

ART2LIFE

ACADEMY

Susan: Hi, everybody. It's Susan here, and we are in rural Maryland, outside of Baltimore County. We're here with a friend of mine, who is an artist with a really interesting story I'm excited to share with you. Let me introduce you to Brent Crothers. Brent, thank you so much for taking the time out to talk to me today.

Brent Crothers: No, sure.

Susan: It's a beautiful day. You could be at work, I'm sure you have plenty you could be doing, but I really appreciate, and what an amazing place. This is in the middle of the woods. I'm sure we'll be sharing some photographs of this location. This is one of those places, it's kind of a workshop, studio, do you call it a studio?

Brent Crothers: I call it the studio, yeah.

Susan: Yeah. It's one of those that you just walk in and you can't take your eyes off all of the little details and amazing materials that you play with. It's really all about materials, isn't it? Well, tell us a little bit about your background before I do it for you.

Brent Crothers: My background?

Susan: Yeah.

Brent Crothers: Well, my father was a plumber. I was poured into that system at a really young age, and I never really felt real comfortable with it.

Susan: But you did it for a [crosstalk 00:01:31].

Brent Crothers: I did it, and that really allowed me, we got involved in solar heating in the mid-'70s, and that really got me to a place where I said, "Oh, okay," so I took over the solar heating part of the business, and that got me enough money where I could buy this property. At 24, I bought this ...

Susan: Nice.

Brent Crothers: 20 acres of woods.

Susan: That must must've been hard to leave that work, making that money.

Brent Crothers: It wasn't because it was a family run business, and my mother was driving me crazy. I love her, but-

Susan: I know, I hear you.

Brent Crothers: God rest her soul. From there, I got out of the business, and I did odd jobs, carpentry, landscape, anything for a while. Then, I split up with the love of my life ...

Susan: Oh, I'm sorry.

Brent Crothers: I really didn't know where to go, but I wasn't going to run away, and so I stayed here for a while, and eventually about November, it was getting cold and I was staying in somebody's room in somebody's house, and I had the property.

Susan: You had the property with the studio?

Brent Crothers: No.

Susan: You didn't even-

Brent Crothers: The only thing that was there was, in 1982, St Patrick's Day night, and my grandfather was very Irish, Chloe Geoghegan, and he always had a party. He was known to have, that was his birthday, but we're not sure if that's true or not, but he always had a big party. We were there, and the trailer, which we had been only living in for, like, nine months, burnt down.

Susan: Oh. How much property is this?

Brent Crothers: Well, I was told it was, give or take, 20 acres, because I didn't have to have it surveyed.

Susan: Right, and it's all woods. It's just beautiful.

Brent Crothers: It was all pretty much woods then.

Susan: Was there art before ... I mean, you haven't mentioned art yet. You were a plumber, solar heat-

Brent Crothers: Okay, so, that's what I was leading up to. I was depressed, I went to the islands and helped a friend build a house down in St John's. Down there, I noticed I started sketching and stuff, and I noticed that all my friends were always musicians and artists, the ones I felt more drawn to. When I came back, I had an old, funky little camper, no running water, nothing. It was getting really cold, and I knew that they had a shower over at the art department at the community college, so I signed up for a class.

Susan: Okay. I told you this was going to be an interesting story.

Brent Crothers: From there, I would start taking classes. I think I took a drawing class the first semester, and I would slip in and take showers there once or twice a week. Then, in the summertime, I had rigged up this whole system with a solar tank in the air, and a gravity float, and I had outdoor showers until almost November.

Susan: Oh my gosh. That's awesome.

Brent Crothers: You know, until it got too cold, and then eventually I would go back to the college. From taking the class at the college, I realized I was really being fed a lot.

Brent Crothers: I always had this draw to be a sculptor, so I took a class with the sculpture teacher. I actually did a little plumbing job for them, which I didn't want to do, but I wanted to get to know them more. Then, I did a life-size piece and he said, "Oh, that's a major project," and I said, "Ah, okay." I was working, doing carpentry during the day, and I did a life-size piece. After that piece was done, that one teacher that I respected, both and they were married, she pulled me aside and said, "I've been here 25 years, and that's the strongest piece that's ever come out of this school." I said, "Oh, well, I thought everybody was like this. I thought everybody could just get caught up in it," because ...

Susan: Because you did.

Brent Crothers: That's when I started realizing, is that, time just would disappear. I'd be lost in whatever I was doing, and the time just-

Susan: Right. Were you working in wood at that point?

Brent Crothers: Yeah.

Susan: Well, go on, because I know that there is some way that what you learned in plumbing is showing up in your work, too.

Brent Crothers: Yeah, I guess. Well, I fought it for a long time. Okay, so, then eventually that summer, I took five little cheap slides. This is how it's so different now. I went down to MICA, and I got a scholarship to go to MICA, and I was almost 30 then.

Susan: This is the Maryland Institute ...

Brent Crothers: Maryland ...

Susan: College of Art.

Brent Crothers: Institute College of Art. From there, I had to take some of the general fundamental courses, and I always didn't want to do the old historical stuff. I wanted to find out what had just been going on in the art scenes. I was taking more contemporary stuff and met a lot of interesting people. I was going to New York some, and just taking it all in. I was like a kid in the candy store. It was like, "Wow, this is a whole world I knew nothing about."

Brent Crothers: Then, I graduated from ... Well, actually, a great experience was, I went for three years to MICA, and then I got a scholarship to go to this school called Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine for nine weeks. I got 12 credits for it, and that's how I got out.

Susan: Ah, nice.

Brent Crothers: In three years, I got my undergraduate degree. Then by that time, I was already working. I started just dragging trees out and I was making gigantic [crosstalk 00:07:05].

Susan: Working where? Where were you, on this property?

Brent Crothers: On this property, and taking stuff when I was still at MICA. I was building these organic forms.

Susan: Right. What was inspiring you? Was the inspiration coming from the material alone, or was there a message or a narrative? Was it just like, "I want to see what happens if I put this together with that," or what?

Brent Crothers: Yes.

Susan: All of the above.

Brent Crothers: I think part of it was, the forest became like a spiritual place for me. As I kept looking at these trees, they all had such beauty. There's like an architecture. When I go to cities, I'm just amazed at all the architecture, but the forest its own architecture.

Susan: Exactly.

Brent Crothers: So much of the architecture is really a spin-off from nature, in some way or form.

Susan: Right, absolutely.

Brent Crothers: I just started dragging things out. A tree would fall, and I was like, "Oh, okay, I can make something with that." I did a whole bunch of large, I did a six-foot vine ball, because it was a jungle when I got out here. I was just trying to pull the vines out of the trees, and I was just wrapping them up. One I made too big to go, and it was a part of a performance. It was so big that it wouldn't ... I was asked to be part of, a graduate student had asked me, because all the graduate students started connecting with me. He had, it was a lot about performance, and so the performance for me was, I came in with this six-foot ball of vines, and we opened the doors, and it was too big to go in. They had pictures of it. What happens is, this organic round wonderful thing, like life and the planet and everything, and then all of a sudden, it has to fit in, within this-

Susan: There's a metaphor.

Brent Crothers: With enough energy, we all pushed it in through there. That became, that was the performance.

Susan: That was the performance. I love it. It's a metaphor, totally.

Brent Crothers: Yeah, and it is a metaphor, because sometimes people will see vines as sticks or twine, but for me the vines are just this complexity. As we're seeing more, as they're going deeper and deeper, science is looking at this, everything is so connected and interwoven.

Susan: Yes, absolutely. Exactly. Right. Really, there's a lot of feeding of your soul at the same time.

Brent Crothers: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Susan: I'm sure, like for me when I'm working, what's happening up here is making all those connections.

Brent Crothers: Yeah, yeah. You've asked me about the plumbing. For years, I wouldn't use copper because of that.

Susan: It's part of that.

Brent Crothers: I wanted the separation. Then I eventually had some health problems, and so I had to work a little smaller, and I realize I developed a way to work incrementally, like a little bit of this, and a little piece of this, and a little piece of that. Eventually over time, it can become large. I like the large form. I like forms that have a relationship to the human scale.

Susan: Yeah, like the trees.

Brent Crothers: That's important to me. Like the tree, yeah. Then, skipping forward, now I think of everything as potential material. Usually, it's something I'll see in a pile somewhere along the road ...

Susan: Such as?

Brent Crothers: Oh, such as, like the old Christmas lights and ...

Susan: The garden hoses.

Brent Crothers: Yeah, the garden hoses, right, that first group of them that came out of the-

Susan: It's like, when I saw what you were doing with them, the same as the tires, I thought ... I have in the past seen things that I just thought the material was just so cool, like porcupine quills I stole from a porcupine once. I mean, it was dead, but they're just so beautiful all by themselves, but I didn't see the inherent beauty in those garden hoses until you started to work with them, and just all of the variety of greens and blacks, and the smoothness and the linear quality, and all that. You're seeing it all the time, everywhere.

Brent Crothers: Pretty much, pretty much. Usually there's also, I've realized more and more, and I'm owning this, is that there's a layer, okay, so I was questioning our use of water. Symbolically, the garden hose is this use of water. There are places that don't have any water, and we're out watering our car. The cars don't need water to live, but we've got to keep them nice and clean. I started questioning all of that stuff, and then they're making them very cheap, and so people are throwing them away at the end of the summer. I'm like, "What?" I have garden hoses that I-

Susan: This is what I love about your work.

Brent Crothers: I have garden hoses that I bought in '78, I still have them now to this day, because they were expensive industrial garden hoses, and I still have them. I keep them out of the sun, because the UV is really hard on things, and I'm going to have them another 50 years. I mean, my children, my son or somebody will have them, because it's a good hose, but these

other ones, they just crank them out. It's just, we forget that some factory made them with chemicals and stuff like that-

Susan: They're in a landfill next year.

Brent Crothers: Then they're in a landfill or on your [crosstalk 00:13:02].

Susan: Your environment is important to you.

Brent Crothers: Oh, yeah. I always tell people that I was an environmentalist first. That's what got me really involved and got me excited about solar heating. Then, from there, it just expanding in a way.

Susan: Right. The way I imagine, when I look at you from 30,000 feet, I see that you're taking these discarded items and transforming them into art, and taking care of a couple of problems, the waste, and reminding people not only of the magic of art, but also of what's happening in our environment, what's happening right here in the Chesapeake and ...

Brent Crothers: Right, right.

Susan: The rest of the planet.

Brent Crothers: Yeah, and I've been really clear about, because what happens is that, we get these little boxes that we put thing in, and that happens in the art world, because for a while I was the environmental artist. I don't quite know what that means, but it became this box that you could just sit on the shelf and say, "Oh, environmental artist," and then you don't look at it any deeper to see what other meanings it might stir up in you, or society, and stuff like that. When I'm talking about what I'm doing these days, a lot of it's still wood, a lot of it's still organic, but I'm also using unappreciated materials, because if they were appreciated, they wouldn't be throwing them out.

Susan: Right, right.

Brent Crothers: Did I think 20 years ago I'd be doing something with bowling balls? No, but somehow, well, one came and another, and I have always loved round forms. Round forms are just, they speak to me. All through my work, there's always been this sphere thing happening.

Susan: Right, like the egg, but the eggs, they had another meeting, too. Didn't they?

Brent Crothers: Well, I started doing the eggs ... I had a health issue in the '90s.

Susan: I wanted to get back to you about that, yeah.

Brent Crothers: Okay, in the '90s, I had Lymes disease.

Susan: Oh.

Brent Crothers: I discovered then also that I had Hepatitis C.

Susan: Oh, okay, together.

Brent Crothers: I didn't have any insurance, and from all the reading back then, it wasn't really the ...

Susan: Wasn't a lot of knowledge about it.

Brent Crothers: Well, and what they were doing was very archaic, and even though I plugged into the very end of that archaic experience ... Then I slowly got myself kind of healthy, but I never was quite right. It took me three or four years, because of Lymes disease with the combination of Hepatitis C, I was so weak. I started working, again, incrementing into small units. If one day I could walk up and solder two keys together, baby, that was a great day. Then you know ...

Susan: You didn't quit.

Brent Crothers: Eventually, you got so, yeah, you could do five. You got more and more, and then the next thing you know-

Susan: Don't we all have to work in our limitations?

Brent Crothers: Yeah, I know.

Susan: It could a limitation of the studio space-

Brent Crothers: It is.

Susan: Or time, or health-

Brent Crothers: That's true. Yeah. I'm not complaining, I'm just explaining the history of it. Then, I think I was trying to figure out a way, how am I going to make a living at this? My wife said, "Well, if you get your master's, you could teach. I said, "Okay." One of my teachers had pulled me in at MICA to teach. I said, "Art, I don't have a master's." He said, "Do you want to teach a class?" I said, "Sure, I'll teach it."

Susan: Oh, I thought you did have to have that. [crosstalk]

Brent Crothers: Yeah. Well, you're supposed to, but he was the head of the department. I'm down there teaching, and there was a new director of the graduate

school, Rinehart. Maren, who's running the thing, I [inaudible] all over the place. I went in and I said, "Maren, I don't have a master's." She said, "I didn't know you didn't know have a master's." She said, "We would love to have you in the program."

Susan: You started, that was your bread and butter.

Brent Crothers: Well, that's what I thought was going to be my bread and butter. The story keeps going. That first semester, which was September 2001, right. I'm teaching a class, and I'm in graduate school and September 11 happens, what we know as September, you know. It turned the whole country upside down.

Susan: Totally, totally.

Brent Crothers: Everything got all-

Susan: You were in Baltimore.

Brent Crothers: I was in Baltimore when it happened, right. Some of the teachers were just scared and running.

Susan: Freaking out, absolutely.

Brent Crothers: I felt, because I was a teacher there too, I hung around because I wanted to make sure, because the students, they didn't know what was going on. "Oh, we're being attacked from everywhere." Then, so after that, I started that whole series, what I call Reinventing The Wheel, which are ...

Susan: Peace ...

Brent Crothers: People will call them peace signs, because I was commuting for the first time really, and community is a strange thing.

Susan: On I-95?

Brent Crothers: You're in these little boxes, and your zipping along, and nobody looks at anybody. I'm, like, all over the road. I'm always looking at people. Or, you see something along the road. People after a while, they know to stay away from you because I kind of wobble a little bit, because I'm distracted easily, you know.

Brent Crothers: I decided that I would start making, at the time I told myself I was going to make one for all, I can't remember, it's 3,000 or some people that died on September 11th. I started making one and-

Susan: Okay. These are made out of tires.

Brent Crothers: I was taking the sidewall of tires.

Susan: Was the commute, like, seeing tires that had blown along the side of the road, were you finding those materials? Or was it ...

Brent Crothers: I think the strongest emphasis for me, yes, I saw tires around. You can go in nice old streams and you see tires. Now, it used to be people would go look, "Oh there's an Indian artifact."

Susan: I remember that.

Brent Crothers: Well, our artifacts are going to be old tires and things like that. There was that level, and then the other thing was, I think that a lot of what led us to September 11th was about oil. What's the symbolic for America, is the freedom machine, the tires. That's why I started using the tires as that connection. Then, all the fallen crosses, which I'd never knew that's what some people called them, was, I started just using anything, because that's us. We're all different, we're all different size, shape, colors, ages. I started just making the cross, and in my studio, I just started making them and I would throw them. Then, eventually, there was this pile, and the pile started speaking to me. It was like, this mound had become ...

Susan: The thing itself.

Brent Crothers: Itself, and made it even more important than the-

Susan: You're pretty open, then, in the process, about where you're heading. There's not like a, "This is what it's going to be in the end, and this is what I'm making." It's more of an organic process.

Brent Crothers: Yes. Sometimes get a little control-ish, and that's usually when the pieces aren't as strong.

Susan: Every time.

Brent Crothers: A lot of times, I am open, that I have an idea, and I said, "Okay, I'm going to do this," but then as you're getting in there, the materials are going to direct you where it's going to want to go.

Susan: Right, yeah. I would find it difficult to not get excited about coming in here and seeing what you're working on every day, because there's just so much texture. Like these trees behind you, they look like they've been stripped of their bark, right, and maybe carved even more?

Brent Crothers: Yeah. I've done a whole series of these things.

Susan: What kind of tree is that?

Brent Crothers: Those are cedars, they're eastern cedars. Like everything, there's a story. The first big snowfall when I was living out here by myself, a lot of the cedars get knocked over. Then, some of them snap. I'm like, "Well, what can I do with that?" The tops of those are the shovels.

Susan: Ah, yeah.

Brent Crothers: I'm saying, "How can I make something with the whole tree," just keep going down.

Susan: Right, just use the whole thing. Yes.

Brent Crothers: I had a period where I did a bunch of cedars where they had fallen down, and I cut them in half, and then I cut him in half again, and then I turned it inside out so all the outer part was here, and it was beautiful. Because now you have that red heartwood on the outside, but all the limbs and everything are in there, and it was beautiful.

Susan: Oh. Yeah. I can picture it, and I haven't seen that one before. I can imagine playing with sculpture that's, like, this big in front of me, but you're talking about huge ...

Brent Crothers: Some of them will have been, yeah.

Susan: Equipment, and ...

Brent Crothers: Yeah. Now, as we age, I'm going to be 64 next month, the scale has changed a little bit. Unless I learn how to get funding more, that's a whole nother story.

Brent Crothers: Then I started chiseling down a whole series, down to what I call the spirit, the heart, the center, and exposing that. It's kind of, when you first open it up, it's like this beautiful pinkish, purplish, and aromatic too. It smells great.

Susan: Right, it smells great in here, yeah.

Brent Crothers: I did one, and I called that one ... Because when I noticed, and I've just been recently confronted with that a little bit, is that I wouldn't title pieces, but then eventually the title became really important. I started making sure that the title would at least give the viewer a little insight, and then they could interpret it however they wanted to, in whichever direction. That was called Where's Your Forest, and it was just a round

grouping of them, but it had been chiseled down to a point. There was always a subtle little curve. In other words, I could have made it so that it was straight across where I stop the chiseling. A little bit of round curve, then I did another one that was even more extreme curve, but it was more of a square bundle of them.

Susan: Right. I may have seen that one.

Brent Crothers: Yeah. The Delaware Art Museum has that one. Right.

Susan: Okay. I'm looking at a piece in front of me that's got to be 15, 20-feet high. Where do they go? How do you get them there? Who buys this stuff? How do you find those buyers and collectors? Was that enough questions? Because I saw you struggling with getting that six-foot egg made out of ... copper piping?

Brent Crothers: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Susan: Up to Wayne, Pennsylvania. You had some problems with that.

Brent Crothers: Yeah.

Susan: Yeah. How much does that thing weigh?

Brent Crothers: Oh, that probably goes 350, 400 pounds or something. Yeah, it's more than I can handle myself, that's for sure.

Susan: You really just started becoming known for your work and getting awards and that's kind of how the whole thing started-

Brent Crothers: Right, yes. Yeah, and I'm selling some, but not enough. Sometimes people will come in and see this, and this is actually only 10-foot. It's 10-foot tall.

Susan: 10-foot? Okay. I'm not good at ...

Brent Crothers: Yeah, no, I know. People were like, "What are you going to," and I don't know. I just start and am motivated to do something, and I just don't really think about it.

Susan: You don't care about that.

Brent Crothers: I just believe if it's good enough, eventually someone will either want to purchase it, or have it in their maybe corporate space, which used to really would have bugged me, but now I'm just like, if it can find a home somewhere, it's good. Because, like, this would have to be an indoor piece.

Susan: Right, but bringing something like that, our viewers can't see it, but it sort of looks like these pieces behind Brent. Bringing something like that into a modern building ... I know what you're saying, that maybe there'd be some objection for you there, but on the other hand, it's like you're taking your message to where it really needs to be seen, in a way.

Brent Crothers: Yes, yeah, and so, I'm open to that. I have started placing some works, or having someone coordinate the purchase of a piece here and there, and I'm open for more of that.

Susan: Right, right. Definitely.

Brent Crothers: Because I have a lot of work stored here and there. A lot of times, it's gone for six months, but then it comes back.

Susan: Right. Yes, exactly. I know you've heard this question before. If you were going to give your younger self advice, what would it be? Or what's the best advice that you ever got regarding your career?

Brent Crothers: I think the best advice I ever got, and it's from a wonderful man who I really like a lot, he's a well-known sculptor internationally. Micro macro.

Susan: Yeah, I know that.

Brent Crothers: Yeah. We went to do a residency with him, and he chose people to work with him, and one of the days was like, "We're going to talk about galleries." He was saying, "If it's starts off that way, that's kind of the way it's probably going to go the whole way."

Susan: Oh, with a gallery. Yeah.

Brent Crothers: With a gallery, or a business you're working with. Micro macro. If it's like that, you really can't change that dynamic. It might change, but the fact is, you always keep it in mind, and especially in personal relationship or personal business things. If that's the way it goes, then don't ...

Susan: Don't expect it to-

Brent Crothers: Don't get upset when it ...

Susan: When it's still like that.

Brent Crothers: When you're doing a big plan and it's not going like that, because he said that's what the way it is. I think that's a good thing for people to realize. If it was a fight or a wrestle the beginning-

Susan: Right, or felt kind of crappy.

Brent Crothers: Or the person wasn't very dependable, well, that's probably the way it's going to be later on.

Susan: Right, exactly. Regarding your journey as an artist though, you did tell us about some big shifts with health issues and things like that, but what's something that you could share that might be really helpful for someone in their journey? Like for me, what I'm hearing that's really resonating for me, because I know I need to hear it, is what you were saying about, "I'm not really thinking about where this is going to go. I'm just in it," and I have a tendency to be in my head too much sometimes as I'm working. What else do you feel is super important in your process?

Brent Crothers: Part of it is learning to trust yourself.

Susan: Yes.

Brent Crothers: Trust your intuition. That means sometimes, you'll maybe put two or three months, maybe two or three years on a piece, and you have to realize, that piece is not going anywhere. You've got to let it go, or either cut it in half, turn it upside down, do something different, and saying, "Okay, I learned from that. That was a great, great lesson. Thank you, thank you, that.

Brent Crothers: Then, as far as my career, I just feel so blessed, because I've been able to travel, I've met great people, I've seen works that were just so inspiring, and maybe it's because you ran into somebody that was a friend of somebody and they're an artist, and they take you to their studio, and all of a sudden you see stuff that other people aren't seeing. I just feel very lucky.

Susan: It's great to be an artist, isn't it?

Brent Crothers: Yeah, it is, but it's not for the meager now.

Susan: No, absolutely.

Brent Crothers: I mean, because here I am, 64, I'm really not always making a full-time living off my artwork.

Susan: Right, exactly.

Brent Crothers: I end up somehow having to do another dance or do something to bring some money from somewhere else.

Susan: I really appreciate that honesty, because it's doable, but it's not always comfortable.

Brent Crothers: Right. Yeah.

Susan: Yeah. What is it that would be important for you to know that the viewer is taking away from your work?

Brent Crothers: Honestly, I don't always consider the viewer, but in reality, I am a viewer at times.

Susan: You are.

Brent Crothers: I think it's really important, I hope, I'm hoping that maybe 100 people will see one of my pieces, and if two or three of them just pull something out, and it may not have anything to do with what I was thinking, that's okay. That's a successful piece. Because, often I would like to have the work be dynamic enough that it draws the viewers in a little bit, but then, what they're going to take away from it, they have their life, their upbringing, their history. I had done a whole series with these books, and we didn't talk much about that.

Susan: No, I haven't seen those.

Brent Crothers: Yeah. My newest video will come out, it's getting ready, about me burning some of these books.

Susan: Oh, okay.

Brent Crothers: The burning book is the end of one of the pieces. I eventually put it outside because it was starting to have some problems with its structure, from the way it happened. The reason that I mentioned that was, I had another piece that was the same thing. I had created this book urn type thing, like a round thing. I had, what I thought, a jam with a big vine ball on it.

Brent Crothers: I was at a show with it, and I like to be at shows with my work, because I like hearing what people are saying things. They said, "Now, this is really reminding me of the book burnings in Germany." See, I didn't look at it at all, because my thinking was, it was nature against holding up and holding out on Western logic, maybe, with the books.

Susan: Also, the book comes from the tree, too.

Brent Crothers: Yeah. That's where I was going, but they saw it as twigs inside of there, and they were thinking that I was going to set it on fire, and that would be the book burning. The next piece I built with books, I built it with that intention, because I kept thinking, "Book burning, I didn't know that much about book burning in Germany." That was the piece that you're going to see in this next video.

Brent Crothers: I'm like a kid, and I got all excited and it was snowing out and I had wrapped a wool liner around it, and had it up in the air. I thought I can control it like a stove. I had a big metal top. I was trying to get it lit, and I couldn't get it lit inside. I finally got it going, and all of a sudden, it really got going, and I hadn't gotten my 30-year-old hoses out yet. I'd run and get those, and I'd put it out, and it took me three months to dry the books back out again because I had to really drench it down. What happens, so much of the burning had undermined, so it started kind of starting to lift to one side. I think I only showed it one time after that.

Brent Crothers: Then I put it outside, because my studio was just getting too jammed with too many pieces. Someone told me that there were these spores that mushrooms would eat paper, and I was going to cover it with that and have it just be consumed. Well, I never got around to it, and it kept-

Susan: Falling?

Brent Crothers: Lifting more. Finally one day, I just got in the mood, and I said, "I've got to clean up. I'm going to light it on fire." I started it on fire. It finally got going, and I was with my cell phone, I was so excited. I was maybe from here to 10 feet away. It got so hot that it shut cell phone ...

Susan: You're kidding?

Brent Crothers: Yes.

Susan: You've got some good stories.

Brent Crothers: Then, I went back and documented it, because eventually it just turned to coals. Then it'd fall apart, and you could still see the books. That's what-

Susan: This is why I love sitting out at my fire pit and just watching the wood burn and watching what it does and how beautiful it is.

Brent Crothers: Right, yeah.

Susan: Yeah. What people take away are all kinds of things. I mean, for me, I always respond first to the material.

Brent Crothers: Right.

Susan: At first I see a shape, like the egg that's six foot high, and then I get up close and I'm like, "Holy crap, this is copper elbow joints all put together and it's like so intricate," but then I might be thinking about, "What's that mean? The egg, the water, what's that all about?" The egg you said was kind of about rebirth.

Brent Crothers: The egg was, for me, rebirth because after my graduate experience, I was just getting worn down and worn down. I went to Canada for our vacation, on the second day I was gone. I was out. I started getting a little depressed because it was like, "I never can do anything. I don't have any energy." I eventually plugged into Hopkins and got into a study program, which I thought was going to kill me because it was 11 months, and chemotherapy and all kinds of stuff. They've just come out now with this pill that you-

Susan: Is this for Lyme, or is this for-

Brent Crothers: This is for Hepatitis C. For Hepatitis C now, just in the last year, they've come up with this the whole way. You take a pill for a month or so and it's gone. I was like, "Oh my"-

Susan: They covered you with leeches and all that stuff.

Brent Crothers: They told me, "One day, we know it's going to be something," but I just couldn't. I was just fading.

Susan: Yeah. That's scary.

Brent Crothers: I had to do something to take care of myself. After that when I realized, okay, slowly I started getting a little bit of energy, I started creating little eggs, because it was like a rebirth of myself. Then as I got stronger, the eggs got bigger.

Susan: Right, right, and 3 and 400 pounds.

Brent Crothers: Right.

Susan: Yeah. I love that there's just so much meaning for you in your work. I think we all want that as artists, and that just happens naturally for you.

Susan: Well, this was really great, and this is one of the reasons why I feel so grateful to be an artist, because I get to have friends like you and talks like this. Thank you so much for opening up your day and your studio to us. I think everybody's going to really enjoy hearing your story and seeing some of the pictures that we're going to include in this video, because your work is really beautiful. Thank you so much.

Brent Crothers: All right. Well, thank you for coming. I appreciate it.

Susan: Yeah. Good seeing you, Bren