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Oral history interview with John Prip, 1980 Oct. 20 and 1981 Nov. 21

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with John Prip on October 20, 1980 and November 10, 1981. The interview took place in Rehoboth, MA, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with John Prip in Rehoboth, Massachusetts, October 20th, 1980, Robert Brown, the interviewer. Perhaps we could begin with your – talking about your childhood, which was – until you were 10 years old, you lived in America. And then you went back to your family's native Denmark. Are there things in those years, those early years, before you even apprenticed to a silversmith, that you remember, that are quite vivid, that particularly that might have affected what you later did?

JOHN PRIP: Well, I remember, you know, certain things from my childhood. I guess they had some bearing or some influence on my later life. But I don't think – in other words, I can't say that at the age of eight or nine or ten years old I decided – I picked up a hammer and said, "I'm going to be a silversmith" or anything like that.

MR. BROWN: Oh, but your family, your father and grandfather were silversmiths.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. But I had – really had no awareness of that as a child. I mean, I didn't give it a great deal of thought. My father went to work in the morning, you know. We lived in the suburbs.

MR. BROWN: Of New York?

MR. PRIP: Of New York. And my father took the train. And occasionally, I would go in – we would go in and visit his place of business. And that would be a thrill for me, they'd run a penny through the rolling mill or something like that. And they would let me melt a little piece of metal or something like that. But it left no lasting impression on me.

MR. BROWN: Did your father work for a company or did he have his own shop?

MR. PRIP: He had his own business. They were doing mainly, at that time, really expensive and sort of extravagant jewelry and platinum and diamond jewelry.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: And then when the Depression came along and hit people real hard in the early 30s, business was really hit quite hard. And --

MR. BROWN: Was this a business your father had brought to America?

MR. PRIP: Well, he started it. He came here and worked for a number of years as a sort of a journeyman jewel and metal smith, you know, silversmith.

MR. BROWN: You mean by that he worked for different companies or --

MR. PRIP: He worked for different companies, different people, and traveled around and worked in the Midwest for a while and then went back to New York where he had some relatives, had a sister. And then he was working for some others, some man, I guess. And just thought it would be a good thing to start out on his own. He did it. And that was – so I know, I can't tell you exactly when this happened. It must have been in the – oh, right after World War I, I guess.

And then my parents were married around 1920. And at that time he had a rather good business going. So he must have built it up by the pants.

MR. BROWN: And the main concentration was on jewelry?

MR. PRIP: On jewelry, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Precious metal?

MR. PRIP: Precious metal. And so – but at any rate, when the Depression came along and he, along with a lot of other people in the jewelry industry, were pretty wiped out, I guess you might say. But he had inherited part of a share of the business in Denmark from my grandfather and had placed some additional money in it and invested in it over the years. So it pretty much belonged to him. So they went there. My parents decided to go, since things were so bad in this country at the time. They went back to – I say they went back; my mother is American-born, my father was Danish born – went to Denmark.

They were just going over there for a couple of years. That was their thought at the time, to sort of ride out the Depression. And as it turned out that two years turned into what became the rest of their lives.

MR. BROWN: Did they find things were better over there?

MR. PRIP: Well, they were at that time, yeah. They were. And then I was 10 years old at the time. And I had to school in Denmark, had to learn to speak Danish and acquire the language skill and adjust and adapt to a new country, which is not all that difficult when you're that age.

And well, to make a long story short, at that time I perhaps became somewhat more aware of my – what was going on when I'd visit my father's place of business. And I worked there several summers. And it's quite common, or it was common at that time, to make a determination when a child reaches a certain point whether they will pursue an academic career or, I guess, what would be called a vocational pursuit.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: And you then pursue either one course or the other in school. And since I was not a shining light of a scholar – I did not have a – no indication that I was going to have – going to become a lawyer or a doctor.

MR. BROWN: Did teachers play much of a role in discussing --

MR. PRIP: Well, I was on very good terms with my teachers. And I did reasonably well in school, but I just had no interest, no inclination. And I think, had I ever had a talk with my father and said, "Look, Dad, I'd like to be this or be that," my parents would have been supportive. But – oh, I guess at a certain point my parents said, "Well" – they just did what was common in Europe in that time, with a certain point, you – I left school and started an apprenticeship at the age of 15.

MR. BROWN: And you were inclined for that. I mean, you looked forward to doing that?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. I thought that was – most – a lot of my friends had done that. And I thought that would be a real, really nice thing to do.

MR. BROWN: Did you live in Copenhagen?

MR. PRIP: Yes, we lived in Copenhagen.

MR. BROWN: So you lived in the city.

MR. PRIP: Well, it would be the suburbs of Copenhagen, which was a rather large city.

MR. BROWN: But generally, would you say, even despite the Depression, you had a pretty happy childhood?

MR. PRIP: Oh, yes. I think my parents were always, you know, I'd say relatively well off. And when you're really that young, you're not that --

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: I was never aware of it or anything other than living a rather good life, you know.

MR. BROWN: Were there brothers and sisters coming?

MR. PRIP: No, I was the only child.

MR. BROWN: The only child.

MR. PRIP: Right. So when I --

MR. BROWN: Well, what did starting an apprenticeship mean? How did it begin?

MR. PRIP: Well, it's very traditional, apprenticeship, you know. It meant going into a working situation, as opposed to a school situation where things are done – it's based pretty much upon, I guess, what the student

wants to do or what teachers think they might – could be or might be – they – practical – serving in an apprenticeship – hey, knock the cat down there – is really what is quite realistic. It's what that situation really is.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: It reflects the work being done within that shop or studio or factory or whatever it happens to be. This was – I was fortunate. I served my apprenticeship in a small, very high-quality workshop. All the work that came out of that shop went to one store, was sold to one outlet. And it was broken down. There were about – oh, there were some few goldsmiths working there, and there were some silversmiths. And you were either a maker of hollowware or you were doing flatware. And then there were – there was one spinner and then one finisher. And there were two foremen. It totaled up to about – oh, pretty close to 20 people. And then there were three or four – three apprentices.

MR. BROWN: And this was – his name was Neilsen?

MR. PRIP: Neilsen. Evald Neilsen.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Yes.

MR. PRIP: And it was really a very nice, very fine shop. And they --

MR. BROWN: So when you'd start out, what would you do, just errands and chores?

MR. PRIP: No, actually you start doing actual pieces, doing actual work. It could – there again, it depended upon the quality I'd say of the firm you were working for. If it's a good firm, they take this obligation rather – they consider it a real obligation. They have to teach you something. And they really try to teach you well. And the man I was working for was head of the guild and the silver -- and the gold and silversmith guild in Denmark. So he took this as – he was very serious about teaching his apprentices well.

MR. BROWN: Could you describe what you would do in the beginning?

MR. PRIP: Well, I can – the very first thing I did was to make a small bowl, you know, a brass, small brass bowl. And you just – of course, first of all, you have to become familiar with the environment, with the working conditions and the people. And I did have to run errands. I mean, that was part of my – what was expected of me.

MR. BROWN: Had you ever raised a bowl before?

MR. PRIP: Oh, no, no, no, never done anything like that.

MR. BROWN: So you would watch the others and then --

MR. PRIP: I would watch them. And I was assigned to one of the journeymen silversmiths. I was sitting next to him. I was sitting between two men at a bench, at a five-man bench. And they would instruct me, tell me what to do, and show me how to do it. And then I would do as much as I could. And if I had a question, I would ask them.

And they wouldn't – you know, they would – they would help me. They were very helpful. But they wouldn't encourage me to lean on them too much. In other words, I was encouraged to do as much as I could and then only ask questions, you know, when I reached a point where I couldn't solve the problem or the question on my own, figure things out on my own. Then I would ask them, and they were always willing to help me, show me how.

MR. BROWN: But surely, you had to kind of look at what they were doing quite a bit.

MR. PRIP: Oh, yes, I would look at what they were doing.

MR. BROWN: You'd watch without interfering?

MR. PRIP: Oh, yes, sure.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, without asking questions.

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And did the head of the workshop, Neilsen, come by to look at your --

MR. PRIP: He would come by. He was sort of a grand, sort of old gentleman. I was scared stiff of him. He had –

he would come by. He would always – I was – I just remember being quite frightened of him, afraid that he would talk to me or ask me questions or something like that, you know. I had a great deal of respect for him. He was – you referred to him as "Master." And you didn't talk to him unless he addressed you, you know, unless you were spoken to. You just kept your mouth shut. And it was quite a formal situation.

And he would come through the shop. He would come through and just stride through, walk through, and see what was going on, and talk. And if he wanted some information, he would ask you, he would address you. But you wouldn't --

MR. BROWN: So if you had questions, you would have to talk to a journeyman?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, but you didn't – you seldom had anything that you would discuss with him. You would discuss it with the journeymen.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: Or discuss it with the foreman. I could go in and ask a question of the shop, the man that was running the shop, who was a very pleasant and very nice man.

MR. BROWN: He was higher ranking than the journeymen?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Yes, in that order. But they were very pleasant, very nice people. I mean, it was very nice there. It was – certain things I had to do every day. The first year, you start out – the lowest order is to be the youngest apprentice. And you go shopping at lunchtime. You had to go out and run the errands for the journeymen, buy their beer and cigarettes and newspapers and things like that.

And that shop was pretty – there wasn't a great deal of drinking or anything. But some of the shops where they do a lot of drinking, the apprentices are out running around chasing, going for beer all day long, stuff like that, you know.

MR. BROWN: But the foreman wouldn't stand for that if you had a certain – a lot of work to do, would he?

MR. PRIP: No, he wouldn't. But I mean, some shops, they do it. They just do it, you know. And there are always some people – some of the guys were always trying to get – send you down, sneak out, you know, and buy beer for them and things like that. And you had a choice. On the one hand, you wanted to stay on good terms with the men that were working there. On the other hand, you didn't want to get caught, you know, sneaking out. So it was always – you were somewhere in between.

MR. BROWN: Were they doing pretty elaborate work then?

MR. PRIP: Well, it was a --

MR. BROWN: What was --

MR. PRIP: The easiest way to describe it is that most people – well, not most people, but a lot of people are familiar with the – sort of the work done by the Jensen Company, sort of some of the – not really elaborate, but sort of semi, I guess, rich, floral work that was being done, usually against – very often, against a plain background with sort of decorative floral elements.

And people know the Jenson name, but there were other people doing the same kind of work. And the company I worked for --

MR. BROWN: But it wasn't traditional work. It was a fairly up-to-date design?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. It was sort of – it was sort of a post-art nouveau or something like that. And then it's Scandinavian flavor. It was stylized floral elements. And then some of it was quite plain, which was the – referred to it as functional, which it was not really. I mean, it's hard to make – but that was – and inaudible [phonetic] and functional. They were just terms that were used. They just didn't mean a great deal, but people used them, you know.

MR. BROWN: They were a little simpler design than usually?

MR. PRIP: It was actually, a lot of it would be – a lot of the things – many of the things we did at that time would now be thought of as just – as rather nice examples of art deco, I imagine, some of them.

MR. BROWN: You mean some of the things were quite streamlined?

MR. PRIP: Oh, yes, some of them were quite streamlined and quite --

MR. BROWN: Well, now you say you began with brass. Was that just test pieces?

MR. PRIP: That was just – they didn't keep me there long because the shop did not work with brass. They didn't use anything made out of brass. It was just to --

MR. BROWN: Get you familiar?

MR. PRIP: Just to get you familiar with the shops. So I think the second piece or the third piece I made, I went right to silver.

MR. BROWN: And did you find you seemed to have a knack for it right away?

MR. PRIP: Oh, to tell you the truth, I think I'd be exaggerating if I said that I was – showed any outstanding ability, as far as outstanding ability. I think I was somewhat average, you know. And I was – if anything, I did – I'm trying to be honest here. I did – I think I did well. I believe I did well. I did good work. My work was good, very clean and neat. I was very careful. I was probably rather slow. And I served a five-year apprenticeship and went to – I did mainly hollowware, emphasis on raising and fabricating of hollow forms.

MR. BROWN: Did you work mainly with sheets of silver or --

MR. PRIP: Sheets of silver, mainly sheets of silver. And then I would do other things, chores. We had to do some – some pieces with stamp were made in dies. And you had to do some press work and some die work. And you had to roll out stock for certain orders. And you had to do some melting and rolling and stamping, things like that.

MR. BROWN: Tell me. Was there – by this time, at least in that shop in Denmark, any feeling for or against using machines, like the stamping?

MR. PRIP: No, no, no.

MR. BROWN: That battle had been fought earlier?

MR. PRIP: That – yes.

MR. BROWN: If they'd had a battle.

MR. PRIP: Well, the – there was really no real – there was complete, I'd say, absence of precious attitude in this place, you know. People were doing this for one – they were there to make a living. I mean, it was not – and you did things the best way you could and just about the fastest way you could. It was – you know, I would say it's something that has pretty much disappeared now, and see, the art of small-scale production. It was done in the manner that was appropriate, you might say, for that level of production. In other words, they were producing small, relatively small numbers of pieces, of objects.

And so this was – if you were turning out – if you're going to manufacture 50,000 of something, well, there's an appropriate method of production for that. If you're making a million, then you just go into a different method of production. If you're making six of something, then there's another. There's an appropriate method. Or if you're making one – it changes, actually.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Sure.

MR. PRIP: If you go from one to twelve to 200, it changes. So they go into different methods of production. They are certainly going to – from doing it entirely by hand to temporary dies. And then you go from temporary dies to dies that have perhaps a medium die light, just sort of a middle die light. And then you go into, from there into things, hardened steel light that have a prolonged or a die light that can take a lot of striking, things like that.

MR. BROWN: Prolonged. Would you be told this by the foreman? He would say, "Now, this is a – you're to make one of this, there's only one"?

MR. PRIP: Well, that's the level we were working. There was all either one of a kind or, at best, very limited production. So that's what we were doing there. But you can't – like, to have all the flatware, although I was not involved with flatware production – but it was all hand forged. However, to --

MR. BROWN: Including the blades?

MR. PRIP: No. The blades were made outside. The blades were made – I mean, the steel blades were made by another company. We purchased the steel blades. But other than that, all the spoons, the knives, the handles, all the forks, and all that – it started with just a blank. They would all be rolled out into blanks of an appropriate size, and they'd be forged. The material would be distributed by hand. It would be forged on an anvil. And then the bowl, the handle, would all be hand forged.

But if it had any kind of a pattern or any kind of a design that would be struck into that, that would be done in a die. In other words, you wouldn't – you would not repeat. The forming would take place by hand, but if you had to – let's say it had just a site and, oh, edge, just a raised edge or something going around the outside, that would be, you know, struck in a die. Or if it had a floral pattern or something running up the handle, that would be struck in a die. That would be die-imposed.

MR. BROWN: Did you – were you involved with any of the design of things?

MR. PRIP: No.

MR. BROWN: Not being an apprentice?

MR. PRIP: No, that would not be. Actually, something – I didn't even really think about that during my apprenticeship, although what I did during my apprenticeship, I, in the very first year, along with my work as an apprentice in the shop, which ran from about 7:30 in the morning till 4:30 in the afternoon, and that was – let's see, six – I'd say six days a week. Well, Saturday we had – we quit a little early. So it was six days a week. We worked Saturday. And then we had – as an apprentice you had to attend evening school as well.

MR. BROWN: What was that for?

MR. PRIP: So I was just fresh home and I would say Copenhagen --

MR. BROWN: For bench work or --

MR. PRIP: No. This was all more theoretical and drawing and a lot of geometry and things that you would not normally learn in the – get in the shop.

MR. BROWN: Hm. Did you see relations between evening school and what you were actually doing?

MR. PRIP: Well, not as much as I would – as a matter of fact, I – now and later on, I could see. I could certainly have learned a great deal more than I did. But at that time, it was something I had to do, no choice really in the matter. I attended evening school for five years. And then I went from 5:30 till 9:00. And so that was a – became a rather long workday. I had to get up at about six o'clock in the morning, and I wasn't home until – it was 10 o'clock when I'd get home at night.

MR. BROWN: Hm. So this you did willingly? I mean, you didn't --

MR. PRIP: Well, I had no --

MR. BROWN: No choice.

MR. PRIP: I mean, that was something you did – see, you do pretty much what people – what it was expected of you, you know. And if you're living in an environment or a situation where other people are doing that, you don't really think too much about it. If you feel that you've been singled out, if you're the only one that's doing it, and around you all of the people are just sitting around doing nothing, then you think it's awful. It's dreadful.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But many of your friends were also --

MR. PRIP: They were also involved in doing pretty much the same thing.

MR. BROWN: Did you – when you had to do, say, six of a kind, how did you feel about that? Was that extremely tedious?

MR. PRIP: Oh, I thought that was – that was tedious, yeah. Usually, six of a kind for like an apprentice, it would only be something very small and rather fast. In other words, something – you might do six egg cups or something like that, you know.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm, um-hm.

MR. PRIP: And then you could say because otherwise it would take much too long. You really get bogged down. But I found that – I really didn't find the work – in some ways – well, then you go from being the youngest

apprentice, where you have to do all the dirty work – and incidentally, when I tell you our work week, we also had to go in during the Christmas vacation and during the Easter vacation and do – that was when they – when we had the big cleanup, shop cleanup. And all the apprentices had to go in and take the place apart and polish all the tools and clean the place down. So they expected a great deal of us, for which I was paid – the first year I was paid one dollar a week.

MR. BROWN: It was just token payment?

MR. PRIP: It was just token payment, yeah. And then the second year, I went to, I don't know, two dollars. But after five years, I ended up, I was making three dollars a week. I had to pay – I had to give my father half of it. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: That was it?

MR. PRIP: It was put in the bank. That was it.

MR. BROWN: So you lived at home?

MR. PRIP: I lived at home, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Would you discuss this at all with your father, or was it all – he --

MR. PRIP: Oh, yes. He was interested in what I was doing. And when I finished a piece that I thought was, or they considered to be sort of a substantial step in my – since they knew my father was involved, they would let me take it home and show it to my father.

MR. BROWN: But it didn't give you much time for any kind of a youthful social life, did it?

MR. PRIP: I managed, somehow. I really did.

MR. BROWN: Saturday evenings and Sundays?

MR. PRIP: Saturday evenings and Sundays. You made a little more – you really made a real – you made an effort, that much more of an effort to do something with your time. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. PRIP: I don't know. It was – I just look back on that time as a – I was just going, you know, constantly going and doing things all the time.

MR. BROWN: This must have been about 1937 when you started?

MR. PRIP: Yes, 1937.

MR. BROWN: So your apprenticeship went into the war years?

MR. PRIP: Into the war years.

MR. BROWN: Did that affect it, seemingly?

MR. PRIP: Well, Denmark was occupied in 1940. So the Germans were there. And yeah.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: I mean, there was – that's a whole different thing. I mean, that --

MR. BROWN: Was the Neilson shop affected, the customers, the store?

MR. PRIP: Well, the economy of the country was affected. Denmark, being a very small country, was cut off from raw materials. And they were, you know, reprocessing also, buying up also, and melting it down. And the quality of the materials we had were not as good.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: But, oh, yes. I mean, the whole country, I mean, the whole atmosphere, everything had changed. But not as much as one might think or might believe. It changed greatly after that. Up until the 42, 43, it didn't change quite as much. I mean, the war had not intensified in that area. But after then – from there on, it sort of went – conditions sort of went downhill.

MR. BROWN: Hm. But the workshop continued through your apprenticeship? [Inaudible]

MR. PRIP: Yeah. It went – oh, no, it continued after that. But I mean, there was just – as a matter of fact, it was a good thing that – it was very difficult to do certain work after that. And hollowware was almost completely cut off after because there was no material. Or no silver – that was available during the war was used primarily for jewelry and making very small objects because they couldn't – they wouldn't use the sheeted silver for a teapot because it wasn't – it was just not the best use.

In other words, not the best use of the material, you might say. If a man had a sheet of silver, he would rather cut it up into small pieces and make 50 small, tiny little items or small rings out of it than make one teapot.

MR. BROWN: And then materials must have gotten in extremely short supply.

MR. PRIP: They were very short supply.

MR. BROWN: But as a – during your apprenticeship, your life wasn't too affected by this?

MR. PRIP: No, it wasn't. Not up until that point, no.

MR. BROWN: One other question, maybe at this point – I mean, you weren't self-consciously a designer or an artist or --

MR. PRIP: No. I was interested in design. I used to do a lot of designing at home. I would draw a great deal. And I never thought I was that good at it. But I did quite a bit of designing. And through the school, when I attended evening school or technical school, it was – well, it was – it was the Danish Arts and Crafts School, *Danmarks Designskole*, which is the arts and crafts school. It's probably the Copenhagen technical college. It's where they have different branches.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm, um-hm.

MR. PRIP: And we would – it was – we would do different things. We would design. Like we'd spend out – you know, we had design problem. And we would go to the museum. We would spend one evening or one day a week. We'd usually go there on Saturday. And then sometimes I had to go to evening school on Saturdays too. That was really the – that was the bottom. That was absolutely it, spending your Saturday evening in a museum, measuring old coffeepots and teapots, you know, and making drawings of – measured drawings of old pieces in their collection. I just loved that.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: It sounds like the teachers at that school, would they ever say, "Now, this is a good example"?

MR. PRIP: Yes. I don't think it made all that much --

MR. BROWN: Or "This is a poor example"?

MR. PRIP: I don't think it made all that much of an impression on me.

MR. BROWN: No? They weren't – you don't remember their trying to explain what was a good quality or what was a poor quality and why?

MR. PRIP: If they did, it didn't really bite all that much or take that much from me. But they had some design competitions there. And I participated in several of those. And the real – I won a couple of prizes doing that, and also – but the real prize was that I was allowed to execute the pieces.

MR. BROWN: Hm.

MR. PRIP: In other words, the man I was working for was interested enough in the – he was really, I guess, what you might call a rather progressive and a rather understanding man. And since he was head of the guild, many of these – or certain activities such as the design competitions were sponsored by the guild. So they would – so he certainly, he encouraged his own apprentices to participate.

MR. BROWN: That was nice.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. So I had a chance to make and see some of my own designs, which is in itself rather unusual, for an apprentice to be able to make his own design and make his own pieces.

And then after that, after I finished, I served a short stretch in the Danish navy, actually. That's something that is compulsory military service.

MR. BROWN: Was this still during the war?

MR. PRIP: This was during the war. They had a sort of the mine sweeper. And then the Germans took over finally, and then they scuttled the fleet, the Danish fleet. And I ended up in a camp for a while. And the Germans decided to let us go.

When I went back, I was working with a – for a friend of mine, had a small shop. I was working for him.

MR. BROWN: This military experience was just fairly routine? Well, you were sweeping mines for the Germans, were you?

MR. PRIP: No, no. This was – there was a Danish navy.

MR. BROWN: It was an occupied country, so you --

MR. PRIP: But it didn't – they – it was an occupied country. But Denmark had a unique situation, conditions, really, of all the occupied countries. Denmark had been left alone. We had our own – it was such a piddling little army and navy they had. So they let them keep the small army and navy.

MR. BROWN: Did you have any direct meetings with Germans while during this occupation?

MR. PRIP: We did --

MR. BROWN: Did you have meetings, I mean, or any run-ins or whatever?

MR. PRIP: Well, not run-ins – well, other than – finally, they took over. We were taken by them. And I spent -- well, I spent a month and a half in a camp. I mean – the thing we worried about more than anything else was that they were – might send us to Germany or something like that. But they didn't. They finally just announced we could go. They let us go.

So I went out, got out. And then I didn't have much to do. I didn't know what to do. And a friend of mine had a small shop he was doing.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And I was working for him. And then I went back to the place where I had served my apprenticeship. By then the war was just about over. The Germans – things were going badly.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And it was just about the end of the war. And as soon as – when the war was over, I had – the one thing I wanted more than anything else was to go somewhere, to do something. But you couldn't get out of the country. You couldn't go anywhere. And the first opportunity that opened up was to go to Sweden, go across the Sound there and go to Sweden. And there was a great need for people working. They were looking for people.

MR. BROWN: Sweden was beginning to boom?

MR. PRIP: Well, yeah, they had a pretty – their economy was – and the thing that really attracted me more than anything else was that you could get – you couldn't buy anything in Denmark at that time. You couldn't buy clothes. You couldn't buy any of the, you know – you couldn't buy any, you name it.

MR. BROWN: You really felt cooped up there.

MR. PRIP: Cooped up, and you couldn't get anything. So that's – so I – I can't remember whether I found it in a Swedish newspaper or whether I saw an ad in the Danish newspaper from a Swedish firm. They were looking – so I answered it. Well, to make a long story short, I went to Stockholm.

MR. BROWN: And you were working in a silversmith's shop?

MR. PRIP: Yes, for about a half a year. And I made enough money to buy some clothes and eat chocolate and drink coffee and cognac and enjoy a few things for a little while. And then I went back to Denmark.

MR. BROWN: Well, after your five-year apprenticeship, were you at what level?

MR. PRIP: Journeyman.

MR. BROWN: Journeyman?

MR. PRIP: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: Which meant you were qualified --

MR. PRIP: Well --

MR. BROWN: Or that other shops would – if they needed somebody?

MR. PRIP: Yes. I could go out. I could take a job.

MR. BROWN: They could assume you were competent?

MR. PRIP: Yes, um-hm. You have – that's sort of – when you enter into an apprenticeship arrangement – actually, I don't know how it is now. But at that time you signed a contract with the man. I signed a contract with Evald Neilsen.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: And it was – I found myself for five years – first, you have a six-month trial period, where he can – if he decides to – that you're not suitable, he can let you go. If you decide you don't like it or this is not the life for you, then you can leave at the end of six months.

And – but at the end of the – after the six-month period is up, you've signed a binding and, in my case, I'd signed a binding five-year contract, in which I obliged myself to stay with him for five years and to work for him during that period. He in turn was obliged to teach me – in other words, essentially, to teach me the trade, or teach me the skills and the art of the silversmith and not, you might say not shortchange me in any way.

And it seems rather obvious that that's the way it should be. But I mean, let's say that at the end of five years, that he had not – that they had spent – that they had let me run errands most of the time and do menial tasks and not – or used me in ways that might be improper.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: And then when it came time for me to execute my journeyman's piece, that it was considered like – it's like passing an exam – that I did not execute it properly and it was not acceptable by the board that passes in those days, I could turn – I could sue him. And by the terms of our contract, he would have to rehire – he would have to hire me for one additional year at journeyman's wages, keep me on for one additional year, and then I would have to – then I could redo my journeyman's piece on his time, and it would be resubmitted. And that he would, say, have to pay me at full salary, at a full journeyman's salary.

That would be to prevent what had happened in many instances, where they would hire an apprentice, just take on an apprentice and it would just be as cheap labor, not really bother teaching him anything.

MR. BROWN: But also, that year would give a chance – they could see maybe you just didn't have the ability. [Inaudible]

MR. PRIP: Well, that's, see – they have a half year to size you up when you first come. And then there are certain things in the contract that if you – I guess if you're really not performing well, they have – there are opportunities for them along the line where they could break off their agreement.

MR. BROWN: Other stages where they could.

MR. PRIP: But if they keep you for the full – allow the contract to run its course --

MR. BROWN: Yeah. That's presumably evidence that you're competent.

MR. PRIP: That you're competent and they have been – the fault lies with them for not teaching you.

MR. BROWN: But then, hopefully, if the assumption is you're competent if you're there five years --

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: -- what is the purpose of making the journeyman's piece?

MR. PRIP: Well, that's the proof. That's – in other words, they know it, but it's to prove – this is tangible proof of competence.

MR. BROWN: And did you – who set the journeyman's piece? Did you talk to this board or this guild or something?

MR. PRIP: Well, you submit. In this case, I submitted a drawing to the board. And there are people there from the guild and from the – and you submit a drawing and a proposal to them. And in my case, it was a drawing of a complete coffee service. However, I only made one piece. I made the coffeepot. It was rather complicated. It had – there was a fluted coffeepot and broken down into many pieces. There were certain technical aspects of this piece that made it rather complicated.

MR. BROWN: Would you strive to do a fairly complicated piece to show your ability?

MR. PRIP: Well, it didn't have to be a real show-off --

MR. BROWN: Didn't have to be a [inaudible] or anything? No?

MR. PRIP: No, not really. It just had to be a – it had to be a good piece. And it had to have certain, you know – not – obviously not real basic stuff. It had to be, you know, reasonably advanced.

MR. BROWN: And then --

MR. PRIP: And you had a certain amount of time in which – I mean, they – you would start on a certain day. And then the people would come by. I think they came by twice while I was making it, and viewed and sort of checked on me, just – you didn't know when they were coming. They would just walk in while you were doing it.

MR. BROWN: And you did this on your own time?

MR. PRIP: No. I mean, while I was working for him, I mean, for them.

MR. BROWN: And based on the quality of your journeyman's piece, would that give you – if yours was better than someone else's of that time, would this give you a leg up as a journeyman?

MR. PRIP: It – well, theoretically, but not really. I mean, people -- they didn't really – when you went out looking for a job, they didn't ask you what grade you received as a journeyman, for your journeyman's piece, nor did they ask you whether you got a medal or whether you received any honors for the way you got the silver medal and the Hertz scholarship or something like that.

I got, you know, the best, I guess you'd call it grade you could possibly receive and the highest honors. But no one ever checked on me to find out, no one ever checked to find out what I had received.

MR. BROWN: Oh, really? No?

MR. PRIP: No.

MR. BROWN: Do you think if it had been peacetime, they might have?

MR. PRIP: No, I don't think – no. No, I think they just – it's just – I mean, it's a relatively small community. In other words, there aren't that many places you can go looking for employment. So they get to know the people. So the word – it's much easier for them to call the person you worked for to check on, say, "How is So-and-so? Is he any good?"

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. PRIP: But I don't really care what kind of – you know, they're not really interested in the paper. They're interested in what you can do for them. So I think it's just something to make people try a little harder and work a little harder. And you know, it makes you feel good when you get it. And whether it has any real – it goes back in time, too. Things like that perhaps were a little more important. Today it doesn't mean a great deal.

MR. BROWN: No. Because much of this system has broken down since then?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, I think so.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. When you were ready to go on your own as a journeyman, did you think of yourself more as a worker who could adapt to a small workshop or work in a large place? Or did you to some degree think of yourself as an artist?

MR. PRIP: I thought of myself as a – at that point as a – well, I thought of myself as a silversmith. You mean, I mean that – as a person in possession of certain skills. And they are trade skills. So I mean, it depends on what you do with them. So I – up to that point, that's what I knew. That's what I had learned. I was a silversmith equipped to work within the trade, I mean, to work as a journeyman silversmith.

And I had certain design – I had a certain amount of interest in design. I had designed a certain amount. But I was – there was a real distinction and a real distinction between the – a designer and a – the craftsmen there at that time. There were very few people working as artist craftsmen. They usually had the designer, and then you had the craftsman, and a real separation between the two.

MR. BROWN: What would the background of the designer have been?

MR. PRIP: Oh, many more of them had trained as sculptors or were trained as architects. Many of them were architect trained. And people that were – it started just before the real breakout of the industrial designer, you know. This – that broke through there right after the war. So many of them were people that just had – were architects that established a working relationship with a company.

This was perhaps better known in the furniture industry. Men who were better known furniture designers were architects. But then some of them then in turn worked with some of the silver companies and designed for – and some of them were, just look at all the names, all the people that designed for places like Jenson. Only a few of them were silversmiths. Most of them were painters or people that were graphic designers or sculptors.

MR. BROWN: Did these cause problems for the silversmiths – translation?

MR. PRIP: No, because they didn't – it's no more so than a person – no, because the relationship, the association was rather intimate, you know. As they came, they didn't – it's not like getting a drawing in the mail, you know. They would come. They would usually bring these to the shop, and you would actually talk to the man himself. And he would come – he would visit the place.

MR. BROWN: So the designer would in time come to know what was possible in silver and what would look best in silver?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It was rather – it was a much more intimate relationship. Although they were paper designers, these people seemed to have more – had a rather intimate knowledge of materials or sort of attitude towards processes and material.

MR. BROWN: Did – in terms of prestige, did the designer stand higher than the maker?

MR. PRIP: Yes, I'd say so. It's just like – yeah, in general. It seems to be that way.

MR. BROWN: And it was then, as far as you can remember?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Yeah. You always get more for doing things with your – inside, with your head or with your hand than you do with the – the same relationship between the architect and the builder.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: And it didn't really – just, you know – again, you tend to accept the conditions of your whatever – the prevailing conditions. And that was fine, although I did have an interest in design and I thought that – and did consider doing other things. I was interested in attending the academy. They had the branch of the academy – well, studying sculpture, one of the things that I thought of doing. But I don't know whether I ever would have done it.

But what happened then – oh, I can't remember. I then had the opportunity to come over here.

MR. BROWN: By then you'd had several years as a journeyman?

MR. PRIP: Yes. And at that time – by then I was married. I had met my wife and married.

MR. BROWN: Was she also a designer and artist?

MR. PRIP: No. She had been working for an office; cargo work for a large department store.

MR. BROWN: Now, for how long would you have been a journeyman in Denmark?

MR. PRIP: Well, from 42 – how long?

MR. BROWN: For how long? You worked for three years, I guess. But in Denmark, until you could have your own workshop?

MR. PRIP: Well, no, actually, it's not – at one time there was a – you had to go through [inaudible] steps. You went from a journeyman to – and you had to make this masterpiece. You don't have to do that anymore. Now it's a – you complete your journeyman's piece and you could start off the next day, you could start your own business.

MR. BROWN: If you had the capital to start your own shop?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. However, most people – the attitude when I was in [inaudible] was that that would have been a very foolish thing to do because it's a – there was a certain attitude, I mean, that's widely held that you just didn't – although you learned a great deal as an apprentice, you really didn't – didn't really learn until you had finished your apprenticeship. I mean, that's when you gained, really gained your experience, when you went out and worked as a journeyman.

And my father would always encourage me to leave the place where I had served my apprenticeship, you know. Many apprentices felt very comfortable where they had served their apprenticeship, and they would stay on. But I always knew that as soon as I finished I would go to other places and try to work as many places as possible. Consequently, I felt I learned as much as possible, way more.

MR. BROWN: Is that why he encouraged you to --

MR. PRIP: Yes. He said, "Oh, by all means, you know, go out and work for other people. Work in other places. And see as much as you can, and learn as many different things as you can." And, you know, it's just a very practical thing. I mean, you are learning other people – you're learning from other people, you know. You are learning their methods. And once you start on your own, any mistakes you make are – you're pretty much stuck with them.

I mean, it's pretty much sort of a trade attitude, I guess you might say, you know. That was a traditional trade attitude. My father was the old school, you know. When he was finished his apprenticeship, the term "journeyman" really meant journeyman. When you were – journeyman means that you can travel. You get your journeyman's papers.

Now it still means the same thing, but it's not done as much by that. Until before World War I, you would take your journeyman's papers and you would go on what they called "on the waltz." Now, this was done down through Europe. People would pick up and they would go, they would travel. And they would honor a union card from practically any of the European countries. And if they didn't have work for you, they would usually give you a handout. They'd give you enough for a meal if they couldn't give you work.

MR. BROWN: Hm.

MR. PRIP: If the people at the company or the boss wouldn't, then the people working there would do it. The men working in the shop would give you enough to get you on to the next town or something, where they would tell you where you could go and get work. It was sort of the – you know, the fraternal order or something like that.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And that's what it meant. It really meant that. And people would – you could travel. And this was the way you'd travel with your trade. And you went from place to place, and people – there were at least a certain percentage, a certain number of the people that – there were others that finished their apprenticeship and just stayed where they were.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And that's where – these people were considered by probably the most, in many ways the most valuable because they usually went out, spent a few years doing that, or a number of – five years – and then would, in most instances, return to their native country.

MR. BROWN: To their native country.

MR. PRIP: But they came back with the knowledge they had acquired while traveling. It's the same as the sailor that goes out, travels around the world, sees the world, comes back. But there's knowledge. You went out and you traveled, and you worked in other places, other countries, and saw new and different, and, you know – had learned things. And then you came back with this knowledge.

MR. BROWN: Was there a – would you contract with a master or the foreman, the owner of a workshop, as a journeyman?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. You'd – usually it wasn't as formal as that. If they had work, they'd just say, "Yeah, we have work," and you'd go to work, you know.

MR. BROWN: Now, what would basically the difference be for what you would have done, say, in your last year as an apprentice? How is it different?

MR. PRIP: Not that much difference, not that much difference, other than they expected a little more of you. While as an apprentice, you would be doing – well, the attitude was in many ways similar to that of a teacher and a student. In other words, they were very aware of my position as an apprentice.

And again, I have to point out that I was fortunate and I was – well, that I worked with people that were as considerate as they were. So I would finish a piece, and I would bring it in, and I would show it to the shop boss. And he would look at it and he would say, "Oh, that's fine." And he would comment on it and sort of give me what amounted to a form of critic, you know, tell me what was good, what was bad, and what I should concentrate on improving.

And then they kept a little card in there. And he'd say, "Well, let's see. What have you done? You haven't done this, or you haven't done that. How would you like to try this?" I'd say, "Sure, I haven't done that. I'd like to do it." Or perhaps I could tell him at that point, I'd say, "I've never made – I've never done any case work or anything. I haven't made any cases. Could I try that?" He'd say, "Sure." And then --

MR. BROWN: And when he asked you, "How would you like to do this?" it was almost – he was suggesting strongly?

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: He was the boss.

MR. PRIP: He was the boss. And then one time I had to – I was interested in making some trays and doing some tray work. And we didn't do a great deal of that in our shop. We had – there was one man working on the outside that did most of our large trays and platters and things. And it was sort of rather tricky work. And they asked me, how would I like to go over and sit and work in his shop for a while? So they sent me over to work with him for two or three – a couple of months.

So I spent several months working in his shop. And he would just – he was working all by himself in a very small, dingy shop. I didn't enjoy it all that much.

MR. BROWN: Did – well, now, as a journeyman, you would be given a task to do, and you were expected to carry it through?

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: There wasn't somebody coming around [inaudible]?

MR. PRIP: No. People weren't all that considerate of you, you know. In other words, a journeyman, you're paying the salary, and you're paying him more so you don't have to – well, the different – an apprentice, you're not paying him all that much.

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. PRIP: So you can give him an assignment, a project – it doesn't really matter how long it takes. You're not losing anything on him. So you can afford to teach it as a – you can afford to treat it as a teaching process, you know. When you give someone a job and you're paying them a certain – you know, a decent hourly wage, then you expect them to complete it within a certain time.

MR. BROWN: Did you take to that okay, the pressures of being a journeyman?

MR. PRIP: Oh, yeah. There was no real problem. I stayed on for a little while for the same place as a journeyman, but only a short period – several months.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Now, speaking of the journeyman traveling, when you went to Sweden, were your credentials accepted?

MR. PRIP: Oh, yeah, sure.

MR. BROWN: I mean, you fit right in?

MR. PRIP: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: And then you came back – you were three years or so, almost or so a journeyman after the war?

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did you come back to Denmark?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. I went back and finally, I ended up working in the same place where I served my apprenticeship. I went back there. And I became restless, and I told them I'd decided I didn't want to stay there. I was going to go out and work for my father. So they --

MR. BROWN: Work for your father?

MR. PRIP: For my father. And he wanted me to come out. So finally, they talked – they said, "Well, what would you want to, you know" – not that they had to make any kind of a big deal proposition. But they said, "Well, what would you want?" And I said, "Well, I'd like to do, you know – if I go out there, I can design my own things. And I can" – and in the meanwhile, I'd become interested in doing some smaller things, working in gold and doing some other things.

I told that to the man that was the shop boss. I told him that in the morning. And I said, "I think maybe the end of the week, I'll leave." So they – this old man Evald Nielsen came over that afternoon. I saw him. He was talking to the man in there in the shop. And they were sitting in the office talking. And then they – he had been in there for a while, half an hour, then an hour, something like that. He didn't say. And then he came back the next day. They didn't say anything to me.

And then he called me into the office. And I guess – I don't know what, he had been to – he had been somewhere to pick up some things. He had brought in a leather bag with him. And he called me into the office, and he said – he took – but he had a leather bag there, and he turned it upside down. And a couple of big gold bars fell out on the table. And then he had some packets of stones. He said, "Do you like these?" And he started packing, then unpacking them and there were all kinds of nice stones. You know, not diamonds – I mean, like –

MR. BROWN: Gemstones?

MR. PRIP: -- nice gemstones, good quality things. He said, "Now, you said you wanted to leave because you could go out and you could do all this work in gold and you could work with nice stones and things like that." I mean, they normally did work like that there, too. But he said – he put it all on this tray. He said, "Here. You go out and you can do whatever you want to do here."

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: [Laughter] So I thought that that was so – you know, that was so – they had never done anything like that before in the place. So I just didn't see how I could leave, you know. I realized that was such a gesture on his part to do that that I couldn't very well – I would really have offended him if I had turned him down. So I accepted it as a sort of a real – you know, in the spirit in which he was really offering me something which he considered rather – you know, very unusual. So I said yeah. I thanked him. And I said, yes, I would stay for a while. And then I didn't know how just [inaudible] and I went out. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: Were you able to design then?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Well, I had started doing some things. I started making some things and doing some things. And I made up some – I took some – I found some old plaster models they had tucked away of some pieces that they had made years before. And I thought it might be nice to redo --

MR. BROWN: Plaster models, huh?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. They took impressions of some of the old pieces and remade them. So I took some of those pieces out. And I remade or restructured some of those and fit them. And I made some pieces. And they were really quite pleased with the things I did.

MR. BROWN: Now, would things like that then be put into the department store?

MR. PRIP: Well, no. This was a store. It was just a jewelry – it was a --

MR. BROWN: Put into the jewelry store?

MR. PRIP: It was a jewelry store. It was just a – just carried the gold and silver items that were made in this.

MR. BROWN: In this, the fact that your father had his own shop and all, did other journeymen resent that at all, the fact they knew you'd – if you were to go to your father's shop, you might eventually succeed him?

MR. PRIP: No. I don't know. They – sometimes they would make little cracks about it or something like that, but not really, you know. No, I think – because they certainly didn't make any – there was no difference in how I was treated. And I had to work and do all the things that they did. No, I got along very well with them.

MR. BROWN: Did you in fact then later go to your father's?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. That turned out – that was a disaster.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you mean the whole system?

MR. PRIP: No, just working for my father turned out to be somewhat – you know.

MR. BROWN: He was extremely demanding or --

MR. PRIP: Just very demanding. And not – he was demanding without really knowing – I should say without really demanding much of me, in a way, just sort of – I had to go back. And I had to do everything the hard way. I had to do all the menial chores around the place. And the way it turned out, more than anything else, it was just extremely boring. I was just bored to tears while I was working there. I was doing all this horrible stuff. I just – it was just dreadful.

MR. BROWN: Do you not – do you think he had any reason for it?

MR. PRIP: Oh, he just wanted to prove, I think, to people that his son –

[END OF DISK ONE]

MR. BROWN: Side two. We were talking about your time with your father. How long were you at your father's place?

MR. PRIP: Oh, I think I worked for him about a year. And I mentioned to you it was rather boring.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Do you think he was apt to be more severe with you than with others?

MR. PRIP: Probably. He was always thinking of things we could do, or he was going to do, but somehow never quite got around to it. And see, my father was doing a much – well, I should have said the quality was on a somewhat lower level, the quality of work they were turning out. And he always – he kept thinking that someday they would get around to doing some other things. And he wanted me to get – become involved in that. But the time was never right, you know? In the meanwhile --

MR. BROWN: Meaning more production work?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, very – yeah, doing very inexpensive things and production. And so I was prepared to be, you know, patient and sit out for a while and wait until we could get around to doing some other things. But it just – after working with him for a while, I had a feeling that it would never happen, that he was well intentioned, but somehow it just – somehow it might just never happen.

MR. BROWN: Was he a man that got involved in lots of different things?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. He was always involved in other things. And whenever I talked to him about it, he would say, "Oh, yeah, well, I don't have time to discuss it now. Let's talk about it later." So I realized his "later" might be five years from now or ten years from now. So I just decided – well, actually, I didn't make it. The decision was almost made for me. I heard about a job opening in the United States. And I, it came indirect. Someone else told me about it. And I pursued that and learned about this position at the School for American Craftsmen, Alfred, New York.

MR. BROWN: Hm. Had you heard of that through somebody in Denmark?

MR. PRIP: Yes. Someone had – they had written several letters to people over there. And one of the people told me about it. And this was Mrs. Webb – had made the contact. They were looking for a silversmith. And then there was a little P.S. on the back of the thing, saying that perhaps they might also need a woodworker

sometime in the future. I mentioned that to Tage Frid.

MR. BROWN: Now, was he someone you knew then?

MR. PRIP: Yes. Our families had known each other for a number of – goes back quite a while. His father served as apprentice with my grandfather – his apprenticeship with my grandfather. My father had turned – worked with his father under Frid's father. And sort of a strange thing in life – Frid's – Tage's father was working in my father's company for a while. So we knew each other very – you know, quite well.

When my parents would travel when I was quite young, would go away for a while, I would stay with his parents. So at any rate, I told him about this. And he said, "Oh, that's great." So we got a letter off. And he applied for the job, and they answered him very – I think within a few weeks, he – I can no longer recall the details, but he had the job.

But I heard – I didn't hear a thing. I didn't hear anything. I finally heard that someone else had the job. And, oh, a few weeks later, someone called me, told me, no, that was not true. They were still interested in me. Would I care to meet with – oh, I can't remember, a Captain something or other? He was in the military – person, military man, a captain in the army.

MR. BROWN: An American?

MR. PRIP: Well, he was a Dane, I believe, who served in the American --

MR. BROWN: But this was your contact that Mrs. Webb had?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, Mrs. Webb had made. And I guess she thought that, rather than hire someone just cold, you know, without knowing – and she, I guess, found that he was going to Denmark, Copenhagen. And she asked him to look up these people. And so he came. I met with him. I had lunch with him in a restaurant in Copenhagen. And we had just a pleasant meeting. And I can't remember what I – he told me that he – he said, "Well, I think you have the job." And then a few days later, I had a telegram from Mrs. Webb.

I think the day it came – well, I can't remember whether it was then or earlier. But we just had a baby. And the baby was about six – four hours old or something like that, Peter, our son. I went in and I told Karen. I said, "Okay, I'm taking off. I'm going to the United States." [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: [Laughter] What was her reaction to that?

MR. PRIP: Well, she was --

MR. BROWN: Was she interested in the possibility?

MR. PRIP: Well, yeah, but I was going alone. I couldn't take her with me at the time. There were all kinds of problems traveling at the time. You couldn't get – but at any rate, we came over. Frid and I traveled together. We came.

MR. BROWN: You quit – you willingly left your father's?

MR. PRIP: Yes, when I had the – when this thing opened up, I made the decision. Well, of course, see, I had lived here as a child.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: I grew up --

MR. BROWN: Through your mother's family, were there [inaudible] at least letters and contacts?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, we had some contacts, yeah, and some family. And I had – well, I had left here at the age of 10 and went, you know, to Denmark to live. I still had this sort of feeling – I wasn't quite sure whether I was American or Danish or sort of just – oh, I still had a real curiosity in me about, you know, the country where I'd lived when I was a child. At that time, I was 26 years old and had a desire to come back and see it again.

And so I took this as a real – I really welcomed this opportunity to come back. And there's a much greater, I think, desire on the part of most people living in Europe, and especially in small countries, to travel. It's a real sort of pent-up urge to get out, you know, and to go, to travel because it's hard not to have a – to feel confined if you're living in – especially during and after the war, when all your travel possibilities were pretty much cut off, you know, and eliminated.

So there's really an urge to get out and to – just to go somewhere, you know, to get out of the – when you live in a country that, you know, you can travel from one end of the country to the other in a good, you know, couple of hours, two or three hours – it's like living in New Jersey or something like that.

MR. BROWN: Hm. Did you – how are the people from the School for American Craftsmen, describe what they needed? And the captain you met with, did they --

MR. PRIP: I no longer recall the – they just said they're looking for --

MR. BROWN: A teacher?

MR. PRIP: A silversmith, that can teach silversmithing to our beginning and advanced --

MR. BROWN: But that was only part of the attraction. The rest was simply the desire to travel, to get over --

MR. PRIP: Oh, I'm sure that was an excuse to travel, yeah. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: [Laughter] When did you and Frid leave Denmark for here?

MR. PRIP: I think it was the – May of 1948. And I came for two years. That was my original plan. I told my father I would go for two years and then we'd come back.

MR. BROWN: How did he feel about it?

MR. PRIP: Well, I'm sure he would much rather have seen me stay there and work. But he was pretty – you know, they were rather understanding.

MR. BROWN: So you came – how did you get here?

MR. PRIP: We came on the Swedish line, on a boat, on the Stockholm. Had a good time and went over. Had a great time. Perhaps that's why I collect ocean liners. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: Well, actually, that's probably been part of our family for years. I traveled – went across on an ocean liner when I was 10 and came back when I was 26. And the meanwhile, just our family members have been going back and forth on various ocean liners as long as I can remember, you know? So I've had sort of an awareness of them.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter] So the two of you were both pretty high spirited?

MR. PRIP: What?

MR. BROWN: You and Frid were both pretty high spirited?

MR. PRIP: Well, we enjoyed life. We had fun coming over.

MR. BROWN: What was your appointment? Was it to start right away? Or what did you do?

MR. PRIP: No, really not – there was summer school going on for a short period. And we were more or less observers. And we came to Alfred. And Alfred is a small town, let me tell you.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: And it becomes even smaller when the student population leaves there. And during the month of August and until school starts up again in September, it is really small, like I mean a pool hall and a drug store, you know?

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: And Copenhagen is a rather – is a good-sized city, you know? And rather active and lively. So we really found ourselves somewhat rather in an isolated situation there. The only thing we could think to – we could do was work. And we worked – we got this sort of really weird pattern. We would – we just, I guess you'd say, eat when we were hungry, you know, and sleep when we were tired, get up when we felt like it. And we were sort of having – eating breakfast at four o'clock in the afternoon, going back, having lunch at 12 o'clock at night, things like that, you know.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. PRIP: And then going to work at one o'clock in the morning and just – it just was really strange what happened to us.

MR. BROWN: It was probably a kind of freedom you'd never known, huh?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. It was just – we just – I guess it was probably the day was sort of – it would just sort of offset our schedule, probably, and just push it another half-hour, or an hour, every day, you know. We'd just work an hour longer or something like that so it would – eight to four would become nine to five. And then it would become ten to six, and then it would become eleven to seven. [Laughter] Without knowing it, just --

MR. BROWN: Were you set up nicely there? Did you have good facilities?

MR. PRIP: We had – we just had a small – we had a room.

MR. BROWN: But I mean, the work facilities were --

MR. PRIP: Oh, the work facilities were excellent, were okay.

MR. BROWN: And were you brought in to help set up these departments?

MR. PRIP: No. The departments were set up. Well, hopefully, we could help them – we could improve on that situation. But it was an interesting period because it was right – shortly – this was still – although this was in 48, it was still considered the post-war era. And they were still getting quite large numbers of GIs. I'd say that 90 percent of students I was working with were GIs. And they were interesting, you know, lively people, interesting people to work with . Most of them were older than I was.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I was going to say. Now, were they there to try to learn a trade?

MR. PRIP: Well, they were there, and it was called a way of life at the time, you know. And they didn't think of it as much as a trade. It was a craftsmanship as – the director of the school, just before I came – when I came, Hal Brennan, you met – do you know Hal Brennan?

MR. BROWN: Hm-mm.

MR. PRIP: He came in just about the same – he came at the same time I came, just the same time. But before that, they had a woman named Francis Wright Caroe who was the daughter of Frank Lloyd Wright and then became the director of America House in New York. And she referred to it as craftsmanship as a way of life, you know. In other words, you didn't – you would never become rich or wealthy, she told them, you know, but you would enjoy – you would be – you would have an interesting, stimulating, satisfying way of life, hopefully. Either that or you'd starve to death, whichever came first. [Laughter] No, I mean I just --

MR. BROWN: This must have struck you and Frid as odd, after your tightly knit system in Europe.

MR. PRIP: Well, somewhat odd. But we were – Hal was open to many things. Probably one of the nicest times in my life, one of the most sort of – because I was – I guess I must have been open. Frid was also open. I was – I came as a teacher, but I was also a student, in a way. I was still young enough. And there was rather an experiment, an air, or an attitude of optimism and sort of a great interest in sort of experiment within the entire school. And that just – that was just great. I just felt completely at home.

And I guess you might say it was sort of an exchange, in a way. I gave them technical information in exchange for an exchange of ideas and environment, which I found rather challenging and stimulating. And since we were quite close in age – or if anything, some of them were older – quite a few of them were older than I was – it just – I just went right to work and just found that there were certain things that I wanted to do. And some of them, I perhaps had not even known that I wanted to do. But they were just sitting there. And this gave me complete liberty and freedom to do pretty much what I wanted to do.

MR. BROWN: What were some of those things? Do you remember?

MR. PRIP: Well, I mean, you know, just attitudes, just – well, to develop certain attitudes towards design and work and just feel completely free to do what I wanted to do and pursue my own inclinations and ideas, you know, without having – which is without having to consider the financial ramifications, which is – that's quite a luxury in a way.

MR. BROWN: These things were provided to you then? You didn't have to buy materials or tools?

MR. PRIP: Didn't have to buy materials, didn't have – they paid me. I was not making a great deal of money, but I was making enough to – so that my wife came over and Peter, my son, came over. We could live, you know,

get by. And all I had to do was work 20 hours a day. [Laughter] Or not quite, but you know.

MR. BROWN: You didn't have to; I mean, you chose to?

MR. PRIP: No, I didn't have to. But I chose to work long hours and just enjoyed it.

MR. BROWN: But did you – when you started teaching, was there a senior silversmith there who was the --

MR. PRIP: There was an older man teaching there at the time. He would – and very interesting man, nice man named Charles Reese who had worked with a man named Eichner who came out of – somebody who had a workshop, a Danish man. I guess that's why they decided to get a Dane. They – Eichner was a Dane who was a friend of Mrs. Webb's. He had a shop in Bloomington, I think, Bloomington, New Jersey. And he was sort of really a gifted man in many ways. He was an engineer, a craftsman. He had considerable knowledge of astronomy.

He had worked with the Museum of Natural History. They had just – they had had a show on Galileo, I believe, and Tycho Brahe, the astronomer. And they wanted to reconstruct the early, the instruments that they had designed and constructed. And they couldn't find anyone that could – that had this sort of combination of knowledge, willing to do it. But he took on this project.

I don't know just how much, really, but he did quite a bit of it. He reconstructed some of the early – by the way, what do you call them?

MR. BROWN: Astronomical instruments?

MR. PRIP: Astronomical instruments for them.

MR. BROWN: And Reese had been his student?

MR. PRIP: And Reese had been – no, not his student. He was older than – he was quite – Reese was one of these real American sort of individuals, a man who had started – had done just a little bit of everything in his life, worked as an architectural draftsman. He was a professional musician by trade. He had worked – he had been with the Detroit Symphony and the Toronto Symphony. He was a violinist.

And then during the Depression, things were really – I don't know where he – how he got together with Eichner, but he went to work with Eichner. And he'd always been building things, making things, building violins and making – all his life. But he was just an exceptional man, just one of these just – he'd read just about everything you could think of.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. PRIP: And just, he had an exceptional knowledge, of course of music and all things.

MR. BROWN: Did you work well with him?

MR. PRIP: Oh, yes. We became very good friends. And he just – and at that time, our second child was born. And he just – he was very fond of the children, used to come to our home often. Yeah. And he was just an unusual man. At that time, he was probably – he was pushing 70. But these, most of them were Gis you know, and they would be – Alfred was a dry town. You know, you couldn't get anything to drink. But there was a town about six miles down the road called Alfred Station, had a tavern and bar, the Can't You Come Inn.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: [Laughter] If you can believe that. And it would occur to some of them – usually around – they'd be working until 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock at night – that they had to go down the road down to Maw's and the Can't You Come Inn.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: And Reese would often be in bed at that time. He'd go to bed early. They'd say, "Let's go up and get Charlie. Let's go up and get Pops," you know? They would go up, banging his door. It would usually take him about five minutes to get dressed, and he'd be down at the car, and then he'd be right – he'd always be ready to go down the road with the boys, you know.

MR. BROWN: Now, you're teaching there. Did you try to set it up kind of the way it had been in the Neilsen workshop?

MR. PRIP: Well, only – hoping only certain --

MR. BROWN: Because you hadn't any instruction, pedagogy or anything [inaudible]?

MR. PRIP: No, no. I approached it in a very – I was very careful. And I tried to be as diplomatic as I could be. And I realized that – I was the observer for a while. I didn't say too much or do too much [inaudible]. I gave advice when people asked me for it, and then I just sat down. I started working and doing some work, doing all the work.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: And just a slow thing. I made what I consider to be a few improvements in the workshop, just where – things that seemed to be rather obvious. There had been another man teaching before I came, the second person in the department, a man named Phillip Martin. And he was a man trained as an engineer, I believe, but self-taught in the area of jewelry and metals, I think, a very, very bright, very ingenious man.

MR. BROWN: But he had left to go somewhere?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. He left about eight – his ideas about, you know, jewelry and metalsmithing were slightly different than what I had been taught [inaudible]. His influence was so very strong. So I had – I really had no feelings about any of that. I was really – more than anything, I was just curious. I wanted to learn. I learned as much – I just looked, observed, and I just – I was just, just very --

MR. BROWN: Well, were these – you knew, though, that they weren't going to be trained as long and as carefully as you were?

MR. PRIP: That's right, yeah. I also knew that they were --

MR. BROWN: So did that bother you? The short time.

MR. PRIP: No. It didn't because it also – I discovered that there was an awful lot you could do with a person, somewhat, in this case, somewhat old or perhaps somewhat more motivated than the average apprentice in the European system. And they were working harder, and the conditions were different, and it was just a different thing.

MR. BROWN: Were they moving along? Was their quality fairly good?

MR. PRIP: We – some of them produced amazing work within the – at that time, it was only a two-year course. And within two years, some of them – some of them really came in as really as gifted, you might say, mechanics or gifted craftsman. They had already done work in other fields in other areas. They were really quite gifted. So it was more a question of transferring skills.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm, um-hm.

MR. PRIP: And they really went at it. They attacked it with a real – with so much energy that it – they just went quite far in a short time.

MR. BROWN: You would let them go ahead and do complete pieces earlier than you were allowed to?

MR. PRIP: Oh, yes. They could just advance at their own speed.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: There was no set curriculum or anything.

MR. BROWN: What about design? What kind of things?

MR. PRIP: They would design. Well, it was --

MR. BROWN: Typically, they would design?

MR. PRIP: They would design pieces. And they would – they had – see, the school had a – it was a small, self-contained school. They had four departments. There was metal, clay, fabric, and wood. And we had a design department. The students would --

MR. BROWN: So you had five departments. They had four --

MR. PRIP: Well, we had five departments. Yes, that's true. Four, I guess you would say four major

departments. And then one was in the sense of support department, which supported all areas, which was the – they all took – participated in the design department.

And then since we were in Alfred, and Alfred University, people when they took various courses at the university, they had to take their art history and --

MR. BROWN: Oh, I see. It was a conventional engineering school or liberal arts school?

MR. PRIP: Well, it's a state university at Alfred. And they had – the New York State College of Ceramics is located.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. Now, that's more geared toward industry, isn't it?

MR. PRIP: Well, it's both. They have both. They have – they teach – you can become a ceramic engineer or you can become an art ceramist.

MR. BROWN: What did – how did you work with the dean or director, Brennan, of the school?

MR. PRIP: He was – it was so easy because the place was completely informal. It was just one of the delightful --

MR. BROWN: He was, too, huh?

MR. PRIP: Yes. It was just a delightful place, you know. The school was in an old barn, or an old carriage house, I should say, converted carriage house surrounded by a nice garden and just a friendly, nice place to be in.

MR. BROWN: Did Mrs. Webb come out? Did she take an active interest?

MR. PRIP: Yes, she did. She would come sit – or I can't remember. I would say she would come an average of every two or three months.

MR. BROWN: She took quite an interest?

MR. PRIP: Yes, she did. She was very much interested. All the time I was at the school there, and even after we moved to Rochester, went to school – the school moved to Rochester in 1950, became part of the Rochester Institute of Technology – she maintained, she kept up her interest and would visit quite frequently.

MR. BROWN: Her role was sort of as a philanthropist? That's what was – you knew that? I mean --

MR. PRIP: Yes. I think it was pretty much known.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: But also, sort of a – she did play a guiding – I mean, she was – I think people knew that she had – it was a lot more than a passive role. I mean --

MR. BROWN: Sure. Sure.

MR. PRIP: But she was quite knowledgeable, I mean, in the field. And she would spend a lot of time and she knew a lot of people. And she was really interested and always a very pleasant person to deal with, very nice and very --

MR. BROWN: Were the heads or at least some of the people in each department – a good many of them were Europeans, weren't they? During that time, they were bringing in --

MR. PRIP: Well, when I first came, Frid and – Tage Frid and I were the only Europeans.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And then later – for a while there – for a while, in Rochester, there were more. There was – Frans Wildenhain was there. And they had a weaving instructor from Sweden, and then they had one from Norway. And then they would change over. They had people coming over from England. And for a while, I think there was a guy from Holland. That was after I left.

MR. BROWN: But you felt no tension between the Americans and you Europeans?

MR. PRIP: No. Not really – at least I wasn't aware of it. [Laughter] They may – perhaps they felt there was. But I never thought about it.

MR. BROWN: Well, you began exhibiting in America in 49. At least you sent something. You were doing things on your own?

MR. PRIP: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: After hours, so to speak? Or in fact, were you spending more – I suppose more time working on your own things than you were in actual teaching time, right?

MR. PRIP: Again, it was hard to make a distinction. I just went in there and, you know, I just worked all the time. And then stop my work and work with the students. And then I would – when there was nothing to do with the students, I would go back to my work. And I would work pretty much, you know, Saturdays and Sundays. I would just be there practically all the time and work.

FEMALE VOICE: That's right.

MR. PRIP: [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: Did you find that you were developing new forms or things that were different from what you'd done in Denmark?

MR. PRIP: Oh, yes, definitely.

MR. BROWN: When you went back, was there a change occurring?

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: In what direction? Can you generalize?

MR. PRIP: Well, oh, I guess the first few things I did, I attempted pretty much two things that were like, of the things I'd been doing in the past or the things that I was familiar with. But then I think it – probably I'd say it was just sort of a two-way deal. And I influenced the students to a certain extent, but I found myself being influenced by the work the students were doing and felt that the influence grew out of my – in a way, my work with the students and my exchange with the students.

And had I been – you know, had I been older and completely established as a designer, that – perhaps that would not have been the case. I don't know. That might not have been the case. But in my instance – in my case --

MR. BROWN: You were quite influenced by their [inaudible]?

MR. PRIP: Well, as I said, I was more influenced by the attitude, by the environment. Just to reach in, you know, and see what was there.

MR. BROWN: That was what the environment was?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. And also, it was very nice because we had – I had never had the opportunity to work close with other people in other areas. In other words, all I had to do was walk next door, and we had the ceramic workshops there, people working in clay. I could walk upstairs and there was the textile work, department.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: And the woodshop was in a different area, but I would visit that quite frequently. And there was just – I found it to be somewhat more stimulating than the environment I had been in before.

MR. BROWN: Well, after two years you didn't really feel like going back?

MR. PRIP: No. I think – I just didn't feel like going back. I don't know, it just – you know, let's stay for a little while longer. Let's stay for a little while longer. And then we received a notice that our visa had run out, had expired. And we tried to get a – they tried, or we tried; Mrs. Webb tried to get a little – an act – it was literally an Act of Congress. And it didn't work. We couldn't get it through or they couldn't get it through at the time.

So we tried all kinds of other – well, finally, we found a very influential man in Rochester, a lawyer named Frances Diamond [phonetic], who had been in the foreign service for a number of years and knew the – knew how to work that quite well. And one fine morning – I think it was in December, I can't remember, or November – we got up and we took a trip to Niagara Falls. And we came back in as – we came back in that evening, we were legal.

MR. BROWN: Hm. You had a new visa?

MR. PRIP: We had a new visa, yeah. We had a permanent visa.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: It was a little – I actually felt rather guilty about the whole thing.

FEMALE VOICE: No, you didn't.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: [Laughter] I probably shouldn't put this on tape.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

FEMALE VOICE: You'll get Christmas cards [inaudible].

MR. PRIP: Yeah. And then actually, we had then – we had – that was for – Tage and I went together. We did this together. We had a great deal of support from the Institute of Technology up there from all the people. And Diamond was the man who put this together and took the time off and did this for us. He was very helpful.

And – but at any rate, as we went there, came back again. And how –

FEMALE VOICE: You still had foreign wives.

MR. PRIP: We still had wives that were in trouble. We couldn't ship them off. But how much later did we go?

FEMALE VOICE: Peter and I got ours, I think the following year.

MR. PRIP: The following year?

FEMALE VOICE: But we had to go all the way to Toronto.

MR. BROWN: Huh. So this was a problem? It wasn't just a routine thing.

FEMALE VOICE: No.

MR. BROWN: You had to get this specially arranged, this sort of thing?

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

FEMALE VOICE: He did the same thing for us.

MR. BROWN: You stayed with the school then until 54, roughly, did you?

MR. PRIP: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And you went up to Rochester. Was that quite a change? It must have been from being in little Alfred.

MR. PRIP: It was. It was quite a change. But the decision had been made to move the school to Rochester. And there was a lot of work moving, going up there, moving the place and getting it ready.

MR. BROWN: Were you involved in the decision at all? I mean, were you --

MR. PRIP: No, not the decision. The decision was made, you know, without us. It was just announced to us that the school would move up there. And I think a few people decided not to go. And most of the people just decided to move with the school. Well, again, at that particular time – that was just one more exit from – as far as we were concerned, that was just another experience, something to do and something to try, you know?

MR. BROWN: Did you feel it worked out better or as well?

MR. PRIP: Oh, I don't know whether it worked out better. It probably – the beginning, in the beginning it was fine. It was good. It worked out rather well. I think that – my personal opinion is that, you know, there is sort of an ideal size for an institution or an organization. And probably, the School for American Craftsmen reached that while it was – when it was – oh, in the early years in Rochester. And then I'm not sure that it improved after that point, you know? But that's my feeling about it. Now, other people may feel that it did indeed improve, that it's

still improving, getting better every year. But I don't really think so.

MR. BROWN: Do you feel that it's a question of size?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, a question of size and sort of the – there's a certain energy in the dynamics of the place that's sort of built into a place. Usually – oh, I don't know what it is. It's hard. You just – very often, you look back on a place or an organization and you'd say, "Now, they were" – you know. You look back on the fine years, on the best years of it, or a person's life for that matter. And how would you say this? There are certain years, I think, that were better than others. Things came together the right way, the right people, the right location, the right spirit. Everything seemed to be in the peak.

MR. BROWN: Maybe – can you for a minute maybe talk about some of those people that you think, and how they worked together?

MR. PRIP: Well --

MR. BROWN: Take Brannon. What was his contribution?

MR. PRIP: Brannon was a – Brannon was – he was a good, friendly – and always friendly and understanding administrator, helpful man. I think sometimes people expected of him that he should act in a somewhat more forceful manner, be somewhat more aggressive or dynamic, you know, as a leader of the school. But he was more the diplomat and found himself sort of caught very often between Mrs. Webb, I think, and the director – or the president of the Institute, Mark Ellington.

So he had – I think he did very well. He did an excellent job. And he left people – really left people pretty much alone. He didn't interfere with the activities. And as I said, he was understanding and sympathetic towards the whole idea of the place and managed to, I think, bring a rather good group of people together.

MR. BROWN: How about the early 50s, who were you [inaudible]?

MR. PRIP: Well, there was – you know, in our area there had been Charles Reese. I've already mentioned him. And then when he left, he reached – well, he had already passed retirement age. When we got to the RIT, the Rochester Institute of Technology, they were a little more stiff about things like retirement and things. So he – it was – he was sort of – they let him know that he should retire.

And we brought in another man named Lawrence Copeland. Larry Copeland had been at Cranbrook. And we worked together there for several years. And very compatible, worked out very well. And the department was not large at that time. We had at most 10 students.

MR. BROWN: And that's the way it had been in Alfred, too, small number of students?

MR. PRIP: No, I think we had more for a while in Alfred. I can't remember.

MR. BROWN: That meant there could be quite a lot of direct supervision, couldn't there?

MR. PRIP: Well, what happened – yeah, what happened, though, was that they – it was a real change. The GIs tapered off. We went from the GIs to the – started getting the high school. And that was a real change.

MR. BROWN: I'll bet it was.

MR. PRIP: That was in the early 50s.

MR. BROWN: Did you find it took a lot more patient babysitting and slower --

MR. PRIP: Yeah, just the difference in attitude. You were – with the one group, it was like – well, especially for someone like myself who had never really – had not been trained as a teacher. I just thought, well, that's the way students are. They're all, you know, [inaudible]. They come in and they want to work. They just come in, they're rather motivated and determined. And then you find that that's not always the case.

MR. BROWN: With the younger ones?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. So I had second thoughts about teaching. That's why I finally – I left in 19 --

MR. BROWN: Fifty-four.

MR. PRIP: Fifty-four, um-hm.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: But Frans Wildenhain came in at that time. [Inaudible] was – well, there was another man, Owen Russem [phonetic] was teaching ceramics, was teaching ceramics with Frans. Owen was from – Russem was from California. He had moved up with the school from Alfred. I believe he's down somewhere around Maryland now, somewhere around Baltimore.

And then in the woodshop, in the furniture design program, there was Tage Frid with a man named Ernest Brace.

MR. BROWN: And Brace had been there before Frid came?

MR. PRIP: Yes. He was the only one that had been part of the original program when it was the Hanover Workshop.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: At Dartmouth.

MR. BROWN: In Dartmouth.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. He was the only one that had been part of that. And Ernest – Ernie Brace was – I don't really know where he learned to do his woodworking. He had written a book about woodworking and had done woodworking for a number of years and designed interiors. But he was – spent more time writing, just as a writer of fiction. He was – and had several published novels. So he was – I don't know how much of a reputation he had. But he had, you know, lived in Paris and with other – knew a lot of writers. Actually, I just thought of him as a writer, probably, as much as the woodwork. And his brother was the publishing firm Harcourt Brace, the Brace in that.

And let's see. And then Fred Myers taught the design program. He was a painter and at that time quite successful. He showed in New York at the Midtown Galleries and, I guess, has become increasingly successful. He's now head of the – they've now joined with the – they had a design – they had a regular design department, more commercial design at RIT.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. And he joined that?

MR. PRIP: And now we have – the School for American Craftsmen and their regular design department have joined. So they had to have a rather large art department. And he's head of the painting department there.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm, um-hm. So have you – you, though, gradually became a little tired of teaching?

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: You've mentioned also – maybe you didn't – it didn't arise at that time. But over here, those who thought of themselves – they wanted to be thought of as artists rather than simply pursuing a trade? Or had that not really – that attitude – that split in attitudes had not emerged?

MR. PRIP: Well --

MR. BROWN: What were these younger students like? Were they --

MR. PRIP: Well, here it's – I guess you have, in a way, a choice. You have a certain set of skills, a certain skill with which you can do any number of things. You can take these skills and become a designer or you can go into industry. You can become a technician. You can choose to enter sales if you wish to or administration, become an administrator, I don't know.

But it's – essentially, you have to think of them as sort of trade skills. It's a trade. And they're the skills of the goldsmith, the silversmith, and the – whereas most people entering school today immediately, as soon as they've made the smallest object, think of themselves as – they do not think of it as acquiring trade skills. They think of it as acquiring the skills of an artist. They think that they are immediately – that they are an artist.

MR. BROWN: And that was true in the early 50s?

MR. PRIP: I think so. I think that most of them entered it with that in mind. In other words, many people became silversmiths in the past. The same is true today. If you can walk into one of the large silver companies, people have the same attitude. You can be a silversmith. The same attitudes that a baker or a butcher or a bricklayer would have, you know. These are trade skills.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But on the other hand, there were others here in America that began thinking of themselves as artists.

MR. PRIP: As artists. You know, the more – it's the same – it would be the same distinction there. There are people that are trade potters, you might say, as opposed to what one would refer to as a studio potter or something like that, or an art potter, you know. There are very few people doing art glass. Most people work for places like Steuben, working as a part of a group, or again working in the glass shop or something like that, at Steuben. They do not usually think of themselves as artists. They're artisans or they have certain skills.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But there was this split in feeling. You didn't have that in Denmark?

MR. PRIP: No. I mean, there there's really no difference. There's really – between industry and the individual – you can go from industry. A company may, or a firm may have 100 or 200 or 300 or 400 people working. And then you go right down the line down to a small firm with a half-a-dozen people. And there's really no difference in attitude or feeling.

But here, there's very definitely – there's really a difference in attitude. You have – and there's no – very little meeting ground where the artist craftsman and industry meet. They don't understand each other here. They tend to be suspicious of each other.

MR. BROWN: Do you think that's avoidable?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, I think so, if they knew a little more about --

MR. BROWN: When the 1950s was – I think that the time that there was a lot of writing and exhibitions trying to elevate the craftsman up to the level of artist in the popular mind.

MR. PRIP: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: I believe there was quite a lot of tension between the --

MR. PRIP: Well, I think all that – you know, to me – I don't know. People – I guess it's good. People don't normally talk about stuff like that anymore because it's not – it's either worth looking at – and it is, I guess, or will one day be judged or considered, thought of as art, or it's not.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But at that time there -- at least certain quarters, I think there was quite a lot of heated discussion.

MR. PRIP: Well, because people really – and – well, they had – well, art had – you know, there was this traditional separation of the arts. There was the fine arts and the decorative arts. And people that had been trained as fine artists were engaged in areas such as painting or sculpture – just did not consider the decorative arts to be at the same level. And in many cases, they are not. You know, they are – or they are referred to as the fine arts and the minor arts.

And I think that's true. I guess if you're making ash trays, they may be very good ash trays, very fine ash trays, but just there's no way you can get the same emotional content, pour the same kind of feelings and emotions into an ash tray that you can into a painting or an overture, you know?

MR. BROWN: Well, what was your attitude? Did you look back? Do you think it was changing in the 50s from that which you'd held in Denmark then as far as [inaudible]?

MR. PRIP: Well, I just became aware of these other – more aware of the other attitudes. And I just – you know, I mean, I guess you have to find your own – pick your own way. And since I had had so many years of the other, I would never be able to discard them nor dismiss them, you know.

Adopting new attitudes or taking on new ideas is rather easy, in a way. Or I've always found that to be easy. It's getting rid of the old ones that's really hard because that's where you have your security and your – that's what gives you – that's what makes you feel safe and secure.

These ideas and these thoughts you have are really – when you have to – and usually, it's – people would say, you know, why don't – and it's – and that's usually what gets in a person's way when they're trying to take on – to develop or to assimilate new ideas, is that they have these – in order to make room for them, you can't always – sometimes it means you have to let go of some old ideas because they can't – at times they do not coexist, you know? To really let something new in and have it really breathe and function properly, frequently it means you have to rid yourself of old attitudes.

And that's usually – I think that's really the painful part because the new is invigorating and exciting and fresh. And it's the old part of it that's – getting rid of that, that's the painful part of the whole process. Or that's – at least to my way of thinking. And that's why I think, as you – especially when people get older, they find it – they tend to stay with their ideas because that's what gives them comfort.

[OFF THE RECORD]

MR. BROWN: Sounds [inaudible].

MR. PRIP: It probably sounds pretty much as it did before, the same drawling, low-pitched –

[OFF THE RECORD]

MR. BROWN: This is the second interview with John Prip in Rehoboth, Massachusetts, November 10, 1981. We've been talking about your years at Alfred and then in Rochester. And we talked a bit about – you were working as a consultant for corporations, design and manufacturing companies. And then last, we talked about your opinion of your work and how it evolves or should evolve as you get older.

In 57, 1957, you seem to have made a decision to continue as a design consultant to industry when you came to New England to be with Reed and Barton Silver Company [inaudible]. What prompted that? Were you a little weary of teaching?

MR. PRIP: No. Actually, I left teaching in 1954. At that time I was weary of it. I just thought there – I could see myself getting stuck in a rut there. And I went out and I worked a number of years with Ronny Pearson and Frans and Tage. We started Shop One. And – but even after doing that for a number of years – well, it was a combination of things. Tough sweating, always, you know, really having to scramble to make ends meet – and it was – just something came along that seemed quite attractive.

I was offered this position at Reed and Barton. Or they didn't actually – it was not an existing position. There was nothing like it. They created a position. This was through Roger Hallowell and Ted Jones at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Boston.

MR. BROWN: Had they come and seen your work?

MR. PRIP: No. I had – I can't remember how I had made contact with Ted Jones. But I had some – he came to the school. Somehow we were in touch. And he told me that someday, if I were interested, he'd contact Reed and Barton, or someone. I gave him a ring. I said, "Do you have anything in mind?" He said, "Yeah. Why don't you come over and we'll go and see the people at Reed and Barton?" I don't think he was [inaudible], but I mean, he made the contact, the original contact.

MR. BROWN: So you met with Hallowell?

MR. PRIP: So I met with Hallowell and some other people. I brought examples of my work with me. And they seemed to be, you know, responsive. And they just, I guess, out of that grew this position. They called it sort of designer craftsman in residence. I was not a staff designer in the usual sense, but more independent in my work, whereas most of the people did – it was mostly paper design, you know. I was to execute my own samples and models. So that's how that came about.

In the spring of 1957, we moved to Taunton, or rather, to Raynham. And I began working for Reed and Barton.

MR. BROWN: Now, you came with the understanding on the part of – with Mr. Hallowell, the president of the company, that you would be able to design what you pleased?

MR. PRIP: Well, not completely. I mean, I – my position was slightly different than that of many other designer craftsman, artist craftsman. I had had previous association with industry. I grew up, you know, with one foot in a factory, so to speak. So I didn't – there was nothing unholy in my view about people making money, about going into – I knew they weren't doing this just to provide a comfortable slot for me where I could have fun. They were hoping that something would result from this cooperation, something that would be useful to them, and they would – in the end they could probably make a profit.

And that was – it was – which is a very honest and straightforward way of doing things. And I always understood that. I never – I always – I didn't bend over backwards to make – in other words, I didn't approach everything from the point of view of just, how commercial. I tried to do what I thought was good and right. At the same time, I realized that there had to be something in there for them. Otherwise, it was – if it could only work for me, then it would have been, you know – it would have.

And as it turned out, my total involvement with Reed and Barton stretched over a 13-year period. So three years full time and then ten years as sort of a, you know, on-and-off consultant.

MR. BROWN: Consultant.

MR. PRIP: So I feel that I must, you know, that – which made me feel good only because I know that the only reason why I continued that long was because, obviously, I was of some use to them, you know.

MR. BROWN: What would they – what did you see happen that affected their stopping with silver?

MR. PRIP: Oh, no – well, again, it – like other people working in the design staff, I had to develop ideas and thoughts. And they were presented at meetings. They called them "new goods meetings." There would be people representing – from the factory, manufacturing. And there would be various – if they were talking about hollowware, there would probably be the foreman from the, perhaps from one of the hollowware departments showing hollowware.

And the plant supervisor, there would be someone there from sales. Roger Hallowell would be there, Bill Hurley, different people. There probably – and then the design staff. There would probably be 10 or 12 people gathered along the table. And they would – the new ideas would be hauled out and looked at. And they would be discussed, you know, from the point of view of their feasibility, number one. Would it be saleable? And if it's saleable, would it be possible to make it within a reasonable amount of time at a profit, you know?

MR. BROWN: Did the saleability, was that the prevailing [inaudible]?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. I mean, they didn't – they just – well, if you take an area such as – it was easier – let me explain. The sterling business falls into two distinctly different categories, anyway. There was flatware and hollowware. Although in many ways you might think of a hollowware item as being more complicated and having more parts and being more difficult to make, the methods used in fabricating these parts are more craft oriented, craft based. They use spinners. They use hand polishers. There are a lot of things you can –

[END OF DISK TWO]

MR. PRIP: -- stood there looking at each other for a couple of minutes.

[OFF THE RECORD]

MR. BROWN: You were saying hollowware is more craft based.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Well, it is.

In other words, there's – they relied more on the – on hand skills. In the first place, well, at least in most instances, the volume of a given hollowware item is much lower. You're not dealing in large, great volume. People think they see a big factory, they think, well, they must produce this coffee service by the millions or at least by the hundred thousands or by the – and frequently, they would be produced by the dozen.

So there are techniques for small-scale hollowware production. There are any number of ways you can approach that – temporary dies instead of permanent dies, spinning, wood chucks instead of nylon or steel, all kinds of things like that. And whereas in flatware, there's really no alternative to going the route. You make dies for the flatware.

MR. BROWN: And so you're – are you saying that for hollowware they can get in and out of the design more quickly?

MR. PRIP: Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: Whereas in flatware they have to go great volume.

MR. PRIP: For very little money. For very little money.

MR. BROWN: So you were more apt to see design innovation tested and tried out by Reed and Barton in hollowware than in flatware?

MR. PRIP: Well, yeah. It wasn't that – well, then you have to break it down too. On the other hand, of course, the market is much greater in flatware.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: People buy six spoons. They buy the six spoons, they're likely to buy the forks and the knives and the other things that go with it. Whereas, they buy a bowl or something like that, or possibly a coffee service, but not necessarily the whole service; perhaps just the coffeepot or the teapot or sugar and creamer, other than that.

So they relied to a greater extent on hand skills in the hollowware department. Flatware was highly mechanized. And what they could do was, they could take – you can take 10 patterns or 20 or 30 patterns and coordinate the manufacture of these. But they all followed almost – let's say more or less precisely the same procedures.

So you can have what appears to be almost a form of efficient mass production in flatware. With hollowware, it's always just sort of making a few of these, making a few of those, and having to do things partly by hand, using temporary tools, except in things like what they call commercial hollowware. They're doing things for the navy or they're doing – hotel work. There, they just stamp out forms, like that.

And that's more and more what it's becoming now, you know, very, very little quality hollowware being made, produced today. It's not – it's almost – you're almost dreaming if you went to a company today with the thought of producing or doing something really outstanding in the area of hollowware. It's just – it's prohibitive.

MR. BROWN: Just – when you were there, you were given some freedom to work out the design?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. I think I was sort of probably the tail end of that. Maybe it will – I'd be surprised if it would change. But I somehow think that everything is working against it.

MR. BROWN: But you've said that – and I think earlier you said that you seem to have the ability to satisfy their need. You had some knowledge of process, translation --

MR. PRIP: Well, I had some knowledge of process. Also, you know, we all have – we have a certain way of working at a given time. At that time, I was very – I guess what you'd – for lack of a better word, use the term "design oriented." In other words, given a choice or preference, my preference ran toward sort of – not slick, but good, clean Scandinavian design, whatever you want or wish to call it. And the market was ready for some of that.

Now, later, my tastes sort of moved away from that. I moved away from that into things that were much more individual. And there was no – you know, a lot of the things I've done since then, there would be no mass market for them. So it was – I didn't have to strain myself. I didn't have to – I didn't have to say, "Well, now, let me see. What can I do that's very" – I just did what I thought was good and right at the time, and it turned out that, with some modifications, it was saleable. It was saleable.

MR. BROWN: Was Scandinavian design in silver in the late 50s – it was about the time that more the more innovative customers were willing to buy it?

MR. PRIP: Well, there were – yes. I mean, that was – but, see, it's just – not to skip ahead or skip – go back and forth a little. It's so labor intensive that it – certain conditions must exist in order to spawn silver, either handmade or semi-mass-produced silverware. And those conditions were sort of on the tail end of a craft-based society in those days. The economy was sort of just – was – still had its – well, it was still partly dominated by – it was somewhat – still part of the craft-oriented society.

And the crafts played an important part in the economy of the society. And we've just moved away from that.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. PRIP: I mean, it's just – so what you have now, it's no longer really part of the economy in the same way as a productive force. It's more an elite production, where it's something that's done either as an avocation, to help you with your leisure time, or as an artistic pursuit.

In other words, someone is attempting to develop an idea and a thought, rather than – there are very – there are not nearly as many people that enter this with what used to be the trade approach. There's a difference between an artist's approach and the trade approach. You can be a printmaker. You have entirely different attitudes than a commercial printer, although you may use many of the same techniques. You can be an artist-craftsman in metal or – and have – but your attitudes are entirely different than the commercial. It's always been.

MR. BROWN: And you've always had – well, you've said that you came out of the trade environment.

MR. PRIP: Yes, completely trade.

MR. BROWN: So you were prepared at that time.

MR. PRIP: But I'm – I've found that it wasn't hard for me to fall into the other. [Laughter] It's much more fun, you know, more --

MR. BROWN: You mean into the art history?

MR. PRIP: Sure. You're pleasing yourself rather than a potential customer.

MR. BROWN: My question a little bit ago, though, was actually simpler. Was the taste in this country for modern Scandinavian design in silver about the time you went to Reed and Barton -- coincided with that?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, it sort of – someone was going to do something, you know, try to get this thing moving. And I just happened to be there.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And I found a – found some people that were willing to go along.

MR. BROWN: Their sales force knew that. They knew that out there there was potential market for it?

MR. PRIP: They knew it because they tested. They had consumer testing. And I would do – we would take, you know – I don't know, the 6 – the 300, whatever you wanted, version of French provincial, and that would be tested along with one of my contemporary patterns. And it was very easy. If the other one beat out my pattern, then it was, "Forget it, John." If I could beat out that pattern with one of mine, then I had a chance, see?

So that was – so I like to think that it was very – the rules were very easy to understand. I mean, they were right there. I had to do something that could compete, that could, you know.

MR. BROWN: And technically, you knew how you had to create that could be picked up by the machinery in the factory.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. I knew – at least I knew enough about it, you know. In other words, I knew enough about it to be able to, you know, function reasonably well. I had to learn a great deal. But I understood their basic problems and concerns, and enough – I had – my understanding was good enough so that I could argue with some of the people in the factory and with people in sales and the factory, where they couldn't just tell me that it couldn't be done, you know, which is just the favorite – the way you just get rid of most of your opposition or most of the problems. You say, "Oh, I'm sorry. It can't be done." That's it. Final. Finished, you know.

And I would sit quite frequently at these meetings and hear the people from the plant say these outrageous things to the people that were in charge – you know, the management, telling them all kinds of things about what could be done, what couldn't be done. And they would buy it, you know. And they just didn't want to do it.

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose they didn't want to do it? They'd have to change their routine?

MR. PRIP: They'd have to change their routine and change their – you'd think they would welcome these challenges. But it doesn't work that way.

MR. BROWN: In fact, how did you find the workmen? Did they --

MR. PRIP: Friendly and nice. I mean, they were --

MR. BROWN: I mean, in terms of their ability, their --

MR. PRIP: Oh, they were very [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: You said they don't care for challenges. They liked --

MR. PRIP: Well, there were always a few people there, you know. I didn't have to work with all the men. I worked with some of them, you know. And you had a way of finding the people, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And so I --

MR. BROWN: Were they those that had some design training? Or were those mostly people that have come up as apprentices there and were taught at the works?

MR. PRIP: They came up as apprentices, yeah. See, they thought of me as a designer. Then they saw – they would see a few of my samples. And they'd say, "Hey, gee, you can make these. Where did you learn how to do this?" You know, and I would – I always had to prove myself – more difficult to prove myself to the guys working in the factory than the management, in a way.

MR. BROWN: Is that possibly because before there had been people would could design that couldn't fabricate?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, that could not – no, I would – I had to – I'll tell you a little story here. I had a studio space assigned below the design room. And it faced out to a yard that – quite close to the entrance and exit gate of the plant. And the people, especially the people that I knew well up in the silver hollowware department, all the men working there, would usually leave somewhat earlier than I left. They would go home around, oh, quarter of four, something like that.

And I would always make it a point to sit down there right where – so they could see me. They would walk by this little island where I was sort of sticking out in the yard. And I would always stick my – I would always take the paper – any old paper, a magazine, and put my feet up on the table and just sit there reading, you know, when these guys would walk out.

And the next time they'd see me, they would be, "Hey!" You know, "Johnny" – they called me Johnny. "How the hell did you ever – how do you do it? How do you manage that?" I said, "That's what I do all day. I just sit down there. I just sit there reading the newspaper." I'd have the radio going.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: "Gee, some people. Boy." I think they admired me for it. And I would – and at the same time, I think they were slightly infuriated because they were up there. They had to, you know – plus they --

MR. BROWN: They had a foreman watching them.

MR. PRIP: Yeah, they had a foreman watching them. They were doing piecework and production. And here this guy was just sitting down there all day long reading the paper.

MR. BROWN: But at the same time, they knew that you could make the stuff that they were doing.

MR. PRIP: Yeah, sure.

MR. BROWN: So they admired you for that, or at least appreciated you.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. They would help me if I had to have something. I would walk by, I would, you know, use tools in that area. I would borrow tools. And I just had to get parts and pieces. And there was quite an exchange there. And it was very pleasant for me because I was free to pretty much wander through the plant to different departments and out in search of materials and parts and pieces. And I enjoyed those years.

MR. BROWN: Three full-time years, to 60, and then part-time another 10.

MR. PRIP: Part-time after that. Yeah. By the time I left, I felt quite at home there. And I enjoyed going back and, you know, occasionally for meetings and doing the work. You're going to ask me what these things are.

MR. BROWN: All right. These are – what are we looking at here?

MR. PRIP: These are flatware samples.

MR. BROWN: These are?

MR. PRIP: Flatware samples I made in the late 40s, early 50s.

MR. BROWN: Flatware sample? What did you call them?

MR. PRIP: Flatware.

MR. BROWN: Flatware samples.

MR. PRIP: These are hand-forged flatware samples.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: And they were at the time considered rather innovative. And they were, however, extremely difficult to manufacture there. I was told flat out that they were impossible; you couldn't do it.

MR. BROWN: Why? What's the problem? Because it's a change from one plane to another?

MR. PRIP: Well, the problem is – one plane to – yeah. That area in there.

MR. BROWN: There's a pinch in the shaft?

MR. PRIP: Pinched in and reversing the area of strength there in the shaft, where traditionally it --

MR. BROWN: Now, is this something you also then worked on at Reed and Barton?

MR. PRIP: Yes, and I took that and I kept pursuing, I kept pushing it. I had first of all – the very first samples I developed were probably in the late 40s. And I approached companies like Oneida and, oh, Fraser's stainless in New York City and people like that. But no one would do it. And I went to Reed and Barton in 1957. I think this went in production around 1959, two years after that.

MR. BROWN: So they adopted it. You showed them that they could --

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Well, we made a few sample dies and we – and I had to modify the – they were not quite as extreme as what you see in that photograph. But as it turned out, it was possible. And I designed a number – I can't tell you just how many – probably a half a dozen flatware patterns for them.

I mentioned earlier, the real problem with a flatware pattern is that there are so many individual pieces involved, which in turn means there are so many dies. The dies are extremely expensive. And they have to, before they can sell it – and of course, they must put it in an inventory. So at that time, it was, considering the development period, the tools, the dies, the sales promotion, the salesman's kits, some advertising, they would invest a quarter of a million dollars in a pattern before getting a single dollar back as a return.

So obviously, it was something they didn't – you know, they thought about very carefully before doing. And now I hesitate to even guess at what it would probably cost – well over a million to launch a good flatware pattern.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. This, the sales force thought, might do?

MR. PRIP: Yes. Well, whether they – I would say more – to be more specific, a few people, key people within the sales structure felt that this could be – as a matter of fact, they knew there was an acceptance because it had been very thoroughly tested. And people responded – they found that there was a good response.

MR. BROWN: You mean they had shown your prototypes to people?

MR. PRIP: Yes, shown the prototypes.

MR. BROWN: And what did they call this pattern?

MR. PRIP: It was called Lark.

MR. BROWN: Lark.

MR. PRIP: And they did – they made two versions of the Lark. They couldn't quite believe that you could sell a pattern like that, completely plain and unadorned. So they made the Lark and the Star. And the Star had a little – this was the – one of the people in sales ideas. And they placed a little star right down there on the handle sort of stamped in place there. And it laid the biggest – just a complete egg, you know. Super-egg. It just – I don't know what they sold – enough to, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And the other one sold really rather well, which – I mean, I didn't really care. Had they been able to sell the other, you know, the Star as well. But it did make me feel good that I had been right. [Laughter] As a matter of fact, I found while I was there, although they considered me to be very – quite impractical and not to have, you know, a very good understanding of what was really saleable, I did – I never kept score or tally. But I would say that, thinking back, you know, I was right probably as often as they were, with all their research and all their understanding of the market. I think I guessed right as often as they did on what would sell or what would not sell.

MR. BROWN: Well, we're looking at some examples of hollowware that you made for Reed and Barton.

MR. PRIP: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: Coffeepots in each case.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Well, they were --

MR. BROWN: What did you base these on? Did you – were these ideas you'd had in your head for some time, or

even done earlier?

MR. PRIP: Well, I had made things similar to that. But I based them mainly on just what I liked, what I thought might be – and I had – I always felt that I had – I was free to just to develop a thought or an idea. It was very pleasant, very nice. I made it – you know, I didn't really think at the time that this piece would go into production in exactly that form. But I felt that, rather than attempt to make compromises right from the outset, I would rather make it the way I thought it should be, and then we could see if it was appealing or had any possibilities. Then we could discuss possible changes.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm, um-hm. Now, which turned out to be the more appealing, the cylindrical one?

MR. PRIP: No. This [inaudible] – we did develop a coffee service around that.

MR. BROWN: Around this one? It's sort of a – well, I don't know if you'd call it, like a bud vase.

MR. PRIP: It's something.

MR. BROWN: An attenuated pear shape, I guess.

MR. PRIP: Pear shaped, yeah. And that was somewhat squatter. And it turned out to be rather successful for them. And other than that, there was another – the first design project I had when I went to work for Reed and Barton was, they had been working with an Italian architect-designer named Giò Ponti, who was a – you know, well known.

MR. BROWN: Well known.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. And he had designed – that was a period when the Italian design was coming through very strongly. He designed a flatware pattern called the Diamond pattern. And it came – and then as an afterthought, that perhaps it would be nice if they had some hollowware to go with this. So they asked me. I don't know why they didn't ask him to do it, but they asked me to design the hollowware. So I did a coffee service. And that was also quite successful. I mean, it sold independent of the flatware pattern.

MR. BROWN: Now, did you find that, though, that the, say, designs by an architect by, for example, Giò Ponti or some other designer who was not a silversmith --

MR. PRIP: Well, it was simply – it was just a design theme.

MR. BROWN: A theme – in other words, you could be much more explicit, right? You would actually fabricate a prototype?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. I developed this idea from their – I just, you know – being some – rather familiar with the flatware patterns, just suggested a certain theme or approach to me. And I just – and it was – a coffeepot and a spoon or a knife do not really have, you know, all that much in common. So you have to take – you just sort of try to lift the essence out of that and design that into an object.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah, but what I meant, did Reed and Barton find that you as a silversmith could produce something that was more manufacturable than, say, these other designers that could simply give them a paper design?

MR. PRIP: I think as a matter of fact that I probably could and I probably did, because they had – that would be a good example because that Diamond pattern was – aside from the very – the early sketches involved, they said "designed by Giò Ponti," it was a staff designer that did all the work on it. He really took those first – I hesitate to call them crude; they were not crude. They were very sophisticated in their own way. But they were not – they did not lend themselves, number one, to mass production; and number two, to the American market.

So he took and designed from that. I guess they sent the patterns, the samples, back and forth. And it was finally – came out with his approval, you know, whereas I was much more flexible. I could just sit down and make something.

MR. BROWN: By this time, maybe being a side issue, in the 50s, certainly it's apparent when you look back at exhibition catalogs and read in the literature that there was a people who were calling themselves artist-craftsmen as opposed to craftsmen – it was craftsmen craftsmen.

MR. PRIP: Yeah, well, I think --

MR. BROWN: Was this sort of thing in the air? Were you aware of it at the time, sort of a tension between those who wanted to do sort of art objects or crafts of sculpture?

MR. PRIP: No, I don't think people that – there's nothing wrong with the term "craft." I mean, that's perfectly – however, it had some maybe other unfortunate connotations. People – you'd say you were a craftsman or you were interested in craft, and people immediately – they were as likely to think of someone doing something with a little kit or something like that.

MR. BROWN: Sure. Hobbies.

MR. PRIP: Hobbies. It was a hobby, you know, a craft hobby. So it was rather difficult, although not terribly important on one hand. It was, I guess, many of the people working in the field that were more serious about it felt that it was important to make some distinction. In other words, they were not – they did not separate the functions of design and production or technique as they do in a person working in a plant. Even though you may be a fine hand-silversmith, and capable of doing just about anything – if you work for – oh, it didn't matter – Gorham, or you work for Tiffany or Cartier, they will give you a drawing and you make it. You may have absolutely no design ability, but you can be a super craftsman.

MR. BROWN: Yes. Yes. So those people, too, certain craftsmen wanted to distance themselves from those who couldn't design.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Well, it's not – I don't know whether they wanted to. But there was a real distinction.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. PRIP: It's like a personal friend of mine is a designer-builder. That's what he does. He designs and builds.

MR. BROWN: But you were both a designer and a craftsman.

MR. PRIP: And the maker, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. I mean, beginning in the 50s, was there an attempt by some craftsmen to do rather extraordinary, super-unique things?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, I think so.

MR. BROWN: So, for example, silver would begin to look more like sculpture and pickup [phonetic]? And they would like to talk of it, say, as sculpture rather than as a functional object?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. I think people were – yeah, I think there was a great deal of that. And so many bad things were – well, I call them that.

MR. BROWN: You didn't get into that when you were at Reed and Barton. But about this time, then, about 1960 or so, you started – you went back to teaching?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Well, I was --

MR. BROWN: And what did you find?

MR. PRIP: You know, I guess I have some ideas pertaining to that. And I think it had to do with the fact that most of the innovations had come from people with rather conventional training and background. In other words, they had been well rooted in a society. And the design advances have tended to evolve. They evolved and grew out of it.

And you would then take a young – when I grew up in Denmark, there was always – you didn't think of it as doing something contemporary or modern. That was the way – that's the way you did things. That's the way people made things.

And it was perfectly obvious and normal that there should be a progression of design, that design was evolving and changing and developing; whereas here, it just didn't occur to you that you should attempt to – unless it was a reproduction – no one thought of it as a reproduction – to attempt to just sit down and make up a bunch of – you know, attempt to make copies or reproduction.

MR. BROWN: In this country, was there more respect given to the designer and not too much appreciation for the crafts tradition?

MR. PRIP: Oh, yeah. And I'd say in order – in order – you know, if you entered one of these large factories, in order of importance, it would be the president, number one. And very often, he controlled sales. Or if he didn't control them, then he would – and then the second most important person would be the – there would usually be a vice president in charge of sales. And he could actually – probably, if the president had any smarts, he would

listen to him because he wanted to, you know, make some money.

And then you went down from there, and you have a vice president probably in charge of production. He was the maker, you might say, the manager, the seller, the maker. But he was somebody – he was definitely – be number three. And usually the top – one of the – Reed and Barton had a force. Probably they had about 25-30 salesmen on the road at that time. And the men with the best territories that really made the biggest sales had the largest, you know, annual volume – were the people who were listened to at sales meetings.

MR. BROWN: But the designer then was further back?

MR. PRIP: Oh, he was just sitting quietly down in the corner.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, um-hm. Well, now, apart from – though, say, the manufacturing scene, the company, in among, say, an exhibition and the like at this time, wasn't the designer-craftsman the more esteemed, rather than those who just came out of the craft tradition?

MR. PRIP: Well, you know, you're asking me --

MR. BROWN: There wasn't any real --

MR. PRIP: Obviously, I think he was, you know – that's what I thought was – would be –

[SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION]

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible]

MR. PRIP: You can carry that on into all kinds of – you know, you're in – you could be an actor, write your own plays. You could be a musician, write your own music.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: Or composer and play your own --

MR. BROWN: For example, you showed regularly at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, places like that. What was the – did you see attitudes changing as you get, say, to the 1960s?

MR. PRIP: Yes, I think – well, you see, my background was such that I knew that this difference was there. Number one, I accepted it and could work within it. But a young man or a young woman with no other experience and that, you know, going to an art school did not – well, I hesitate to use terms such as "realistic" because whatever is real to you is real.

If that's your life, you know, the four walls of an art school, then what takes place within that institution is – you're constantly reinforced by your teacher. You know, your efforts are being supported and you're being reinforced. And your friends, obviously, think what you do is really fantastic, is great. And once in a while you bring something home, show it to your family. You know, when you go home on a holiday, and they think it's absolutely stupendous, you know.

Then it's really rather cruel when you walk out into the world and you find that people don't care that much about what you do, you know? On the other hand, it's nice to have that time in school. That's very important to have that time when people are very appreciative of what you do and where you work without those other concerns.

And it's – I hate to – well, I don't hate because I don't say it – that many people, I think, do probably the best work they ever have done, ever will do – is done while they're students.

MR. BROWN: What do you think happens to some of them after they're students?

MR. PRIP: Well, because it's just – it takes too much – a combination of too many skills. You have to be extremely motivated. You have to be somewhat inventive and – just to survive doing the work.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: But it's very hard. And there are certain fields that are more difficult than others, I guess. It's like – just the physical barriers that must be overcome, you know. And it's more difficult to become an artist than to become a doctor. People don't think of it in those terms. But it is. You have to – it takes years and years. And really – very little appreciation for what you're doing, whereas the moment you enter medical – you know, they're always talking about "my son the doctor" or whatever he is. And everyone – receives a certain amount

of respect from society.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: The best artists, aside from people who might have a commercial, some interest in them, monetary commercial interest in what he's doing – could stop working tomorrow. People – you know, society could get along quite well without his effort.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. PRIP: There are other – you know, there are just – very few people have artists – the world really comes knocking on their door.

MR. BROWN: Well, what led you to go back into this bleak land of teaching again?

MR. PRIP: I don't know. I --

MR. BROWN: About 1960 or so, you [inaudible]?

MR. PRIP: It was more fun, I think.

MR. BROWN: Sixty-three you went to Rhode Island School of Design?

MR. PRIP: I'm trying to think of some profound – I think that it was just more fun, more interesting.

MR. BROWN: What, to have the interaction with students and other teachers?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did they approach – did the Rhode Island School of Design approach you?

MR. PRIP: I went to – first I taught at – I left Reed and Barton and went to Boston, the Boston Museum School.

MR. BROWN: Did they have a sizable crafts department?

MR. PRIP: They had a sizable silversmithing.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: They called it J and S, jewelry and silversmithing. [Laughter] Headed by a man named Sherach [phonetic], at the time, Joseph Sherach, a very fine, highly skilled silversmith. And I was sort of pushed in there in a way by the director of the museum, Perry Rathbone.

MR. BROWN: Why was that? Why did they do that?

MR. PRIP: Well, because they – it's a long story. I mean, the place just – he felt that not too much was taking place, was going on there. And so I found myself, not a hostile environment, but not the most friendly environment.

MR. BROWN: Oh. You mean they might have been a bit resentful of your --

MR. PRIP: I think they were, you know. And I don't know why. I tried to be – I was there for three years. They never gave me a key to the office, if that tells you – clues you in. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: Oh. [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: They didn't trust me with the key to the safe or to the silver department, you know?

MR. BROWN: What did you find the students were interested in?

MR. PRIP: Well, they were really – they really – they were interested in the things most students were interested in. It breaks down into, you know, if you have 30 students, there are a certain number that are innovative and interested in new thoughts and ideas. And the majority of them are somewhere in between. And at the other end, you have some people that are just duds in a way.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Did you find that teaching, as opposed to Reed and Barton, you could try out with the students a lot more, a greater variety of things?

MR. PRIP: Well, the system was not quite as flexible at the Museum School. They have a rather disciplined curriculum. It had to be more, you know --

MR. BROWN: You mean the students' time was --

MR. PRIP: Time was really limited. And I – my feeling was it was not always spent in the best way. However, this was – you know, I was the outsider coming in, and I had to, you know, prove myself. And I did establish good relationship with a certain number of students. But it was in certain ways made clear that they weren't all that happy to have me in there. But I mean --

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose --

MR. PRIP: It took me one year to really get the message, about a year. And then the second year I thought, well, I have to get out of here. And just about then --

MR. BROWN: Was it simply resentment of the fact that you had been imposed by management, or something?

MR. PRIP: I can't tell. It's just that I – I think what it was was that the man that had been in charge here for years, this was his thing. This was his baby.

MR. BROWN: His domain.

MR. PRIP: Yeah, his domain.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: I mean, you just didn't go in there and start scratching around his turf in there. That was his place, you know. And he told them exactly how to hold a hammer, which way to sit, how to sit, how to design things. He would approve of designs. And if he didn't like it, they just couldn't make it, period. That's it. Final. And he was very – and I was somewhat – perhaps took a more liberal approach.

MR. BROWN: So he was imposing a pretty narrowly defined system of taste, probably, too, was he?

MR. PRIP: Well, I thought so. You know, now – but – well, we were just quite – completely different, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: I just – it was not a good place for me there. I just didn't – I didn't care that much for the whole – for the place there.

MR. BROWN: Did you make any close friends with any of your other colleagues there in the other areas?

MR. PRIP: Well, I made – I became sort of friendly with some of them. Perhaps the – offhand, the only – the person that really sticks out was a sculptor named Harold Tovish.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes. He was there then.

MR. PRIP: He was there at the time. And we would always, crossing the parking lot, be talking about, you know, the good old Museum School and what they could do with it. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: He was pretty restless, too?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. He was – and it was – but it was a place where more had fear, I think, than anything else. The people had – what they would do, they had a four-year program. And they would keep people – they would allow people to stay on for – I hope I'm not saying things here that will offend anyone. They had an optional – well, not really optional – an honored fifth year – five-year program.

And the fifth year, all they paid their faculty was – the salaries were miserable. And they didn't really do all that much for students in many ways. They had collected a great deal of scholarship money. And this was controlled by certain key faculty. And you either played footsy with these guys and you did what they told you to do, or you were out.

MR. BROWN: You mean as a student you weren't even considered?

MR. PRIP: As a student, you weren't even considered.

MR. BROWN: Wow.

MR. PRIP: And if you were a good guy and you really did what you were supposed to do and you were a right-thinking student, not only would you get through your four years and probably perhaps receive some scholarship support in your third and fourth year, but you would get a year in Europe for gratis. I mean, the school would pay, would pick up the tab on that one. And that's rather – that gives you a rather powerful hold over these young people.

After five years, then, they would return to the school, and they would let them come back for a sixth year, in a way, as practice instructors. By that time, they had really been rather, you know, clearly and narrowly defined. You only had the true believers left at that point. [Laughter]

And many of them then just stayed on. They would then pay them some token salary, and they would just be teaching there part time. Or they'd end with a --

MR. BROWN: A pretty incestuous practice.

MR. PRIP: I thought so, you know.

MR. BROWN: Hm.

MR. PRIP: And they just couldn't imagine a life away from that place. That was it.

MR. BROWN: Particularly in the crafts – would this have happened in the crafts occasionally, too?

MR. PRIP: It was the whole – it was throughout the school, at least my impression of it.

MR. BROWN: But this earlier point you were making about the art school, craft training products, how they get out in the world, a pretty cold place – these people were able to cling around there indefinitely.

MR. PRIP: Well, some of them made – some of them did quite well. I guess they went out. They set up as jewelers and so forth. I can't really --

MR. BROWN: Yeah. You were there [inaudible].

MR. PRIP: This is obviously slanted.

MR. BROWN: It did --

MR. PRIP: This is my – I'm not trying to --

MR. BROWN: The school did turn around or change in some ways later in the decade, didn't it?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, oh, completely.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: During the 60s, it just made a complete flip, or the late 60s, early 70s. It was just – became sort of scrungy. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: In the early 60s, the kids still went along with the system.

MR. PRIP: Oh, yeah. No, they had very little choice.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. PRIP: See, I'd been there. I'd been at the school. I think what really told me what was going on – I had been at the school, at the Museum School for about a year, a year and a half. And I never – you know, well before going to the Museum School, I had been at Reed and Barton. I had been working for quite a few years. I was probably close to 40. I had been department head at the School for American Craftsmen. I thought that if ever Sherach were to leave, you know, that it was possible that they would give me a crack, say, "Okay, see what you can do with it."

But one day I received a call from a person I knew at the school and said, "Have you heard that Joe Sherach had a heart attack?" I didn't know it. Well, there had been a traffic jam on the expressway going out of – leaving Boston. And he – it was a hot day. He got out of his car to see what was going on, and he dropped dead.

And see, no one would, told – no one – they wouldn't talk to me about it. No one ever told me about this. I went back there. And it was – I was – they would – they actually looked at me and made me feel like I was a criminal, that I had been almost like responsible for the guy's death or something like that. And --

MR. BROWN: Who was "they," the administration?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. And the other person teaching there, and you know, they had been so – you know, very attached to this man. And he was a fine man. But hell, I didn't – and I knew that they would – they would have – what they wanted, and what they finally did. They wanted – certainly, they wanted someone that had been working under Joe Sherach to take over the department, which is exactly what happened.

They brought into – they had two other people working. We didn't really need three people. But I was the third person. And I realized that I would probably – as long as that administration was in place and the people were there, I would always be an outsider.

MR. BROWN: Hm. Did you have much contact with that administration, then?

MR. PRIP: No, not really.

MR. BROWN: Well, the dean was Smith, right?

MR. PRIP: Smith, Russell Smith.

MR. BROWN: Russell Smith. Was he a painter? Was that his training?

MR. PRIP: I don't really know what he was. I think so. I just don't – really, that period, it just sort of seems rather drab and uninteresting when I think back on it. At the time --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible]

MR. PRIP: About that time, a good friend of mine, Tage Frid, who I'd been working with, at Alfred and later in Rochester, moved to Rhode Island School of Design. And he, I guess – it just happened at the time that they were in need. They were considering a change there. And he said, "How would you like to come to RISD?" I said, "Well, let's talk it over." And I went down there. And to make a long story short, that's what happened. I was offered the job at RISD, and I went down there.

MR. BROWN: Who did you deal with when you went down to talk about the job? [inaudible]?

MR. PRIP: Well, there was a man named – well, Bush Brown.

MR. BROWN: He had just come in?

MR. PRIP: He had just come in. And there was a man named Stroud – Strout, I think, Strout, a dean. And they were the people I dealt with at the time.

MR. BROWN: How did Bush Brown impress you?

MR. PRIP: I liked him. He was rather friendly and outgoing, slightly pompous. But I – you know, I liked the man. I think he was --

MR. BROWN: Well, he was bringing in big changes in the faculty at that time.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. I had – let's put it this way. I had no reason – he never gave me cause to dislike him or not to like him.

MR. BROWN: And you came in with quite a few other new people, didn't you, at that time?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. And I had no understanding of the – what was happening. I'm sure that some horrendous things happened there, and a lot of people lost their jobs, and some of them may have been innocent and should not have – there were – feelings were mixed. But I had not been a part of that.

MR. BROWN: So what did you find on the scene in your department?

MR. PRIP: Very – I mean --

MR. BROWN: I mean, what in terms of colleagues and facilities?

MR. PRIP: Well, there again, it was just somewhat of the same – different, though, however. But very small department that had ended up in the basement in one of the buildings there, was servicing evening school students and really not much of anything, to tell you the truth.

MR. BROWN: Because in the early days, silversmithing and even jewelry making had been prominent.

MR. PRIP: Well, it had been very big. But it had been allowed to die, practically die out. And there was no department there when I – I mean, it was nothing. And the greatest thing that happened was that after I had been there for – oh, about a month or something, one of the janitors came by one day and said, "Hey, do you know that down in the boiler, way down in the back there, there are about five or six barrels of tools packed away down there?" I said, "I didn't know." He said, "Well, when they dismantled the department years ago," he said, "I saw people just taking these things home with them. And they were taking them and using them for big stakes, raising stakes. They used them for anchors for their boats and things like that."

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: He said, "And I just thought that was too bad. So I stuffed up about – I filled about five or six big drums down in there with some of the tools." And that was the basis of our whole stake and hammer collection, was right in there. And thanks to a man named Smith, Ray Smith, the custodian, the head custodian.

MR. BROWN: Did the dean now indicate that you would be allowed – were you given some funds and allowed to – with the understanding you were supposed to build it up?

MR. PRIP: Well, you had that – I was supposed to build it up, but they did not give me any funds. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: [Laughter] Oh, you were supposed to perform miracles, huh?

MR. PRIP: No. [Laughter] They didn't seem to be all that serious about it at the time. I stayed there for a while. At the time, there was not a separate – oh, if you could call it a craft-oriented program. The workshops, the woodshop and the metal shop and the machine shop were actually sub-departments, you might say, of industrial design. They were service areas. In other words, the idea was that the people in industrial design would design something, and then they would have the shops available so they could go there. So I guess my title was more or less shop master or something like that.

MR. BROWN: In metals?

MR. PRIP: In metals, yes. And Frid was in wood. And I just slowly developed a program there. It actually grew out of – not a clamoring, a huge, clamoring demand, but I mean, just an interest on the part of the students. I would get – a few students would find that one day a week or two days was not enough. They thought they'd like more, so I'd let them work over the weekend. So I ended up with a small group of people working, just interested in working there all the time, and not interested in their major areas.

And I finally – although in the catalog, I mean, officially I was offering one or two electives for industrial design students, or other people could take the course through industrial design. I had a graduate program before I had an undergraduate program. I had some people, you know, get in touch with me from other schools. And so I had – started out with one student from RISD and three people or two people from Rochester Institute of Technology, the School for American Craftsmen – came. I think, around 1969, we got a small graduate program going.

MR. BROWN: So that was before you had a separate undergraduate.

MR. PRIP: And then the following year, we – they gave us – they didn't give it to us. We had to practically take it by force. We took over some space, architecture, the architectural division vacated some classrooms in more pleasant environment area. And we just occupied that. And it just grew, at that point. There was a considerable interest. Interest was just developing in the crafts, in general.

And it was just – rather confused in the beginning. I had an awful lot of electives in there, people working all the – you know, just --

MR. BROWN: At all levels.

MR. PRIP: And then we just --

MR. BROWN: In the beginning, you couldn't have set up a very regular program.

MR. PRIP: No, it was quite irregular. And it was sort of – I use the term "popular," "by popular demand," and that's pretty much what it was. Again, I'd get more – I'd see these – I could always tell when one of these students would have something on his or her mind. They would be hanging around, and they wouldn't be saying much. They'd look sort of low down, and they'd – I think, "Can I talk to you for a little while?" I'd say, "Yeah. What is it?" And I knew very well what it was.

"Well, I'm in such-and-such a department. And I'm really not very happy there. But I really love this. This is great, you know. Is there some way I could work full time?" I'd say, "Well, we have no" – "Well, isn't there some

way we could sort of get around that?" And we would devise all these sort of – they would still be in illustration, but doing their major work in silversmithing and stuff like that. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: Did you ever directly confront the administration and say, "Why not a department?"

MR. PRIP: Well, what I did, finally, I felt that we were somewhat restricted being part of the industrial design department. And after thinking about it for a while, I decided to sort of relocate the area in a way. And I discussed it with some of the people in the administration. And we shifted that area from industrial design to fine arts. And that just changed our status, that we were part – and we became – or I or the department became part of sculpture.

And then we were working – we offered – actually, we were offering them – at that time, ceramics was also part of sculpture. So it was metal, ceramics, and sculpture.

MR. BROWN: Was that reflective of what I was talking about earlier, the fact that some of the crafts were aspiring to be fine arts?

MR. PRIP: I think that's very much it.

MR. BROWN: Or was it mainly administrative?

MR. PRIP: It was breaking the – you know, it was breaking down. No, it was more a natural development that they – people were more fine arts oriented.

MR. BROWN: But this didn't occur until, what, the late 60s?

[END OF DISK THREE]

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MR. BROWN: But this didn't occur, what, till the late 60s?

MR. PRIP: Well, it had occurred, you know, other places. But at RISD, they – I think we – I'm trying to remember. Somewhere around 1970-71, I think we got that program going.

MR. BROWN: Was it only then that you could develop a full silversmithing training?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Can you maybe describe a little bit, once you got the right to do the whole – say, what was it, three or four years you would have the students? What were the steps you might have taken them through?

MR. PRIP: Well --

MR. BROWN: Did you draw from what you had done at the School for American Craftsman or your training in Denmark?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, I think so, a combination. You always –well, you draw on your experience wherever you happen to have had that experience. And my training, my background, and experience was quite, you know, different, considerably, from most of the people teaching in art schools such as RISD.

MR. BROWN: They were mostly art school products themselves?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, mostly art school products, or -- although at that time there were more people that came to teaching positions in art school from other -- with other experiences. It was more common. But, I just – well, RISD had a good, had an excellent, and still does have a good freshman foundation, period. In other words, a student goes through one year of basic during which they receive good basic design training, two-dimensional, three-dimensional classes. You know, it sort of increases their general awareness of design.

So when you receive them as and then you add to that the fact that RISD was one of the more fortunate schools, I think they did get a high percentage of talented students who considered it a good place to go to. And by the time they would enter the department, they would choose a major, elect a major.

By their sophomore year, they were reasonably well equipped, you know, to come in. And they would then develop through technical exercises. The first, I guess -- my first goal was to attempt to give them something in way of a technical vocabulary to give them an understanding of the materials and the processes in what was involved. And it's nothing startling, I mean, pretty much a standard, you know -- and to then encourage them.

In the meanwhile, they would take -- they would be taking other courses. They would be taking, you know -- they would be working in other areas within sculpture, life drawing, painting, printmaking. So I had -- there was quite a crossover. I mean, we would have students working in the department from painting or sculpture, and they would be working there part time, you know. It's just -- it was quite really rather loose, I guess is the word.

MR. BROWN: But any of those other things you mentioned, though, would they keep their design sense high?

MR. PRIP: Well --

MR. BROWN: Because, while you were teaching at the technical stage -- they were at the technical stage in silversmithing -- did you also try to make sure they kept their design sensitivity?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Well, this was, they were all, you might – well, right from the very beginning they were sort of, you might say, they were two stepped'ed. And there was a design – design was something we've worked into the – and which they would usually explore a process by developing an idea or thought and then attempting to approach it from that point of view. And then just help them, guide them through that.

MR. BROWN: You couldn't start them with the very simple forms that, say, you'd had or a boy would have had in the old days?

MR. PRIP: No. I think you would find the students would not have -- it would have been rather boring and uninteresting for them.

MR. BROWN: You got them into something that required, that requires a little more virtuosity, in terms of --

MR. PRIP: Well, they were given some choice. In other words, you know, even if you're making a very simple little bowl, if you tell them that they – "Well, it's up to you. You can make it from a six-inch disk to a seven-inch disk on a base, or change the base, or change it around, or do something with it." Then they think less. In other words, do anything but tell them, "This is how you have to do." You don't have to do it exactly this way, but you suggest that they take a certain approach. It's dictated, pretty much part of the technical limitations.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. In terms of design they could try and fail?

MR. PRIP: They could try and fail, sure.

MR. BROWN: Whereas the difference to the traditional [inaudible] system is -- system was, most people said, "This is the way it has to be done."

MR. PRIP: This is the way it has to be done.

MR. BROWN: Most people never got to the stage of being independent designers.

MR. PRIP: No. They began as designers. The whole concept of being a designer and craftsman was built by the -- with part of the program.

MR. BROWN: Was three years enough?

MR. PRIP: Well, I don't know what, I guess it's really never enough in a way. I mean, people can always learn more. But we had a surprising number of talented and skilled young people come out of the program, you know. It's just amazing how fast some of them pick up on these things. They just bang-bang-bang, and they just -- it's like it's almost as if they were born with this knowledge, you know, and they were just waiting for the right conditions, the right circumstances to release this. Others, however -- you also found frequently that the people, the most talented and gifted students, since it was rather easy for them, very often would move away – would not stay with it. It was just almost, the challenge was not great enough or whatever. Very often, frequently, the person that really had to sort of, really sort of carve away at, you know, really sort of work and plug away at it, once the skill had been obtained or acquired, it meant more to them and they were more -- I think they were holding onto it, and using it meant more to that person. I'm not suggesting that we ended up with all the slow, semi-retarded students. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: No, but some people went off into what, sculpture or something else?

MR. PRIP: No. It could be they would work and they would say, "Well, now I've had it with -- so, you know, so now I'm going into glass blowing or I'm going into ceramics." [Inaudible] So they would hop and skip around from one thing to another. Not always -- I mean, not much to add, not always the most talented – sometimes, it was just ignorance or just ineptitude that, you know, that sort of prompted them to move on.

MR. BROWN: Those that stuck with your program, what happened when they got out? Did you have any kind of --

MR. PRIP: You just about -- what happens to a person coming out of a liberal arts program or anything like that? They become English teachers, they become --

MR. BROWN: Did you have any orientation for them?

MR. PRIP: Well, not really.

MR. BROWN: Try to --

MR. PRIP: They become salesmen.

MR. BROWN: -- suggest what --

MR. PRIP: They become poets. They become bankers. I don't know. What happens to people? They -- anything, everything, you know.

MR. BROWN: Very much of a percentage go on as silversmiths?

MR. PRIP: I don't know what percentage. A certain percentage did, and sometime they would take a rather indirect route or whatever. And they would go out and work on their own for a while. And you would hear about them, and they would be bartenders or shoe salesmen or something like that. Then you would hear that they were now designers for Gorham or Reed International or Tole or some company, or they would be working in New York for the costume jewelry firm or something like that. Or they would switch out of -- they would leave the areas of jewelry and silversmithing and go into -- carry more towards sculpture. They would be doing sculpture. They become teachers. [Inaudible], I mean you name it.

MR. BROWN: You and I heard Tage Frid say that most of his students seem to go right on with woodworking.

MR. PRIP: I think that --

MR. BROWN: This is not so much the case --

MR. PRIP: I think it's – he – I think there is a greater demand for the skills – right, or – well, it depends. But in recent years, the demand for reasonably well-qualified young cabinetmakers, the demand is just there. All he has to do is go out and say, "I can do this." Even though he may not be designing exciting, innovative furniture, but he can go out and make an extremely good living putting up – installing kitchens, or doing interior work, restaurants and doing, you know, installing work, putting in a bar. There is a great demand for people that know how to handle, manipulate --

MR. BROWN: Why do you think it's different with silver?

MR. PRIP: Well, because it just -- they were not as -- the only -- the real outlet seemed to be more in the area of -- in industry. And many of them tried that and found it to be rather stifling.

MR. BROWN: What about the independent silversmith? Is that -- they're just not as in demand or --

[SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION]

MR. PRIP: Well, they're not; they're not as much in demand. Also, the high price of materials came in like they did. Also, they -- I've thought about this a great deal. I can't tell you. I think we frequently attracted a different kind of, a different type of student. They were more – Frid probably would not like to hear me say this, but they were almost more artistically inclined. They found this work because they had -- they were looking for an outlet, for a creative outlet.

Whereas very frequently you would find that people would -- and many of my students did not really enjoy or appreciate the technical aspects of the work, there was just something they did. But they really wanted -- it was like doing sculpture.

MR. BROWN: The expressive part was more --

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Whereas you found that you would end up with a lot of the just good, solid, regular guys working down the in woodshop, you know, running planks, bzzzt through the planer and making – you know, making things, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And many of them came out of industrial design, where I was getting most of my students out of sculpture. And I think they were just thinking along those lines, going out and establishing a business, constructing.

MR. BROWN: Whereas your people were going to plunge into something else.

MR. PRIP: They were going to go out and make art – you know, make art and – or fail.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: Or die in the attempt. Most of them – or not most of them, but a lot of them did the job, at least for a while.

MR. BROWN: But you saw, the time you were there, the stature of silversmithing at the Rhode Island School of Design pick up and improve a great deal.

MR. PRIP: Well, it went from nothing to a department where we finally – we ended up with, you know – well, a very complete program, which included extension school and summer programs and winter sessions and about 50 majors at one time – close to 50 majors at one time. A good size – six graduate programs with six students.

MR. BROWN: Who were some of your colleagues? Did you bring in new people? Or were you --

MR. PRIP: Well, up until the first – let's see, 10, 12 years, I was alone. I don't know how I had the time [Laughter]. Since then, the first teacher came in, I think, in 74-75, around 74-75, a young man named George van Dinewick [phonetic]. Had been there as a graduate student and then returned. And he was the first teacher. And then after that, we had a man named Harold Schremmer -- was there for a year or two. He left. And then a man named Bruce Muller came in.

And then the department had grown in the meanwhile to a size that it was – we just couldn't – not only could we not deal with all this, that many students, but we couldn't cover – no one person can cover that much ground. So we had a third person teaching there, I'd say about two-thirds of the time. He spent one-third in another department.

And he specialized, mainly, in giving them certain highly specialized technical knowledge. Like people were interested in doing electronic jewelry, using electronic components, and things. And he was – I certainly couldn't help them. I could encourage them, but not really give them much information. So we had Rod Nakamoto teaching in that area.

MR. BROWN: Because these were technical things, using modern techniques? [Inaudible]

MR. PRIP: Yes. And then you got into rather – you know, he went into things where he used plating processes. And you start out as very basic. You just have a glass tank and a, you know, storage battery, and you start plating things. And then it becomes more and more sophisticated. And then you need some larger rectifiers and you need filters for it. And you have to be able to analyze the bass and then it grows and develops. And then you have a whole room full of – it's, you know. And then you get more and more equipment. It drives you crazy after a while, you know.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. PRIP: Just trying to keep, to maintain that. To really keep a good-sized department like that running, with all the equipment, all the – is really quite difficult.

MR. BROWN: Why did all that sort of high technology, whatever you want to call it, develop? Because of the curiosity of the students?

MR. PRIP: Probably. Just –well, you know, it happens while you're not looking.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible]

MR. PRIP: And that's why a lot of schools here, a lot of people – it was always a matter of status for many people, many schools. I never felt that way, but I know other people, that they had to --

MR. BROWN: You mean they had to do apparatus?

MR. PRIP: They had to have certain equipment.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: The more equipment they had, you know, the better the department.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And of course, many places just – somehow, they would get a new person, and they would give them some remarkable sum of money. My budget was always really quite modest. And they would go out and buy everything available, and then just let it all collapse and break down. Because it's easy to buy something, but to keep the stuff running, to keep the stuff in decent condition is another matter.

MR. BROWN: Did you always try to insist that the students learn the basic fabrication before they got into that?

MR. PRIP: As much as we – as far as we could control. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: It's not always, you know.

MR. BROWN: Were administrations there always fairly favorable with this expansion?

MR. PRIP: The administration there, I will tell you --

MR. BROWN: They must have [inaudible].

MR. PRIP: All the years I was at RISD, I never saw – I mean, the only way I could find a person in the administration would be to go over and look for them. I've never – they never – you almost might say they didn't know you existed until, I'd say, the last five, six years I was there during that – when the new president Lee Hall came in. And then there's been a great deal of conflict between the administration and the faculty. And we were quite aware of the administration. But before that, I would say, unless I went looking for an administrator and looking for trouble, then it wasn't there.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. Well, this current climate, a much more activist and intrusive administration, is that, generally speaking, not a good thing?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, it's – well, I just think what – it's just cranking more wheels and filling out more forms, more paperwork. It's certainly not a more efficient place than it was before, if anything, less, although all of these things are done in the name of efficiency, greater efficiency, more "Let's get this thing – let's get this – let's organize, really get this place moving." And the more you do, it seems the more you gum up the works. But they don't – I don't think they see it that way.

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose that gums up – such things gum up the works?

MR. PRIP: Well, I don't know. It's just – you're asking me to --

MR. BROWN: A great deal can be done by word of mouth and verbally that now has to be --

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Sure. I mean, if I have – if we have a problem, if you say, "Well, look. You're my neighbor and I'm doing something" – you know, the easiest thing for you to do is just come over and talk to me about it, rather than go through – write 20 letters through the – you know, they have to go through Boston, through a special office in Boston and then come back to me.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: And I have to fill out forms. Most of these things can be resolved within a few minutes, you know. Just – yes, you can; no, you can't. If I can't, why not? Someone tells you why you can't do it. If you're – unless you're totally and completely unreasonable, you understand it. You walk away satisfied.

Now you find yourself spending most of your time in a state of complete frustration because if you have a complaint or something, you'd like it resolved, there's no one you can go to. No one has – even the people with responsibility tend to pass the buck, you know, because they didn't want to be – get caught with a bad decision,

you know, on their shirt. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: Whereas for years when you were there, people were willing to take on responsibility?

MR. PRIP: I think so. I'm not suggesting that – I'm not suggesting that it was a perfect place, by any means.

[SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION]

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. PRIP: But I think it was, in its own sloppy way, a much more efficient place.

MR. BROWN: How would you compare your teaching there and the quality of the place with the School for American Craftsmen, which you taught in 20 years ago, 30 years ago?

MR. PRIP: Well, it's – well, number one, you must understand the School for American Craftsmen, I came a few years after it had been established. It was started during – just at the very end of the war. I came in 1948.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. PRIP: So it was just getting off the ground.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And I think it was a marvelous place, very exciting and stimulating, and it was just a nice place. But RISD was sort of a really old-time, well-established art school, you know, probably the oldest in the country.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, one of the oldest in the country.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. And so there was a difference in the whole – it was sort of – and RISD covered the entire spectrum of the arts. There was the division of architecture, fine arts, [inaudible], design. And the School for American Craftsmen had – you know, we said there were 50 students there. We had metal, clay, fiber, and wood.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And we had one design teacher, and that was it.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And a barn out in the country, you know. That was rather nice. People knew why they were there.

MR. BROWN: They weren't always sure at RISD?

MR. PRIP: No. I think --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] supervised.

MR. PRIP: Well, you could come there for many years, for many reasons to do many things. But, you know, there was only one possible reason for being at the School for American Craftsmen.

MR. BROWN: Well, we've just been talking about teaching and then your employment in industry. But during the later 50s, 60s, 70s, can you talk for a bit about your work, about how you're going out in the profession? You were a participant in a number of conferences, a juror. You were in some very important exhibitions.

MR. PRIP: Yeah, well, I think you probably get -- people invite you to, you know – they ask you to be a juror because your name appears in a lot of catalogs. So they, I guess, after a while assume you know something about what you're doing. And also, there weren't that many people doing it at the time, you know.

MR. BROWN: Were there any exhibitions or any experiences that particularly stand out?

MR. PRIP: Well, at the time and going way back to the late 40s, there just were not that many exhibitions. The only really important ones were places like Wichita, you know, the Wichita annual. I think I may have mentioned this when we talked earlier. And Los Angeles had an annual MOMA affair. And there was a show in 1953, I remember. The Brooklyn Museum sponsored a very large national craft exhibit.

MR. BROWN: And that was quite an important exhibit.

MR. PRIP: It was quite important, yeah, I think. And then there was – not particularly from the point of view of the metal smith, but for other people, of course, the Syracuse National – Ceramic National.

MR. BROWN: Ceramics?

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: That Brooklyn show, there was – there is where the controversy as to whether craftsmen are artists or mere artisans came out, I remember, in that 53 show at Brooklyn.

MR. PRIP: Well, I don't know. You see, that's only – that's something people talked about at that time. Now students – no one even thinks about that.

MR. BROWN: No, no.

MR. PRIP: It's just understood that you're – if you're a silversmith or a potter, you're an artist.

MR. BROWN: Right. I just wondered if you had a memory of that.

MR. PRIP: Oh, definitely, yeah, sure.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: Because as I said, my background, my background was such that I had been trained as an artisan.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: I mean, this was – that was my whole training and background and experience. And not until – I guess – well, art requires a certain – in other words, requires fertile ground and certain conditions in which to thrive. It's going to thrive, you know. And I don't know what – where life would have led me or what I would have done. But I found conditions that were conducive, I think, to my own – to my personal development when I came to the School for American Craftsmen as a teacher.

I didn't just go there and teach a couple of days a week and go home. I spent all my time there. And I was just working and, you know, just found it exciting and interesting to explore new areas, new possibilities, new techniques. I just didn't – I wasn't – definitely not conscious of it at the time. All I knew was I was working. I enjoyed it. I worked along with the students.

MR. BROWN: And you would send things to exhibitions as frequently as it seemed warranted?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, once in a while, if I had something I felt good about.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And it wasn't good --

MR. BROWN: But you didn't get caught up in those controversies to any extent?

MR. PRIP: Oh, no, no. Other than, you know, people would – you'd sit around and you'd knock off a couple of bottles of wine or something like that. And then people would start talking about silly things, the way they normally do. And so you'd get into all kinds of things about art and craft, and what is art, and what is craft? And why not? And all those things.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: But it never – well, maybe I did. I had – I guess I had certain feelings about it. I was certainly more rigid at that – than I am now. Now, it's – I don't even really like to – don't even want to talk about it.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: It's not important. I mean, it's something that's really for other people to judge. In other words, if someone is an artist, produces art, then that's fine. If they – if it's not, then that's fine, too. If it keeps them busy and occupied, that's great.

MR. BROWN: You've said to me that you feel there's no strong need to legitimize the crafts. I mean, they are what they are.

MR. PRIP: They are. Sure. I do think – I mean, I do – see, my background – we were talking a little while ago

about what happens to students or frequently happens. There's a certain forced development within an art school or the environment of an art school, or the art school environment, I guess. And you feed people so much information. And their tastes in schools develop rather rapidly. And they sort of assume that that's the way it is, you know? But it's a forced process. It's like a hothouse or, you know, for plants. In some ways, you're corrupting the growth, this spurt of growth.

And my background was slightly different. I really grew up with a great deal of respect for the – you might say the common object, for the common – and I never felt that this was a lesser thing to be doing. As a matter of fact, I always felt it was extremely difficult. Anyone that would attempt – that ever tried to design a commonplace object such as a chair or a set of flatware or dinnerware, porcelain dinnerware realizes – soon realizes that this is extremely difficult, mainly because it's been done so many times. It's been done, not only many, but thousands and thousands of times by so many people, some of them very capable.

And to enter that field and attempt to sift through all those and come up – and find something new and original is just about the hardest, one of the most difficult design problems a person can face. I think much more so than designing, you know, something that's more extravagant, where there are very few limitations placed on you.

So I guess I'm just saying that I don't really have – I do not have a great deal of admiration or respect for poorly – or things that pretend to be useful and yet are poorly or thoughtlessly constructed or made.

MR. BROWN: Do you have any quarrel, say, in silver with people who do things that are overtly sculpture and nonfunctional?

MR. PRIP: No, no. That's just – but the silver is always the material.

MR. BROWN: Because here we have now the work you are doing. This is in 72 or 73, a review of your work, I suppose of recent – of the late 60s, early 70s. And this is certainly, in some cases, an ornament. Could be used as jewelry. Other cases, it's simply forms.

MR. PRIP: That's true, yeah.

MR. BROWN: It looks so sculptural.

MR. PRIP: There was nothing – there's nothing conscious in that.

MR. BROWN: You yourself went toward that.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. I guess I just did it. It was a natural thing. I've never been very – you know, for lack of a better term, I guess you might say intellectual in my approach or intellectualized to any great extent. I would just look at the thing when it was finished and wonder how it got there, really, you know.

MR. BROWN: But you certainly – because you remember. You moved a great deal away from what you were doing, say, with Reed and Barton, with the material we just looked at, which was still [inaudible].

MR. PRIP: Well, I was doing things like that while I was at Reed and Barton. I would – I had always maintained a small shop at home. And I would go in there and work evenings and weekends, use the facilities. And I was always fooling around doing other stuff.

MR. BROWN: And the fooling-around stuff became the more important stuff, eventually.

MR. PRIP: Became more important, sure.

MR. BROWN: But what did you do when you fooled around, worked with other materials?

MR. PRIP: Sometimes paper, cardboard, anything – anything I could lay my hands on.

MR. BROWN: And then perhaps casts from that, if you were going to do --

MR. PRIP: Sometimes casts. Just anything I could think of, to tell you the truth. Nothing – I never consciously placed any restrictions on what I was doing. I never said, "This is the way you have to do that," you know. But again, that's just because, I guess, that's the way I am. I didn't say – I didn't do the opposite, either. I didn't consciously say, "I will be completely free, and I will do anything." You know, I guess I just did what I did, you know. I guess I – for whatever reasons.

MR. BROWN: Well, take a form like this. This is a container with a lid, in brass.

MR. PRIP: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: You know how to prepare something to be – was this cast in brass? Or was this hammered?

MR. PRIP: That's all hammered, all fabricated.

MR. BROWN: So this form itself, did this evolve or did you play with designs like that – [inaudible] very strong [inaudible]?

[SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION]

MR. PRIP: I just – I'll tell you one of the things I liked – I've always enjoyed doing. Again, this is something – I don't know how this grew, how it developed. I've always enjoyed just putting things together, stacking things. And very often, I mean, unlikely – what could be – in some ways, you know, that's sort of a flattened, spherical – whatever you call it – shape, sitting on, you know, a very geometric section, you know. What is that? It's half a cube. [Laughter]

MR. BROWN: It's sort of a cube, is it?

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And then it's in turn sitting on the cylinders.

MR. PRIP: And supported by two cylinders.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: Well, it's very – if you were to do that with some other material – it's just very nice, the way the light plays off those surfaces and the way – and the proportions. I have no theories that guide me. I just would take this one and put that one on top of it. And then I'd say – I'd look around. I'd see a rock, and I'd put that on it. And I'd say, "That's a nice combination. I think I'll make something like that."

MR. BROWN: So these things are very processed, the process of constantly working with forms and materials – manipulation.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Um-hm. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Without – no intentional program you lay out.

MR. PRIP: No, never, no. Occasionally, I would do it – I would approach it from a different point of view. I would take – I would find the process to be interesting or fascinating. That was something I'd never done before. I would start taking wax impressions from the surfaces or something like that.

And then I would just -- not – it was somewhat conscious, but not really. I was just being [inaudible], and then just working my way through that process to see how many things I could do with that, with a given technique. How many different ways could I exploit it and explore it and develop it? And then try to sift through the results there and see what I had found and if I could use it in any way.

MR. BROWN: But it wasn't totally chance. I mean, you were – your design sense was leaking out. You were selecting all the time.

MR. PRIP: Oh, sure. It was – well, nothing, nothing you do – in that sense, nothing you do is really chance. You're – I don't know, you know.

MR. BROWN: You'd take a [inaudible].

MR. PRIP: I don't know. It's much easier – I think it's easier – well, I shouldn't -- maybe not. Some people can explain what they do before they do it. I find it easier, in a way, to explain it after I've done it, you know. And even then, I can't quite explain why that something – the thing takes the form it does.

I don't understand a great deal about what – why people do the things they do, to tell you the truth. It seemed like a good idea at the time. Let's put it that way, you know. I may have seen something else that appealed to me somewhere, a book or a magazine. Or I may have seen a piece in a museum. It just all becomes part of your file system, you know, goes into your file system up there. And you pull it out when you need it, I guess.

MR. BROWN: Well, now explain this. There's a pendant. It's a rather elegant thing. It's mixed gold and silver, mother of pearl with some banding in the lower portion.

MR. PRIP: Um-hm. That – I guess it's just –

MR. BROWN: A great variety.

MR. PRIP: If I could tell you, I could go on, I could talk, I could give you a long spiel about why I did that. But I think I just liked that wiggly form down there, and I thought, well, what would contrast that nicely? And I had a fondness, I guess – I must have because I've done it so many times – for trying to get unlikely things to go together, you know, just to combine things. I didn't do it because I think, "Well, now – what can I – I'll take this spin, just because they are unlikely candidates for, you know, a union." It just seemed to appeal to me to put these in like they – attempt to combine these unlikely elements.

And it was a game, in a way, you know, to keep trying to do them and work them together until I found it. It's like something balances.

MR. BROWN: Okay. Well, you sure have a combination of geometrical and natural forms, and then here there's these striations of mother of pearl texture.

MR. PRIP: Mother of pearl – yeah, yeah. And the only thing, if I were to tell you anything looks like anything at all, it looks like a double apple up there or something, with the stem coming out of it.

MR. BROWN: You pick that up again over here in this electroplated lid to this box.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. But you know, that never occurred to me before. I was just sitting here looking at. And you're holding that, and I can see it. It never even occurred to me. What it means is that I was – and you can see that it actually comes out -- it's here, too.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: Well, I guess what it means that I responded to that at the time, you know. I didn't think too much about it, I just did it.

MR. BROWN: That in itself is another – there are strongly contrasting forms.

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: The spirals and then the square.

MR. PRIP: But it had no real significance. In other words, there was no message that I was trying to get across.

MR. BROWN: Oh. No, but your – the penchant you mentioned earlier for juxtaposing – trying to – working, fiddling with contrasting forms comes out time and again.

MR. PRIP: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: In the abrupt transitions from one texture to another or one form to another.

MR. PRIP: And you know, it fits that that little piece there to your right, on your right. Again, that's not only the form, but the techniques – it's that section on the lid is completely electroformed. I was interested in electroforming. And that was – came out of my experimenting with electroforming. I developed that – built that entire unit through electroforming.

I thought, well, what would – it's sort of a slightly rough and crude. I guess I thought it would look nice on something very sharp and precise. But then I – again, looking at it, I didn't want it to be too mechanical. So it's tilted slightly. I made it just a little crooked, you know. So it's sort of – and the top section is gold-plated, those egg – combination of egg element there. And the lower section is rhodium plated, which is real – which in some ways could be real tacky. It's real bright and shiny. It's brighter than chrome, in other words.

And I can't tell you why. It seemed a good idea at the time, but apparently, it did. That's all I can say.

MR. BROWN: You exhibited this sort of thing quite a bit, didn't you? You were exhibiting?

MR. PRIP: Not that often. No, I didn't show that much. You know, I just get – I would –

FEMALE VOICE: You had a jewelry show.

MR. PRIP: Yeah, jewelry. I guess it just wasn't at the top of my list, you know.

MR. BROWN: In juroring, did you see an awful lot? Do you think that had any influence on you?

MR. PRIP: It's possible. I think everything you see has an influence, you know, if you're open to it. Everything

you see has an influence.

MR. BROWN: But now here again, this is a container with this pewter. You worked with pewter a good deal, didn't you?

MR. PRIP: Yes. And that particular piece has – is – you can't see it, but it's nickel-plated. And that grew out of my experience making samples, flatware samples for stainless steel. It was so difficult to make these stainless steel samples. I mean, you'd kill yourself trying to work directly with stainless steel, you know?

MR. BROWN: Extremely hard.

MR. PRIP: Oh, so hard, so tough, and not very grateful material. And I've discovered that I could make them out of pewter. And we just would finish them off and just flash them in nickel. And it approximately had the appearance of stainless steel. It had that sort of dull metallic surface. And since all people were willing to do was just to be – look at them anyway, why?

And this young man that had been my student many, many years before that went to work for Gorham, Burr Sebring. He's head of design at Gorham. And once I had met him somewhere; I can't remember if it was New York. And he said, "Jack," he said, "I just had to ask you that. You may not want to tell me," he said, "But how the hell do you get to make those samples, those stainless samples?" You know, boy, they looked – they're perfect.

You know, boy, and that stuff killed me. We had been trying to make those things. And when I told him how I did it, he just couldn't, you know --

It's all right. Then I just took that and used it just to experiment with it. And I think it – I liked that.

MR. BROWN: Pewter is very easily manipulated, isn't it?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. That's its – that's the advantage of – it's also the limitation and its drawback, in a way. You can – it's not very strong. So you have to treat it a certain – I guess it would be like high-fired stone and low-fired --

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Hence the bulkiness of these forms. You can't be any more decorative or delicate.

MR. PRIP: Yeah, you can't – no, you can't do decorating or delicate.

MR. BROWN: And then you plate it. You find you can plate it on low, low temperatures.

MR. PRIP: You know, I had – see, I was also rather fortunate in a way. I had – even after I left Reed and Barton, I had sort of access to certain technical – that most people would not have been able to use. And I could go over to Joe and say, "Hey, Joe, how about putting the – running this one through and let's see what happens, what it looks like?" Well, you know, most people do not have that.

MR. BROWN: So you were able to pursue an extremely wide variety of things. You mentioned Styrofoam, using that as a finish material, or is it something you used in casting?

MR. PRIP: Well, I used it in casting. I used it for matrix, for electroforming. And then they would float – they would always float to the surface, where I had to split them and put mud weights inside and then try to melt it out afterwards.

And I remembered there was this guy. I told you we had a guy named Harold Schremmer teaching at the school for a while. And after I got to know him, he said, "You know, Jack?" He said, "I used to see you at things around." He said, "I thought Jack Prip had to be six guys, had to be six different people." Not that I was that productive or prolific. But he said, "Every time I'd see something, it would be – look like it was made by another person."

MR. BROWN: Oh, I get it. I see what he means, just looking at this one group of four things.

MR. PRIP: And I didn't – and in some ways, I guess, it's – I always thought of it as a strength. But some people, I almost think in the – in art, it can be almost a weakness, unless you're just so completely and totally prolific. A person like Picasso, you know, would be an extreme example.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. PRIP: Other than that, it's considered that you can't – people just think, "Oh, that guy can't make up his mind. He jumps around from one thing to the other."

MR. BROWN: Did they really think that?

MR. PRIP: I think some people think that. I'll tell you, a gallery or a museum would much rather have – I've heard people in galleries and museums, for instance, say, "Oh, no. We don't want to show that person. You can't really – he has no recognizable style." You know, I've heard them turn down very fine, outstanding people, not wanting to give them shows, you know, for that very – and I always thought that was – I mean, that was the greatest compliment, in a way, anyone could pay.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MR. PRIP: Because so many people, the worst thing that can happen to them, especially today when there is such – it's so difficult to get into galleries or be accepted – is that they have some success at an early stage. And they stay with – they're just – they're afraid. If they do something else, the gallery director will say, "Hey, what the hell is this? This doesn't look like you."

MR. BROWN: Right. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. It's not that different really than from, say, Reed and Barton's sales force coming back and saying, "I'm sorry, but this is as far as we can go."

MR. PRIP: No. There are many people that fall into --

MR. BROWN: It's very analogous, isn't it?

MR. PRIP: And what really surprises me is that – you'll see artists. You know that they must have been very, very – you know, really extremely innovative at one point. Otherwise, they would not have done their original work, the first work, the work that gained them their reputation. And then you see 25 years later, they're doing exactly the same thing.

Now, I don't think that you have to jump around all the time. I think you should follow your – whatever your nature happens to be. And there's much to be said for slow, meticulous new development. But just to latch onto a formula that gives you success and stay with it --

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Your nature at this time was prodigious, wasn't it? You were plunging in a number of directions.

MR. PRIP: In other words, I didn't do more things because I didn't have more time. [Laughter] You know – in other words, I probably would have done many, many more different things.

MR. BROWN: Now, these are things of the early 70s, I assume?

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: You have geometrical forms. Here's natural forms, a bird's foot. Here's part of a shell. Here's a finger. These are all, what? That are cast and molded from the forms themselves?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, just a – anything that would – I could – that would work.

MR. BROWN: You're translating into silver or gold, natural?

MR. PRIP: Yeah. It's not because I had – well, I probably did have a thing about natural objects and things. But not – I wasn't thinking, well, I – that's what I'm – I just happened to have them around and I liked them. So I used them.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm.

MR. PRIP: I tried to, when I was most active – if I could describe the way I worked, I would say – or I worked at that time, I'd say that I developed – it was almost like working with found objects. The only difference, that I made my own objects. And then I would go around almost like searching through my studio until I found them, until I found the right thing that would go in some – I'd very often take things apart and use this. Or I'd make a lid for something. And I would decide it didn't look good.

But I wouldn't scrap it. I'd put it on the shelf, or I'd put it somewhere, and I'd stack a rock or put feathers in it and work them in. And it would sit there for maybe five years. I would put a lot – a lot of things were together, like that piece there with the shell and the – that's a dog bone that I found out in the yard. I polished that, sanded that down, polished it. The shell was sitting over there. And I just – I did a lot of work with wax, with brown sculptor's wax. And I would just stick these things together.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And then some of them sort of became – I became so accustomed or so familiar – they became such familiar objects that I decided to just, I guess, make them permanent. I just – you know, after I had that thing sitting around for five years or three or four years, stuck together with wax, one day the cat – it would fall over and fall apart – I thought, "Gee, I should really do something."

MR. BROWN: But of course, those things you had stuck together with wax were things you'd in a sense created. They were completely that. They weren't found objects. They were combinations of --

MR. PRIP: No. But then I would take parts and pieces of that.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, I see what you mean. Yeah.

MR. PRIP: I say "found objects."

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: I mean, in other words, if you made all your own objects and then you just --

MR. BROWN: They were assembled by you.

MR. PRIP: They were assembled, you know. And one of the reasons I think I did that – I did a lot of that – is because metalsmithing in itself or metalwork is so time consuming and so slow that this gives you a certain relief. It gives you a certain – it's one way of being spontaneous in a very slow and tedious medium when working within the confines of metal.

MR. BROWN: I assume that partly accounts for why you were so tolerant of your talented students who would hop, skip, and jump from one thing to another.

MR. PRIP: Oh, I always encouraged it.

MR. BROWN: [Laughter]

MR. PRIP: Sure.

MR. BROWN: Well, this sort of thing you were doing at the time, you have this 1971 show, was that at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts?

MR. PRIP: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: That was a one-man show. Do you recall, was that quite an important show?

MR. PRIP: Yeah, it was. It became more important than I realized because shortly after that I ran into a lot of serious physical problems that kept me away from work for quite a few years. And so that sort of culminated, in a way, the work I did during those years. And --

MR. BROWN: What was – do you recall, what was some critical reaction in the profession to this [inaudible]? When they saw it?

MR. PRIP: I guess there was – I guess I can – a number of people were complimentary, I mean, seemed to enjoy it. I received even some letters from people telling me they thought it was good. And I imagine there was a certain amount of indifference. I don't know.

But I think that it was a slightly – it came not consciously so, but on looking at it now, I think it was different than most of the things. In other words, there was almost like a style of ceramics, and there was a style in metal, wood, and jewelry, and certain textures and certain formulas were used. And I think that – you know, looking at this – I haven't looked at this stuff here for a long time – it's probably different than most of the work people were doing.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. PRIP: And I think that one of the things, the greatest compliments I received was from a person who told me that he never – he really never thought anyone could make a statement through the crafts. In other words, that they were confined to, you know – if they allowed themselves to be confined by craft media, that the demanding techniques of craft. But he felt that walking into the room and looking at this total – at this, almost as an environment created by my objects, that it did make a very strong – you know, the total statement.

MR. BROWN: Unprecedented, as far as he knew.

MR. PRIP: Well, I don't know. I mean, that I wouldn't put it --

MR. BROWN: In crafts.

MR. PRIP: He also happened to be a good friend of mine; you know, that may have had something to do with it. But I think he tends to be reasonably honest, you know. So what else?

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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