it hadn't rained.

David Hayes: And this is what all non-urban roads were like, when this cemetery was made, I mean even around big cities you got the city limits and it became a dirt road.

Bea Neattles: I imagine. They might have put something down on the road. Okay, here we come to the place that is technically a road, but it just looks like a dip in the grass, because it's not, it's no longer paved, and you'll immediately from this peat moss road. When you get sort of to the rise above as high as you can go if you look to the right you'll see the word “Hall”, and this is the first named shot that's on the road that I could actually relocate 51 years later because the stone is that exactly the same.

David Hayes: Have you used, I'm just challenging now, you know, in a sense, to your whatever your next project is in the cemetery project, to actually use that photograph of Hall.

Bea Neattles: It's a good question. It's a beautiful one and block letters, it's a, it's a family site, because there's “Mother” and “Minnie” and “Lucie” and lots of little smaller family stones, but the dad was Albert. Albert Hall, I thought that was pretty interesting too although I wouldn't have caught that at all in grad school. “Nina” and “Ethel”, “Natty” beautiful old, old names

David Hayes: They're amazing names. I mean Nina, but everything else is in “E” – “Minie”, “Lucie”, “Nettie”.

Bea Neattles: Yeah, and a lot of girls. He had lots of daughters, evidently, or something. Okay, so here's the Hall family. And there would have been, there were two stars in front of this. those metal stars, so that's another reason I photographed it. It's all crooked, I mean it's not, I wasn't interested at all in the words. He's a colonel.

David Hayes: So it says he's a colonel and on this little sign it says he's a colonel, I'm not sure what company. Maybe that's company. “1”, “2nd”, Illinois tree or sorry, Illinois second cavalry, yeah.

Bea Neattles: Yeah, and from the birth date.

David Hayes: Makes perfect sense.

Bea Neattles: In 1835, it would have been probably Civil War there. Okay.

David Hayes: He would have been 18, then in 1863. Yeah.
Bea Nettles: So, he served and his stars and now they're gone. But at any rate...

David Hayes: I have to correct my math there. He would have been 28 in 1863.

Bea Nettles: Yeah. Alright so we're looking we're looking at the Hall shot. Alright so maybe the 9th shot on the roll or something. I'm thinking I'm going let's look for this concrete tree. Yeah that is shot. That is shot. So I was right, I roll film so my film only has 12 shots, I probably was conscious of that being over here with limited amount of films I only had four more shots on the role. So I took the Hall family and then I move sideways just to the right is the country tree.

David Hayes: I want to add something here, because this is what cemeteries to me -- on the side is a list again of all of these kids, but it looks like five of them died as children, that was very common, because they range from 1867 to 7371 to 78. Yeah, yeah. And then, even the wife who produce these children. She died at 33 years old, whereas her husband lived until 1924

Bea Nettles: Wow.

David Hayes: So he made it to 89.

Bea Nettles: He may have married again too.

David Hayes: It's really striking.

Bea Nettles: Yeah, it's very sad. Okay so right to the right is one of these amazing monuments, that's a tree. It looks like a tree that's been cut down, the branches are off and this actually is called Hall, that's the last name. Again, I, I took a picture pretty far away from this, I think I was intrigued by it and then right behind you, David, are these stumps. So there's a series I don't think they're all here, actually look what's happened is a tree, another tree a real tree has grown up between two stones. So there's the stone stumps and then a real pesky tree that's grown up between them, so there's 1, 2, 3, 4... there is at least five headstones that are stumps now did you do any research on this I meant to somebody said they thought that the stone things are used “as women of the world” or something had to belong to a certain organization to, to have them but...

David Hayes: Yeah, and I mean there's the idea of a life cut short. It’s symbolic. It’s kind of also like a natural equivalent to a crucifix like Christ on the cross kind of thing. Yeah, it can be.

Bea Nettles: So there's the big family tree and then they're all these little stumps below. So I photograph that from a fairly good distance. Now one thing I should point out in my own defense is with a two and a quarter camera. In those days, you couldn't get very close. The closest you could focus was at least three feet away.

David Hayes: Oh wow.
Bea Nettles: So you couldn't really do a full front you know you couldn't do a real terrific close up the one of the image of Hall was probably about as close as I could get. There's just, of course no comparison with what we can do, photographically today but a two and a quarter hat was a limitation when you, when I shifted to a 35 millimeter camera, I could get a lot closer but for years all I shot with was a roll film two and a quarter so my, my photography was constrained by how close I could get to a subject.

David Hayes: When you say there's no comparison, the way you're talking about digital is really... is there something you lose though. Now I mean when you think about that, the equipment is really hard to handle, there's the pleasure of developing a photograph, which if you haven't experienced it.

Bea Nettles: That was fun. It's amazing, and I miss, I miss teaching people that because it was so exciting. For people, including myself, just in it continued to be exciting to see it. Developing film was so much fun because it was completely hidden from you and you had to be patient for a good 30 minutes until you could see whether you messed up or you got it. But printing was really almost instant and it was a lot of fun. But I don't think people value their photos anymore, 51 years from now, I doubt that anyone's going to be able to pull up a proof sheet, a shot and talk about it the way we're talking about this because it was so memorable and so special you spent you spent time, at least I did, thinking about every shot, more or less, in like why am I doing that or boy I only have two shots left a better make this good, or last, or there's got to be a sort of a reason. You know that I'm taking this picture.

David Hayes: During the past year I've been experiencing that a lot you're reminding me about how pleasurable it was to work in a dark room because I did that a little bit. But my great aunt took a lot of photographs and she, her own son had died as an adult and nobody wanted these negatives but they came to me.

Bea Nettles: Oh good!

David Hayes: And so a few years ago, I was really questioning what do I do with this? I mean I had met her a couple of times. So what I've been doing recently as I opened up a candy box it's a it's a chocolate box it's just packed with old negatives, big old negatives. And I put them onto a copier scanner, I put it like eight on at a time and do a simple scan, and just a surface scan so the qualities in that high. And then in Photoshop. I have that moment of developing the photograph, because I then I crop it and then I inverted. And then I get to see what's there. Yeah, and it's been incredible. I mean some of the images are beautiful images they're astonishing images. Yeah, but it's also been wonderful to share that. Sometimes there are still relatives who will recognize who somebody is, right..

Bea Nettles: And you better do it now but yeah they pass away.
David Hayes: But it's interesting to me how much people have been interested in those photographs, because a lot of people don't have them so and you know it's also to me tragic when you at least maybe I'm melodramatic but when you come across a Candy Box have Of photos that there's no one around to know any of that, I find it incredibly sad, I only have them because nobody wanted, and that's and that yeah I'm aware of that. but it's also interesting how somebody else's memories can become important to you, even if you didn't know them. And so I think like in your work. There is this question, it's autobiographical and yet it's resonated with a lot of people who don't even know you.

Bea Nettles: Yeah, I mean I do feel that a lot of the work that I do involves archetypes, and in the road with the trees on both sides, going, going through the trees going up a road which we need to do next. This shot. Number 11 right after the tree trunk isn't, it's again, it's a rise on a hill. I don't know where I went from here. The next road doesn't exactly fit the bill, but it is more of a gravel paved road, but the shot right after right after this one with the stones, was the rise in the road and then there was this mausoleum and I think it's this ruin. Over here..

David Hayes: It makes a lot of sense, because...

Bea Nettles: I wouldn't have gone very far. I only had a couple shots of film. I don't know how much time I had but let's get on the road, and just compare. Maybe the trees that we're seeing. Okay, so we're headed towards a actual paved road, I take it back it's not just gravel it's paved. So we are headed north now.

David Hayes: I think that's right because when we look at ahead and we compare it with the photograph, we can see a couple of populists framing the view. Yeah. And those are there. But, but there's, but the ground in the image versus our lived experience is radically different. Yeah. And so the ground and those is up more it's definitely higher when you look at it, relative to the where the stones are.

Bea Nettles: Yeah.

David Hayes: But it's as if the ground, we're on right now was lower.

Bea Nettles: it could have been when they paved the road because this picture is a two lane or to track dirt. Yeah, that they say graded it a bit. But I drove around, and I actually had the groundsman look at the picture too0, the groundskeeper there, they're a great source of information. The young man who works here now has only been here maybe eight years, but he had someone tell him that this particular monument that we're headed for, I guess you would call it, what would you call it.

David Hayes: Yeah, a mausoleum, a small mausoleum.

Bea Nettles: Has really diminished over the years and the guy before him said yes it had caved in. For a while, or something, so I don't know if this could be it. It's real. If that's the case, it's
really gone to pieces. But there is a stairwell, cement poured stairwell headed up and it would have been a big deal. I mean that's a pretty major site location.

David Hayes: Do we, do we round the corner to see it because it looks like in this picture... I'm just, I'm based on where...

Bea Nettles: Yeah, I don't. I frankly, I frankly did sort of give up after driving round and round and maybe someone on their walks will actually discover it. That would be fun. Because this the last shot on the role. And then I would have headed back.

David Hayes: It's super strange I mean...

Bea Nettles: I don't think I would have gone really, really far from here, but who knows.

David Hayes: Given the shape of it, the orientation of it. I mean it's likely that what we're looking at is the east or the west end. But I'm imagining that it would be the East End. Except, yeah, you're right, it makes absolutely no sense.

Bea Nettles: No and walk around David, I don't see an entrance to it, I don't see a marker on it. So we'll circle around and then I want to start on. Yeah, well, we're going to walk completely around it, because the next area I want to show you was the beginning of my next project. Years later, so here we go. It's really possibly a lot of soil has just been thrown up around.

15:27:48 And in the summers got vines of some description disguising it.

David Hayes: Well I think this is, I think, yes this is definitely so it's the west side which would make sense, with the idea of like a church, like, like a traditional European church where the, the glass and the apps is towards the east so that when Christ rises in the east to see through the windows, but also because you're here you have these framing obelisks, and those bases are in this photograph, because this is the end of the stairwell. Yeah, they've mastered in front of it. But when you look at the basis of the obelisks there there, so the way they are laid it out. Makes perfect sense.

Bea Nettles: I think so, I, I do think knowing my habits. I wouldn't have taken off and gone a lot further, I don't believe.

David Hayes: So I have a question about habits. Yeah, going, going back looking at your proof sheet to this image of a star front of the small cemetery. Yeah, you took three of that. So for most of the images on here, there's one image...

Bea Nettles: and you only know what I thought it was doing, I may have been playing with exposure to be sure I nailed it. In other words, I thought, I really want this picture, there's not that much difference. I don't see any playing with what's called depth of field, which you can, if you have enough light. You can, you could, in those days. Choose your depth of field by stopping the camera, either down or opening it. But it doesn't look like there's that much
variation maybe a slider, the middle image is lighter, it is a little different, the exposure there so
number. Number six or eight both of them work just fine.

David Hayes: As you use your phone and other digital channels to take pictures now, and
there's so much, you know it's point shoot right, do you miss that part of the of taking
photographs, like, No, you missed the developing part but do you miss that go on site
adjustment

Bea Nettles: [chuckles] I really don't I love, I love being able to have just infinite shots if I want
them. It's amazing. You don't have to budget yourself or worry about money or any of that.
I'm sorry I'm rattling papers here and I don't make some racket, but I think we solved that
actually - look don't you think that might be the stairway?

David Hayes: Absolutely so on the ground, we're seeing that there are these, there's just one
line on the, on the south side or the right side that is part of that.

Bea Nettles: I feel like this is one of those TV shows like This Old House or something but you
know I think that's what it is. One thing that I noticed...

David Hayes: This Old Mausoleum!

Bea Nettles: yeah, This Old Mausoleum! In, in Iceland. When you go to what they call the thing
velour, which is not pronounced right, but it's where they make all their made their all their
laws and it's great divide, the Continental Divide and you look, you get high enough, one of the
cliffs and look down, you can still see the foundations of their sort of campsites, that were laid
in stone and then they would come along and pitch tense in the summer over, over them, but
you don't even necessarily see the stone you see the plants are different. The grass is different
than the nothing group because of it. So that's what's happening there. It's a. They call it an art
is that the sentimental or sometimes, you know, a little hidden something.

David Hayes: So, so the need for material for your photographs lead you, 51 years ago possibly,
to walk through a graveyard and to look at stones, as you've been looking for names now have
you been discovering places close at hand you didn't know that been part of the fun of it. Yeah,
or even just in places I mean I don't know how far field you've actually gone to get a name.

Bea Nettles: I've gotten pretty far but let me, I'll tell you I'll tell you some stories now -- we're
just now heading back off the hill, we're going to cross the paved road...

David Hayes: Heading South.

Bea Nettles: So getting south tennis courts and what is it straight ahead?
David Hayes: Exactly right, the sports complex cross Florida Avenue. So, one cemetery block
away from..
Bea Nettles: Yes, now we're on a double lane road that is gravel track road and we're going to walk, almost, almost to Florida will have some traffic noise again but we, we won't stay there long. Okay, I came back to this graveyard not so much to photograph in it. Just to explore it because it actually ironically years later, this was after I retired. This had been my son Gavin's hang out when he was a college student here he liked Mount Hope, and I had photos of him in Mount Hope. I have one that I look at the time and he was a younger guy. And so I thought I'll go see what Gavin saw and you know, it's not a place I tend to hang out but it was July, June, July, and the weather was okay and I was riding my bike a lot. And I thought I'll just bike over there. And, and just bike around and already the, Fall before that I had been down in North Carolina at Salem college. And there's a graveyard on the campus. And it's a terrible pun, but I had time to kill one morning because I was artists in residence there, they put me up. And so I went for a walk. And I, one of the first stones that caught my eye was not, newt. Now I'm sorry Tut, like King Tut. Newt is a different person all together. King Tut, and I thought that was so funny. And that's where cell phones are a nuisance. I mean, I posted it immediately to Facebook like something like, “who knew Tut was buried in North Carolina” and I just laughed about it. And then I took a little more of a walk and I came upon a to me my memory of it was a huge granite stone, just the last name Southern, Southern and I thought, Yeah, right, of course you'd be called Southern if you were North Carolina and I again that struck me sort of amusing.

But that was it. And that would have been maybe in September or something. It wasn't until the following June, that I came over here to Mount Hope, with no intention necessarily photographing. But I started to see a few words that I couldn't, I just couldn't resist, some names that are legend boys words, well I didn't notice that for like they were just Bishop, or whatever, and I, I didn't Yeah, Ernest is a good one, although there's two ways to spell it so it does make you really think about spelling to my mom was an English teacher and so I always wanted to be sure that if I use words they are into...

David Hayes: To Northwest is the real McCoy. McCoy. So it's tempting, so you're seeing names that are words but there must have been one in particular.

Bea Nettles: There were a couple and so I photographed them. And I actually misremembered this or as well as I can say I didn't do this one stone the first visit. I went home and thought about it. And I think I looked through and I see you know these words that I'm finding are people's last names that are nouns and verbs and adjectives and of course my name “Nettles” is all of those. And I got teased a lot. Being a Nettles and also being a Bea Nettles I mean double, double, double teasing. And I thought well okay I'm going to go back again so I came back and this is the this is the one that really sealed the deal. I was rounding the corner, we're still on this double lane graveled we're on the one that" parallel to parallel to Florida. Now, I came upon this little stone that I thought was so precious has a beautiful little lamb carved on it, of Marie Pickle. There’s Mary Pickle. She was 49 and my memory of this, this was a good many years ago, I thought she was a child. And, and I and I actually thought her name was Daisy pickle. But I believe maybe there's a Daisy Pickle somewhere else.

David Hayes: That's creepy but it's but one of the fascinating things about return trips is that they, they were like when something is external to you, like a photograph you've made even is
that it has the potential to poke you to remind you of something you forgot or to show you something that you have narrated differently over time.

Bea Nettles: It’s been nine good, nine years ago. Okay

David Hayes: I have to say it's a gray stone, but it has this lichen growing up on it so it looks kind of like a big gherkin or something like that...

Bea Nettles: Okay, so again, I don't take these pictures to make fun of people I've taken them because I find it absolutely fascinating that someone would have the last name Pickle. We're going to move along because of the noise is bad here. So, I photographed a few more names. And I went back home. And it was just fun to do.

David Hayes: Yep. There's a person, “George Person”. And it looks like he never died 1883 to 19---, and they did not, it’s blank..

Bea Nettles: We better come in and revise it.

David Hayes: The person next term was not so, not so fortunate.

Bea Nettles: Another thing you're going to notice and if you if you're bringing children on this walk they might find this interesting is to find the lambs. Lambs are all across the country, and they're actually international I found him and international cemeteries. Representing little children, and you don't have to tell your kids that, but they're young, either infants, or children, and I did an artist book on with 80 lambs and I photograph them in various stages of meltdown, almost like sugar cubes melting and the book was laid out in that order from very sharply carved ones to some that were looked like little melted lumps and a very small text about human memory, and how long can you retain it and how many generations will it last and I thought I think these little lambs serve as a metaphor for that like how long can you keep the pain the memory alive is going to wear down.

David Hayes: I want to connect a couple of dots on that subject because I’ve been thinking about generations Yeah, I'm thinking about this project these names that are words that are verbs nouns, adjectives and just string them together in forms of writing, which. It's inevitably poetic. I mean, it requires a lot of ingenuity and requires names.

Bea Nettles: We haven’t mentioned that yet. After collecting a few. It struck me I think I could write a phrase, or I might be able to write a sentence or two and then the whole thing started in earnest. And literally, I began an earnest think we were talking about him, or someone like that minute ago. So I began to collect them and I have almost, almost 7000 now.

David Hays: And I see this unbelievable lexicon. One of the questions that I have about that is, as your work has he evolved over time, sometimes because of where you were sometimes because of the equipment you had, you did become very interested in book arts and we can
talk about that, but I'm also really aware that you had also collaborated with your mom who was a phenomenal poet.

Bea Nettles: That's right.

David Hayes: So, when I think about your it was visual, and it is still visual, because it's work that you're reproducing are composites of images of words from gravestones.

Bea Nettles: Refrigerator magnets.

David Hayes: Your mom was a terrific poet I mean I know that because I've read her work, and it's, it's actually, she's an astonishingly great poet.

Bea Nettles: I agree.

David Hayes: But you published work together again and I'm wondering if, if, like, you had imagined, or if you had experimented yourself with poetic writing, before this project?

Bea Nettles: No I hadn't, I didn't dare, I didn't think I could do it. I knew I was a good prose writer, and I've written pieces that were introductions public syntax. And I love writing, but it was always prose and I never tried poetry. And I think what helped me get going on this was the constraint, you had only so many words and you had to make the best of it, and that that was the challenge, but it also was very liberating and we write about that, or forget who did -- I think Jamie and in the book, The Harvest of Memory book I think in her essay, she picks up on my rant about constraint, but I think constraints are really important. And in teaching when you give an assignment sometimes students will get the fact that there's certain constraints on their freedom and so forth but having them then you bang up against them or you work against them or you work with them. And I think it unleashes a lot more creativity than enough, you know, no constraints completely wide open. That's part of the problem I think with, with Photoshop editing, when do you stop you can just keep doing it.

David Hayes: When in teaching design, we know that it's when you set out a constraint, it gives somebody the opportunity to respond to the constraints right, but it's also true that there in terms of how we work, you're right, there's a way in which digital tools are - don't seem containing or compressing in the way that a dark room would a study would I mean there's a paradigm. Right. I think it's a pretty global paradigm that when you are in a quiet space, like a dark room or a study a studio, that, that, setting the limit on your physical scope allows your imagination to get as big as the cosmos.

Bea Nettles: Economics, too. Economics. Time is money. All of those. Okay, well let me get on with. Alright so after I started thinking about phrases, then the idea occurred to me to write a poem, text, whatever about the Four Seasons, because I've done many things in the Four Seasons, I even have another book called Seasonal Turns and I've done it many, many times I think about it. So right at the very beginning if I'm going to write
something with these gravestones, they're to me has to be a conceptual merit, or reason to do it with gravestones, otherwise it would be like refrigerator magnets or something and I am not interested in that. So, the seasons are we were talking about them earlier I mean that they're very evocative and in evidence when you walk through a graveyard you start thinking about that these people are here for the long run. We think I mean we seen some graves were an out here and collapsing and disintegrating but nevertheless, you tend to think of them seeing the seasons in and out, in the same, in the same spot. So, I decided to write a book about the four seasons and I very quickly expanded beyond Mount Hope cemetery. Rantool has a beautiful one, a couple of beautiful ones, there, they're out St. Joseph you know if you start driving around, you'll find communities but I also didn't become it I quickly realized I didn't have to just drive around hope to stumble on them there's some incredible resources now online. One is. Find a Grave. There's another one called gave finder and then the National Military cemeteries have awesome databases too. So, when I went to Rantool for some for a search I had already read through the names in a particular cemetery. And I went with a list of names that I wanted to find including Mr. Pancake. I wanted the name pancake. Now, a lot of these graveyards don't have offices so you really have to do a lot of walking and also I was retired. It's great exercise keeps you walking and every shot is a deep knee bend. So it's a physical activity that's pretty demanding, but also exciting and keeps me moving so I thought it was a really good plan.

David Hayes: So you're building a lexicon, but you're building a lexicon the way that like a printer might have built a lexicon where I mean you can write, you can write any words you want you can type in what you want, but here you don't get to use a word unless it's a photograph.

Bea Nettles: That's right. And I made up some rules of the game, early on, this first book which became the book Stonesifer. And I even remember photographing the name Stonesifer and thinking wow that's a hard word to use in a sentence, but eventually it seemed like the logical title for this book it's like how do you decipher things that are in stone you know so forth so became Stonesifer book of seasons and I actually want to read you a little because some of this. I'll read you were Daisy Pickle or Marie pickle plays a role. This is that this is the first season. This is a spring. Because for me, that's when the year really begins to spring. To hell with January. Okay, so this is May Day and “may” is the last name “day” is the last name, anything I'm saying now is the last name:


I'm wrong, doesn't turn up to the Fourth of July. But anyway, but the book

David Hayes: The language is very evocative because it's full of images.
Bea Nettles: It's all images, but then it's also you can visualize a lot of it.

David Hayes: There are no, there's no “those”, “and” “is”, you know “to be” is not a verb in this. So that that constraint actually forces the language to be evocative yeah and active.

Bea Nettles: Yeah, she turns up in the next line summers call. Sherry karaoke peach creamer Spears dill pickle. Okay, so they're on a picnic and there's the pickle. But what I wanted to read in its entirety also is because Halloween is coming up is Falls Nice Wander, and those are last names too:


David Hayes: So there's a measured way in which you read that and I just want to remark for listeners that that's how I read it when I read it with my eyes because, in a sense, like, each name has this integrity to it again it's kind of like a single woodblock with a slightly different font, each time. The way you read it with your eyes, and the way you listen to it is kind of the same, in that sequence was nettles.

Bea Nettles: Yeah, which I mean play fair and use my own family and almost as my dad's death But initially, the rules of this particular first book were Champagne County. Okay, and there's one nettles here in this, in this county and it wasn't my dad's tombstone but eventually I opened.

David Hayes: As you open that up to different parts, we know I mean, part of what you're registering here is a history of, you know, different communities of people all settled in different places. So I mean, I'm just wondering if, as you've expanded this, I guess two things, how important has it been that a set like a particular work is based on stones from one place and alternatively, as you read through the later poems where your lexicon has grown do you feel like you're jumping around a bit from region to region, because you must be very conscious of where knowing how your memory works. You probably know where each one of those.

Bea Nettles: No, I don't. You don't actually anymore but I can't, in some cases you never forget discovering the word like “genius” when I found genius, it was over in Bloomington, and who knew, you know what, that's what I learned genius, you know, but you know certain names just jump out at you.

David Hayes: Definitely.
Bea Nettles: And what I do is I carry on my phone a PDF file of all my words and so, if I were to see something today and I wonder wow I don't think I've got that word, I'm not sure. And sometimes it's the most common words like Smith, you think of course I've got that, but you realize you don't, because it was just so common. I wouldn't have photographed it I checked my, my PDF and say well you know what, I never did photograph Smith and then I'll take it.

David Hayes: And we're walking, for listeners, walking by the Smith stone right now. So with your phone because you're using your phone you can also geo locate, do you have a switched on?

Bea Nettles: I do. And that's been really, really helpful. I could not have done this project without digital photography and more and more first year use a digital camera. It was sort of at the at the edge of the really good iPhones and so forth. But then, within a year, I switched completely to, to my phone camera and that's all I use now. I wanted to find, specifically the ones that I took here in Mount Hope, but they were taken so early on I didn't have the GPS information that could prove the names that were here specifically I mean I know I got Pickle here I know a couple of them. Dailies over by Crystal Lake has a beautiful cemetery over there.

David Hayes: I have another question about geo location though, and this in a sense goes back to the beginning you've always been so sensitive to where you are and by that I mean like the natural world as much as the cultural world so you're aware of differences among plants.

Bea Nettles: Yes.

David Hayes. And so when I think about seasons. I grew up, I grew up in western New York state but you grew up in Florida. Was seasonality something that you discovered as you move north, was it something that you knew from images and sort of stories, or what was the seasonality of Florida.

Bea Nettles: It's subtle but it's there. For one thing, when you hit this time of year Trick or treat and all of that, you're heading into the best time in Florida in terms of the weather not being so hot and mosquitoes dying off. It's a very hopeful wonderful time, I mean I would like for a lot more if I didn't know what was coming. It's beautiful. It's been especially beautiful this year and I'm trying to really relish the color and enjoy it but I get filled with with dread because I'm, I really am not, I wasn't raised in the snow and the ice and I find it very hard, maybe two months I could deal with it, but when it goes on and on it's really difficult. But in Florida you're headed into the nice months. The hot months are really hot, very uncomfortable. So we did have seasons, definitely you, you knew, you know, you knew it was July down there. And no doubt about it.

David Hayes: My parents moved down to Florida for winters. A number of years ago and I remember heading down the first time in winter, kind of dreading it thinking, you know how are we going to the holidays without snow whatnot. And I, so I found the winter, I'm sure that
between July and December, there's a significant difference that I found it to be shocking and utterly wonderful.

Bea Nettles: Good.

David Hayes: So, but part of that also was that it gave me an index for what this place is like. One thing I realized about this place, I knew it from experience as a design teacher but I hadn't really fully appreciated it is how much sound this landscape makes. There's always wind moving here. And when I went down to visit my parents and I went outside the first day. This sky was so blue and but the air was so still that it seemed artificial it seemed like I was inside a building, and it was painted. And I became aware that I wasn't hearing the air way that I do and in this place so being in the cemetry outdoors. Yeah, you know, or it's wonderful to be outdoors especially now during a pandemic.

Bea Nettles: Yeah, this would be a good walk for people, I mean we're headed back, what we did was we came back up the second road in and we're on the main paved road headed back towards the office but ignore passing “Call” and “Elder”, and those definitely made their way into...

David Hayes: and on the other side “George Falls”.

Bea Nettles: “Canter” like a horse would canter. It's, it's fascinating I I can't seem to quit being amazed by by these names it's harder and harder to find new ones but I still do. And right now because of the pandemic I'm not going anywhere except anywhere I can drive within, you know, a reasonable amount of time. After the book that was done with the seasons I knew I had to do more and so the second book that I did was called Place. Place and it's the four cardinal directions so again the way I justified that to be with stones was, it's the it was the history of the north, south, east and the west written in the family names now people have asked me did you get only Southern name for the South I said give me a break. And they come in a folio that's a square because it's the four points on a compass and it's a square, you slide amount of stuff is a little bit smaller than an old fashioned record album. And, and you lay them out in the compass points, and the image on the, on the cover and all these you can see on my website, on the cover is my face, my body, taking pictures reflected a beautiful pinkish flat marbles stone with the word “place” on it and and that's on the in the graveyard on the way to St. Joe. It's a beautiful graphic, and I thought, right, I'm going to put myself here in the Midwest, which is where I am everyone thinks here in the center of the universe, wherever they are. So I'm in the middle of it all on in my place and reflected in the stone is the landscape, the prairie landscape a very flat horizon, which by the way is flat in Florida too. So that wasn't a huge shock for me the flatness wasn't as much of a shock. So after I did play so it took me a while to come up with another idea I did one called Hot Dog which was written only in veterans headstones, so I had to go back and read relocate words, only Vet because I want to write about war.

David Hayes: And you do put some pretty intense constraints on yourself.
Bea Nettles: oh yes, yeah.

David Hayes: What, what's your newest project that you finished?

Bea Nettles: I brought that with me and I, we probably have time for me just to read a little bit.

David Hayes: I'm just wondering about your newest project and I'm also wondering about what your next project is, you know. Okay, maybe, maybe some listeners can suggest something

Bea Nettles: Once a year I do come up with something this last one that I just finished is called *Headlines World's Warning*, and it's a history of Covid and written in only last name starting in December. And it's, it's so hard to even think about it but I try to read you maybe this is pretty visual. This is the month of April. Okay, so this is the month of April:


Good enough I just found in Rochester, I love it.

David Hayes: Amazing. Good. So, again, it reminds me like the language is so evocative, but it's also efficient and I was just thinking about how digital photography allows you to take as many photographs as you want and emails also allow us to write as many words as we want. But this is more like a telegram for communication when you say per word

Bea Nettles: And students that I read this to, Isaac, but I read it to him before you hit it out. He said, You know, it's called “Headlines”. And he says it reads like a headline. It's like headlines in the New York Times isn't going to use “thee” and “the” and “and “, all they're going to be very concise and that's what this whole thing is - is hard, hard words, and I could have really done a lot more, I could have been much much harsher on Trump. It's easy. There are lots of words that would apply to him but um, I was constraining myself there. Focusing on the facts and less on the emotions.

David Hayes: But there's a clarity there that comes from, in a sense, realizing that a lot of the words we use are perhaps not necessary, but there's also, as in poetry, any great poetry, there's an openness to it, that allows people to insert their words or kind of see you give enough there
for somebody to have an image in their mind, but that they can dress in their own fashion and that they can kind of shape in their own fashion so...

Bea Nettles: The thought I've had in dealing with surnames is often their extremes, you don't name, someone that's just bland although there is a bland family and there's a boring family. But there's also the lively family as well. But by and large, if you're going to name someone after a characteristic it's pretty noticeable. Extreme either totally boring or totally lively, but not so much in between and that's the case with a lot of emotions words for emotions like whoa, and doom and gloom I have all you know have those words. And to me that's also really interesting. I often wonder how did my family name happened, Nettles, you know what was that maybe it was that group of loonies that live out by the nettles patch, you know, could be all sorts of...

David Hayes: and sometimes though, I don't think this is the case with the name Nettles, but some of those names you just mentioned are Englishizations of some other name, which is also interesting. Yeah, Bea this has been really terrific it's been wonderful to spend the time with you. To go on this return trip with you. To learn more, it's always wonderful to hear about what you're working on what you've been working on.

Bea Nettles: David, well likewise.

David Hayes: Congratulations on the exhibition too though, it's going to be stunning. I know that it was in Rochester was in St. Louis and now it's here yeah so it's wonderful to be able to see the work.

Bea Nettles: I hope people come in person, a few at a time, and go in and it's not just my work there are a lot of people who have worked incredibly hard to bring this thing together and I thank them for it. And I hope some people can get some benefit from it.

David Hayes: Thank you.

Bea Nettles: Bye bye, David.