



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Willard
Cummings, 1973 March 20

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Willard Cummings on March 20, 1973. The interview took place in Carnegie Hall, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

PC: Paul Cummings

WC: Willard Cummings

PC: Let me say it's the 20th of March, 1973, Paul Cummings talking to Bill Cummings in his studio in Carnegie Hall. You were born in Maine right?

WC: Yes, Alton, 1915.

PC: And was your family there, I mean was that their

WC: No, my father was working for the American Woolen Company. He and mother had met in Borderville where he was working in Bassboro and they were married and moved to, he was given a larger plant to manage in Old Town, Maine. And I was the first child and my brother Cain was born about a year and a half later, also in Old Town and then we moved to Skowhegan when he was given a larger mill and we lived in the mill house which was a beautiful Bulfinch house, located on the river there, which has unfortunately been torn down and then in 1924 I think, he didn't particularly like the way the American Woolen Company was going. They actually wanted him to be head of it and he didn't want this so he started his own business. A shodding business and where he made or the mill made lining for refrigerators and it was a very low quality product. Then we moved to Welsley Hills and

PC: When was that?

WC: Well, at Kowhegan three sisters were born and my family was interested in music and also interested in theatre and I was interested in painting. In 1925 we moved to Welsley Hills where we lived for three years and during that time I studied at Boston, first with Anna Coleman Ladd the sculptress in her studio on Clarendon Street. And my brother and I both had tutors for schoolwork at this point and I went into Boston three days a week to study art.

PC: Well, had you started drawing, you know, early on?

WC: Yes, I had started drawing early in Skowhegan when I was about six I drew all the time and I preferred it to guess all sports and most everything else. And so I'd always drawn some and I had the my family had taken me to Boston twice to see a couple of potters and Anna Ladd was one of them, who is a friend of the family's and she took me on as a student in her studio there.

PC: Was that for sculpture or drawing or painting?

WC: Oh, that was for sculpture, yes we copied, I copied a Michealangelo; The Eye of David and I copied The Ear of David I believe, and various things from plaster casts in those days. And it was quite exciting to me because Mrs. Ladd had several you know, very exciting people posing in the studio. I remember at that time, that I was studying with her. She was doing a bust of Balanda Yurka who was playing in The Wild Duck in Boston at the Repertory Theatre and then through Lakewood next to Skowhegan, you know, they have the oldest summer theatre in the country. I'd always been interested in theatre too, and very interested in theatre people and liked them a lot.

PC: That developed on your own or through family interests?

WC: Oh the family pursued the theatre and was naturally connected with it. Dad was the director, president of the company, although he was running his own mill, he did this. Had an interest in it on the side. Which helped them out because he was a good businessman. And so our house was always filled with actors, also another friend of the early days was G.I. Adams. He started the Modern Museum with Alfred Barr and had been at the Fogg, he taught at Vogner and left Vogner and went to the Fogg at about the age of 28 or so and was a good friend of Alfred Barr's and they traveled in Europe and Russia and France together a great deal and his father and my father were very good friends, and he was a very good friend of and the age of Mike Bambendore and so he was in the house very often. Friends, and encouraged me a great deal at quite an early age, also Blanda

Yurka was there one summer, she came to do one play and spent the entire summer with us. I invited her to stay with us because I met her with Mrs. Ladd and she came for one week's rehearsal, one week's performance and stayed on the rest of the summer with us and she was great fun, very energetic and very dramatic and very exciting and she also drew quite well. So on rainy days we'd take charcoal and chalk, charcoal out of the fireplace, and chalk and draw portraits and draw. At that time Jere liked one of the drawings I did that must have been about eleven, he liked one of the drawings very much, which I saw years ago in his house which pleased me very much and let's see, then we moved to Wellesley but we always came back to Skowhegan in the summertime. We had a cottage on the lake which is now part of the school property.

PC: Well, I'm curious about your interests in music, theatre, I suppose also literature. Did you read a lot as a child?

WC: Well, we had a tutor and we read Greek plays and things like that. I didn't read very much contemporary literature at that time and as I recall we weren't allowed to read Zane Grey stories.

PC: Right, which everybody else was reading.

WC: Which everybody else was reading except us and also we were starting violin at the time, we studied with, we had two violin teachers, two lessons a week. One with Felix Minternitz who had been the first violinist under Munch, the original Munch at the Boston Symphony, remarkable man, and with an assistant of us called Irene Forte and we all, all the children played. My brother played the violin, I played the violin, one sister played the cello, another one played the piano, and one played the harp. So we were being quite pushed into music, and then in Boston this all continued, the girls continued studying music and as I say I was studying with Minternitz as well as studying with Jack Eastman who is now the director of the Skowhegan schools and I used to take the trolley from Wellseley Hills to the Boston Museum for the Saturday morning classes, drawing classes at the Boston Museum and that was geared very much for children, I mean we'd do watercolors and details of Egyptian tombs and that sort of thing, copies of Chinese screens.

PC: Well, was the music your interest or was that really a parental interest?

WC: I think it was maternal and paternal interest.

PC: Were you interested in it?

WC: I liked it, I liked music very much, but I was not a good musician at all. I was very poor. I mean I had very sort of sentimental taste, so on. I mean I liked, you know, Chrysler and the sort of sentimental music much better than Back and Mozart.

PC: Do you still play or not?

WC: No, I decided in Paris years later, 1928 or 9, I couldn't do both painting and sculpture and music because I had really gotten, studying in art Beaux Engaie and studying with my head violin teacher was Master Schier who was then a contemporary of Boulange Mile, Boulanger and the second fine teacher I had at the conservatory was the young man whose first concert we went to a St. Raphael, was Gino Van Visconti and you know they were pretty good strong stuff and I know I got to be pretty good but I figured I'd never make it as a fiddler and I really was much fonder of painting and sculpture. And so in Paris I studied we had first year we had courses there in a school called the Ecole Pascale.

PC: How did you get to Paris though? Was that you?

WC: Well, the family took us, took my brother and I over and we stayed there and we stayed there the years. And then mother and the three girls came over the next year and we had an apartment in the Bat Marceau. And then I took special courses at the Sorbonne and we had a tutor, an English tutor for algebra, or for math and Latin and English, and then I took courses at the La Courcion and so forth. I was about fourteen, fifteen, or fourteen. I took courses, sit in courses at the Sorbonne which I loved and then I was studying also part of the time at the Ecole Julian, Academie Julien, and also studied privately with a sculptor named Louis Aman-Jean, a sculptor not well known in this country, well known in France in the time.

PC: Well, how did you like all this milieu that you were in?

WC: I loved it. I was a compulsive worker and I loved it, I spent long hours in the studio and then would come home and get the school work done and we worked long days and we had a wonderful time. We all were very enthusiastic sight seers, we went to the Louvre very often, we went to Lateramine also went to opera and ballet and all that sort of thing and liked it very much. Saw Nijinsky, saw quite a few people who of course are now legend. And then my brother and I took several trips, very simply, through the country on our own time before we came back to America in the spring leaving from La Harve. We took a three weeks trip on our own, just

station to station as we wanted to do it and I was very interested in medieval art at the time. I was crazy about Gothic architecture and Romansque architecture and I had studied it with Focillor at the Sorbonne and also the man who had an apartment upstairs, a chap named Harrison who was in the consulate there, he and his two sisters and mother lived above us, he was an ardent medievalist and I was very fond of him so he, this became a really raging enthusiasm. My brother and I spend a week in Chartres going through every single piece of stained glass in each window, you know, day by day by day by day and going through every piece of sculpture on all of the three portals and also doing watercolors of Portion and Charitt and so on.

PC: How much time did you spend in France then?

WC: We were there for two years.

PC: For two years.

WC: From October of '28 until Spring of '30.

PC: And why did you come back, was that

WC: Well there was something in America called Crash, so having really lived in Paris with the best teachers and everything in the world we came back and Dada wanted us to keep the big house in Wellsley Hills and continue the same sort of education we had been living on a more moderate scale, and mother didn't want to do that and in the meantime they had bought an old farm adjoining our summer property which they had bought really to have it an adjunct to the Eastman Music Camp which was run by friends of theirs, Sir Frances Finney, Walter Damrosch, Hanson and so forth and mother didn't want to move back to Wellesely with Dad being in Skohegan running the mills and he closed his Boston office which he had when we lived in Wellesely Hills. And so we moved into this house that hadn't been lived in for thirty years, an old south, the old nurse that had been with the Cummings grandparents had come with us, come with mom and dad when my brother and I were born and a girl named Naia, a Mexican girl, she and her sister. And she had, she was a woman of I guess forty by this time, she married, when was about four and a half feet tall and she married an almost seven foot Swede from Westport, Maine, going into either a gas station or a chicken business so before we got home from Europe, Dad who had always indulged her anything she wasted because she was an absolute little saint, and set her up, set her husband up in the chicken business and when we came back from Europe, Pete Whiting was his name. He and mother did not see eye to eye on how to run the whole establishment and so one morning we woke up with 6,000 chickens to feed before we went to school. In the meantime we had been given an old Buick by some friends of Dad's and I was old enough to have a license. I was fifteen in those days, and so I was the family chauffeur for school projects. And we'd, it was probably the best thing that ever happened to us because we were certainly well on the way of being totally spoiled and

PC: Well, how did you like this shift in life, going to school and not having tutors?

WC: Oh, I think it was great. We had this old house and we all came home and scraped paint and took off tin ceilings and finally restored the house to what it had been originally in 1792 and which was my mother's enthusiasm Dad's too, he liked it very much and we all liked it. So we'd scrape paint and candled eggs, we raised hatching eggs, to get a little more pay for them than just ordinary eggs. And then we would kill and dress chickens and deliver them on weekends to various institutions, the Elmwood Hotel, the Central Maine Sanitarium and several other places. We would clean and dress as many as 250 chickens a weekend so these were the days when they were dipped into hot water and handplucked. We continued that and then I almost finished high school in Skowhegan but I didn't, and so in 1931 they decided that they could get along without me as a farm hand and I came to New York and lived at the Sloan House and went to Grand Central in the day time and the Art Student's League at night.

PC: How did you pick those two schools?

WC: Well there weren't too many other schools in New York at that time.

PC: Oh there was the Academy.

WC: Well there was the Academy and I liked there was a man that I liked very much at named George Oberteuffer who just returned from many years living in France and he was a very fine painter and I liked him very much and then I always wanted to be a portrait painter from the very beginning.

PC: How so? I mean for what?

WC: Just because I like painting portraits. I was crazy about people and I though portraits were very handsome, very beautiful and Wayman Adams was teaching at Grand Central in those days and I suppose that was why I went there to begin with and he was a good teacher.

PC: Who else did you study with at those schools?

WC: Well, I started studying when I was in Boston. I started studying with Philip Hale. Three weeks a day, who was then sort of Kind of Boston, I was too young to work at the Museum School where he taught but I worked in his studio and we got along very well, and at that time, another student was Robert Haze. Was at Harvard. He was more than I was, he would come in every Saturday with his box of charcoal all chopped down to pinpoint and worked very meticulously as well all did and Mr. Hale's daughter, Nancy Hale, the writer, writer for women and so forth would come in too and she was

PC: What would you draw?

WC: Well, I drew from casts and then did several self-portraits and several still-lives and then I started painting a little bit although he kept me drawing most of the time and these were very long and complete drawings in red chalk and charcoal or red chalk and all done in parallel lines, all striped which was Mr. Hale's technique. He used quite a famous, did a very fine book on Vermeer which I never read, which was very large and impressive and he had acquired a reputation in France as a very fine draftsman and he was a wonderful man. I don't know that I'm crazy about his work but today but he was a brilliant raconteur and liked me very much I guess because I was a nuisance. He had quite few old ladies in the studio he'd tell marvelous stories to and I at fourteen would miss the point entirely and then say, what happened Mr. Haley, and so forth and then I asked where one landscape was one day, I used to work on his pictures during lunch hour too. He painted in little strokes, and so forth, so I didn't see that he would notice if I did a little work on them so I sued to work on them, both the pastels and the paintings while he was out to lunch when I wasn't with him. And he never did notice the difference or if he did notice he never said anything.

PC: Terrific.

WC: His wife Lilian Westcott Hale. That used to annoy me a great deal because the general gossip around Boston was that she was a finer painter than he was and I wasn't going to buy this at all. But anyway the Boston days were very exciting.

PC: Well what kind of idea did he talk about? You know, his ideas about art or things you'd pick up besides the drawing, the techniques.

WC: Well, he didn't very much, he talked about people and characters. That is to say he was a very good raconteur. He was very fond of Seurat. I know many of his students would copy a little Seurat print. He was interested in pointillism although he didn't paint that way himself. He painted in long brushstrokes, I mean narrow sort of impressionist brush strokes but nothing adding up to impressionism at all and he seemed to favor a kind of impressionism and did very literary I suppose intentionally romantic pictures and one of the landscapes was called of course Bohemia and had later become the ...

PC: Right.

WC: So he was a very amusing and marvelous man and he gave a very fine anatomy course and he used to drag me and we gave one at the Boston Public Library, and also at the Museum and he used to take me around to those lecture courses and sit me in the back row.

PC: What were they given from drawings that he had made or

WC: They were mostly given the big book he used was Dunlop's Anatomy and he has all kinds of charts, he had skeletons and charts and he talked about you know, muscle structure, and but it was mostly, my recollection of it is that the course was really based on knowing anatomy rather than the relationship of anatomy to drawing, how it worked as being useful to drawing never seemed to be a consideration.

PC: Bones and the muscles.

WC: Yeah, just the impression of actually having the knowledge. There was never any attempt as far as I remember to relate this to drawing or even to flexible with it. Just to get the actual technical knowledge of the structure of the body and the muscles of the body.

PC: Have you found that useful in the years?

WC: Yes, I think it was a little academic, a little staid and a little dull and I think I've heard Bob do a lecture on anatomy and he makes it much more alive, much more vital and much more part of the whole group. He gives you reason to the whole thing, how it functions and how Mr. Hale didn't, you learned anatomy in the same way you'd cover a salad course at a dinner or something like that. It didn't seem to relate as he talked about, I mean didn't relate to it, or if he did he didn't convey his relationship to me of why, how anatomy was really an

alive and exciting thing and worked in terms of really fine drawing. I mean you never looked any other master drawings, Michelangelo in connection with these things, it was just Dunlop's Anatomy and Mr. Hale himself.

PC: So you became a great surgeon?

WC: So I became a great surgeon, right.

PC: What kind of art were you interested in at that point?

WC: Only to be a portrait painter.

PC: But I mean older painters, what which ones interested you? Were you interested in Rembrandt or Manet or Cezanne?

WC: Well, I was always crazy about Manet. Of course in those days we weren't very exposed to the French artists. I mean I remember the first showing in Boston of any French pictures at all was the Fuller Collection in which they had Manets and Renoirs and Cezannes and et cetera. And this was of course at the time '27 or '28, it was considered revolutionary you know, like wild. I don't know why Seurat didn't seem as wild except that he was the painter Mr. Hale seemed to like and Hale never talked very much about the others at all, at least to me.

PC: No interest in old masters.

WC: I'm interested in old masters, yes, and I'm crazy about De Vinci. I love the Italian primitives, primitives, I say people like Botticelli and Lippi, I was very fond of Michelangelo I was very fond of, I had a special interest in Botticelli and Lippi I think.

PC: What was the appeal?

WC: I don't know, I just like the way they drew and the kind of character you know the kind of character that their people were intended and don't many contemporary painters to pick, but I hadn't seen very much contemporary painters.

PC: Well what about the museum in Boston though because that had been

WC: Well yes but there again there were very few contemporary pictures, very few. Now there were Rembrandts and I suppose perhaps the most contemporary things in those days was the collection of Millet and I liked Millet. But I wasn't too crazy about him. I like him very much now, but then I thought they were sort of not very interesting.

PC: Were there many, well you couldn't know many other artists at that point or did you?

WC: No.

PC: No.

WC: Waldo Peirce was an old friend, he came over to do my sister's portrait at Lakewood in about 1926 I guess or something like that and he was a wild man and he was married to Ivy Trouton then and a wonderful guy. But he and we all liked him very much he did a good portrait of my sister but not many much smaller world there in those days, much less exposed. I remember when Waldo arrived. His wife beautifully dressed because she was English in the most beautiful sort of clothes, handwoven clothes this outfit elegantly dressed and Waldo had on a shirt and a pair of pants theoretically held up by a silk necktie which didn't hold them up at all, and when he came they came in a big touring car. I think it was a Pierce Arrow with the top down and he had this heavy beard and was very, oh gusty, they used to call him Hercules, anyway, and the two little French Canadian maids that we had were so terrified that they went into their bedroom and pulled the curtains and locked their doors and it took mother about three or four hours to get them. And you know so we had met people in the theatre and Jerry was visiting a that time of course we were young enough, we weren't up for all the art activities, but there we were all were in Skowhagen, Maine. Some of the actors liked painting and some of them painted and I remember Arthur Berns son, Buddy, who was a cripple, quite extraordinary man but he had sort of below the waist he was twelve years old and the top part of his body was sort of Michelangelosque in scale. Very handsome, beautiful head, magnificent hands that he could walk on, he played the best tennis in the world and he had studied with Bridgemen and wanted me to study with Bridgeman so when I first and he thought Bridgeman was the living end. And so I came to New York and I went to the League and signed up for a Bridgeman class and studied, but this Buddy had insisted on it and I stayed there two days, one day before Mr. Bridgeman came and the day Mr. Bridgeman came and I left.

PC: Why was that?

WC: I couldn't stand him, he was perfectly terrible. In the first place I thought if you were drawing you drew from a model, the model was there and you were supposed to do that. And he just came down and sat and erased the drawing and I didn't look at the model at all, just redrew page 33 of his book or page 34 or something like that and I felt that this wasn't the way to see and

PC: You had to draw a Bridgeman otherwise.

WC: You had to draw a Bridgeman, the hell with the model, and I was much more interested in the model than I was in Mr. Bridgeman and so that didn't work out and so I took a night course from Robert Laurent.

PC: How was that?

WC: A sculpture course which was wonderful. He was just a great guy. So I got back in then into sculpture at night and into painting in the daytime.

PC: How long did you continue that?

WC: Well I was in New York a year, yeah, '31 and '32 and then the family thought perhaps I was getting too many ideas in New York, well not too many ideas but they didn't know of sort of what my influences were and suggested that I go up to Yale, but at this time I got a job during the summer display for the Eastern States Exposition in Springfield, a big panorama thing for the chicken business for Wyford Bros., which we had live chickens and painted background and multiple hills and a train and they had the head of the society was a Mr. Knight from New Haven, Harry Knight, he was a good friend of Dad, some counsel and so they had me go down and visit them and look at Yale and so I signed up at the Yale Art School.

PC: Well you know, I'm curious about the League. You were doing painting in the day and sculpture in the evening, do you find a conflict between those two ways of working or thinking?

WC: Oh no, it was all people and I started out as a sculptor anyway and I liked sculpture very much and always tended to you know two or one almost. No I didn't see any split in that and no I liked both of them very much and I liked Laurent very much, he was just a wonderful teacher, a wonderful man, and the League was filled with very exciting people at that time. It was when they had the big go to about getting George Grosz to this country and he came over, and Ivan Dubois was studying there and Raoul Pene Du Bois and Gordon Irving who was a good friend of mine, it was, his father worked at one of the big galleries in New York.

PC: Well, who were some of the other students there that you got to know in that year?

WC: Well there weren't a great many of them, I was very crazy about one of the models, Irene Gufgruska and I used to walk her home after school. She lived on St. Mark's Place and she was studying to be a doctor and her family a Polish girl, her family didn't know that she was modeling to put herself through Medical school and she had an aunt and uncle and I was crazy about the whole family and crazy about her. She was very beautiful and very intelligent and I still see her, she comes to Maine. She's married a man named Dr. Wyner and has three children. She was crazy about music and she has three children who are all extremely profound musicians. Her son is going to become a doctor but he really is you know concert quality cello. And I used to go down there and I used to have a lot of fun with them on Sundays and go to all the Polish dances, folk music and actually danced at a polo in Madison Square Garden when they had big Polish festival and in the old garden. It was enormous fun and I loved to dance and I liked this girl very much, we had a very good time.

PC: That's a lot of action doing those dances.

WC: Oh boy it was fun in those days, it was great. I could do it and they were wonderful people too.

PC: Well it's interesting you keep going around and around but always back to Maine. You know that's sort of

WC: Yeah, well when we lived in Wellsley, the family built a summer house which is now part of the school. So we went back there summers and knew you know people in the theatre and friends in town and so forth and so on. And the family then only got the farm in '32, we stayed right there except all the children went away to school. My sister went to Arnana and I did it all at my brother went from Lawrenceville to MIT. They tried to get me into Deerfield but that didn't work so I went to art school instead they went up to Yale, I was there for three years. They registered me in first year but two weeks after school had started they put me in third year, and by this time I painted quite a lot and

PC: Do you like Yale, because this is a gain a new milieu.

WC: Well, I liked the students there a lot and it was a very old fashioned school and I like the people. I mean Lou York was a wonderful teacher on Mr. Taylor was great he was, you could see it was very inbred. I mean they had all studied with Tom Alden Weir and most of them had won Yale scholarship to come back to teach. But there

were some very fine teachers. I never saw anything Lou York did but he was an excellent teacher. Took temper, but he was a fine teacher in aesthetic, but the whole point he was very limited and politics were excessive. I remember getting a portrait job there from Dr. Quinton who was head of the medical school I think and Dean Keller was so upset about this that he went to the head of the medical school and said you can't have a student taking jobs that I should be having. So they changed this around.

PC: Oh really?

WC: And also a lot of us students had sent in the Academy show and would get accepted and the faculty weren't quite often.

PC: You mean at Pennsylvania?

WC: No, at the National Academy of Design.

PC: Oh that one, yeah.

WC: And so you know there was some feeling between

PC: Competition.

WC: Competition and then some of the older students, Bill Pearce and Valator and so forth. Victor Killian and Mike Russo and a chap named Euchenko, very active and very fond of Renoir and Cezanne and Goya and so forth and Delacroix and this didn't interest the faculty at all. I mean they just weren't on that kick at all.

PC: Who where they interested in?

WC: The faculty, I think John Alden Weir, Kenyon Cox as far as I could see and you were supposed to do this nineteenth-century underpainting things with glazes which was supposed to be the method of Titian, like this, if they ever looked at Titian outside of reproduction. He had little to do with it. But we did learn a lot of things of course. Steve Dorian had taught mural painting very much and year after year after year they won the Rome and Gene Savage was teaching there.

PC: Right, right.

WC: And although we weren't crazy about his work I like the way he painted. Figure painted, the figure paintings assist him. He was good and

PC: Well, you know I'm curious, was the National Academy a place to aim for?

WC: The Academy.

PC: Yeah.

WC: Yes, in the early thirties it received a lot of attention, the big reviews which changed almost immediately. I mean by the thirty-five this was out. But there were painters like, well like Speicker and another painter I like very much, can't remember his name now, who did figure things. I remember one man with a hawk and a plaid shirt which was very good. Leon Kroll you know was quite good in those days. He still looks pretty good considering his age and all. I was never crazy about Kroll's painting, he did one painting of Babette, which was a model that was very popular. Several of the artists Speicher did her and Kroll did her and very fine painting. A figure painting. But you know the, I suppose the things that we aimed at in those days were Renoir and Maillol and Kroll and Speicher seemed to be affiliates, seniors, so that was the kind of exposure, we hadn't got into all of the other people yet.

PC: Did you continue the sculpture at Yale too?

WC: No.

PC: Not what happened?

WC: Was just painting, well I had a full painting course and sculpture was a separate course. And I didn't really like what they were doing in sculpture, they were doing pretty academic stuff. One of the sculptors taught drawing, Charles Renier, no Renair, no Joseph, Joe, who was a very good drawing teacher. But I didn't really like any of the sculpture. Ray Braggio was a student at the time and in sculpture and Jack Canaday was a student at the time in painting. Tome Folds who is at the Met graduated and went to Exter and they were a great lively group to be with and we were sort of, I never did join the Glee Club but a lot of my friends were very busy in this. Euchenko and Valetor and so forth got concerned with all this and very progressive in their, I mean they were a

very stimulating student group and they were, of course they were years older than I was, I hadn't even finished high school and they had gone to college and then had come on to Yale which was kind of a graduate school at the time. Did win a couple of Prix de Rome medals. My first one for some synagogue doors and the others I can't really remember. I got two others.

PC: What about people like, what was the teacher you just mentioned? Folds and Canaday, what do you remember about them at that point?

WC: Oh, they were good friends, we used to, Cannady was a compulsive worker and so was Folds. They were very quiet and very serious and the work

WC: ... but was crazy about crazy about John Crawford and I wanted to paint Cornell and we had a bit one day that would do it and one day I did, I've known here in the theatre and I've known Stanley Gilkey and several people from Ms. Cornell's office, from her olinio's office and so Stanley was up there one day and this was after Vincet Price had liked my work and he had commissioned a picture and so forth and this was about '37 I guess, no it was later than that, it was '38 and by this time I had had a couple of shows in Boston and had some reviews and had some good clients and I was really making it as a portrait painter, very successful, and so Stanley took some, she took some photographs down to Miss Cornell's office. She liked the work very much. But she was rather busy at the time and so I was very disappointed about that and about a year later I was visiting on Martha's Vinyard Island and thought well I'll give it one more try and so I walked up to her house and asked if she was there and she was and I told her I was and she said yes, I remember such and such a picture and the kind of a perfect time because I'm free now for three weeks and would love to sit for you and so I rushed back to Boston and got a canvas and easel and paints and took the next boat back and we did it and it was great fun. She was a wonderful person, is a wonderful person.

PC: Well where was your fist show then? You had a show in Boston which I haven't been able to find, where was that?

WC: At Grace Horn Gallery. I went up there to do a portrait one spring and a Cardinal Spellman and another friend was going to have me do a little girl who got the mumps. I met a studio where I studied, a sublet studio in the Einly Studios where I had studied with Hale, and Optins, and Cutler and those people had studios and so I was here I was paying studio rent. I had to finish the Spellman portrait and took it out to Brighton while he was giving a retreat and I wandered into the Ritz bar one night and there sat Mrs. Robert Hilliard who was a friend of friends. I met her in New York with Bob O'higley, he was a playwright who had done a play at Lakewood and Bob's wife was the sister of Chuck Austin Halefritz wife and so on and Mary was a great friend of my Mary Higley, Mary Goodwin higley and she sat a lot for me when I was here in New York in '36 and, no '37, I guess that was it. I did two or three portraits of her and other friends where the Robert Hillyards, the partners and so Dorothy had come back from the theatre and she was quite marvelous. She was very beautiful, she looks like Lachaise, a marvelous dancer, tiny, handsome feet and beautiful face. And so I said you know, Dorothy I've got this beautiful empty studio with marvelous North light, what about sitting for me and she said I would love to, so she, I was really shy in those days in spite of the fact being so in the theatre and so forth, but with real people to go back to your reference of real people as opposed to theatre people I was very comfortable with theatre people and I was quite shy with real people especially if they were Harvard or something. So they asked me for lunch the week later and I think when the portrait was done and I was so scared I had to walk around the block three times before I could get in and make myself go in and I finally went in and Robert served marvelous martinis in sherbet glasses which took away almost any shyness I had immediately. And in the house was the copies of portraits of Dorothy's family, like John Hancock, copies from the ones they had made because they gave the other ones to the Boston Museum and some other lovely things and some contemporary paintings they were interested in and they had let me see the Philip Wrens, knew a friend of Ted Russo's, Bessie Yogurt and Bill Borden the publisher of the Max Auschwitz magazine here who had just done a book on Hart Crane and he wanted Rob to view it and Rob gave a smashing review and I guess some other people from New York and so in the middle of the afternoon after cocktails, martinis, and wine Rob said I want very much to see, I want everyone to see Dorothy's portrait, why don't we all go into the studio. I gulped and almost died in embarrassment and we all got in cars and went to the studio and Robert said I'm crazy about it. I want to buy it. Here's a check right now and I'll commission you to do one of me immediately fondle for it, it was the first time I had consciously heard the word fondo you know in terms of, in terms of what you're painting in that era so we did a fondo of Robert. And of course all of Dorothy's closest friends like Dorothy's portrait best and didn't like Robert's and all of Robert's closest friends liked Robert's and didn't like Dorothy's.

PC: Oh, really.

WC: So this was a good lesson for a beginning portrait painter. And oh at the same luncheon, Nat Saltenstall was just then started, just started to live in the same building with the Hilliards, just started the Institute of Modern Art in Boston and he liked my work very much. And I had a quite a few examples of things in the studio, five or six portraits, so he introduced me to the man who ran the Grace Horn Gallery and we got up the next

week Gab Whitmore and Gab said I like your work very much. I'd like to give you a show. So I went to Maine in the summer and came back and had a show in the fall. And Dorothy was quite familiar with the press and Robert wrote a forward to my catalogue and I got a full page spread in the Herald and Transcript.

PC: Which is all very

WC: Which all was just great, launched in Boston and the McBays, Francis and Marilyn McBay was she was the niece of John and Alice Guet who had been in the embassy in Rome, had portraits done which they liked very much and invited me to come to Washington to visit her mother and also visit her aunt in Baltimore at Evergreen House and they liked my work. Her brother-in-law, Marilyn's brother-in-law was Benjamin Tourin and Violet Tourin wanted me to do a portrait of their youngest child, and also of Mrs. Tourin who was a very shy woman. She was a Spencer and quite marvelous looking but she was very very shy. And I did a portrait of her in a white lace mantilla and a low cut velvet dress hard for her to accept but they were crazy about the portrait and then I was handed down to Baltimore and went through a lot of things in Baltimore. Of course that was a marvelous experience being at Evergreen House because Mrs. Guet had been a great friend of Cocteau and Jacques Blanche and Selouger and she was the godson of Leon Basques's son, godmother of Leon Basque's son, and all the Cocteau correspondence was there, all the Zuaga correspondence, everything, you name it, and they had marvelous stories about how she got t wear blue jeans at the wedding in Rome of Umberto when he married the Belgian Princess. And marvelous people, marvelous parties, and they had house guests like, oh, Finky Nabersoth and Carl Millus and all these people and Lessi Cheak had been to Yale, who was terribly snobbish, was running the Baltimore museum at the time and running it well.

PC: Well, you know, I'm curious as to, it seems that like one day you started and within a couple of years you had a terribly large body of work already you know.

WC: Well out of Yale I came to New York and no, it wasn't that soon. I came to New York in the fall of '35 and I was here, '45, I was here for two or three years I guess and during that time I was doing drawings. We had a friend, again from Boston, who was in charge of the Journal American and I did illustrations for the Jack Lake Stories. They were love stories, serial love stories on the back page of the Sunday magazine Journal American magazine. And I did menu covers and I did anything I could do to get work done in between. I had friends posing for me, I was a member of the Players Club and used to go there and see people in the theatre that I knew and some of them posed for me. And then Mrs. Landon Post, who had been at Skowhegan a lot in the theatre, she was married to Landon Post who was the city commissioner of buildings or something like that and her father was Ron Kirby who was the famous cartoonist for the Old World newspaper, and a very fine cartoonist. Very good and she sat for me and Hope, Laura another actress who was a friend of hers sat for me and a woman Lucille Stewart and the niece of this kind of courtesy aunt.

PC: Who was she?

WC: Married. She married Barkley Ulman who later became Barkley of Auchliss. She Rolenstorf from the south and she was an art student, we were in school together as well as being friends everything was mutual, Suncay relatives and she sat for me. And I did Mary Higley a lot, an actress I went around with called Catherine Nesco, several paintings of an actor called Lloyd Crawford, who was very handsome and quite a good model too. And again the Gof Gostiglios both she and her sister would sit for me so I did quite a bit of painting then and in using art circles where I had quite a bit of exposure but no cash when I was doing commercial jobs on the side. And I went to Boston, all of this worked for me because there were people that they knew and they were, they had seen in the theatre and so forth and so on. And then I got into some of the artists and writers like the Hilliards and society people and then I had two or three shows in Boston. I think I had one juggle with Carl Zerbe, at that time Gab had some of my work shown in New York in '39 or '38, did a Cornell portrait and it was shown in Boston and it was shown here at Mary Harm, the portrait was shown at Seligmann's.

PC: How did those exhibitions work for you, the early ones say in Boston, were they

WC: Oh, in Boston it was sensational. I got full page reviews and reproductions.

PC: I mean after the shows, did the show do much for you in terms of actual commissions of work? Oh, yes. Surely, I was busy all the time and then that sent me to Washington and I got work there and then from Washington Nel's mother was Mrs. Leonard, Mrs. Harry Leonard and they were devoted to me as well as the Tourins her son and I got a lot of work there. And by this time Vose was my dealer and I was doing

PC: How did you get involved with them?

WC: Well they liked my work and Grace Horn Galleries had some problems, he had gone into a partnership with a man named Dick Rideout and there were problems in the gallery and I think Aton died about that time and I didn't get along too well with Rideout and so I went to Vose. They asked me to show there and that went very well and I insisted if I show there, my friend, Charles Cutler, the sculptor, would be exhibited too. And this was a

great send-off for him and another friend, Peter De Vanowitz, who was a painter and studied with Jachovat up at the Boston Museum was a friend of mine. So I had the big gallery and they had the two other galleries and we opened the show and it was quite following as a benefit for British Relief, this was in 1940. And then I went immediately into the army and was there for almost five years. And so this almost dropped off. And I got married just before I got into the army and so I never went back to Boston after the war. I mean to live. Back to work, exhibitions there at Margaret Brown's Gallery, which had been taken over by, she had taken over the old Grace Horn Gallery and but when I was with Vost and I was doing the Keith Merrill portraits

[TAPE ONE SIDE TWO]

PC: This is side two. In a way because a lot of artists have been going away for their summers from Hamilton Easterfield's and before that almost, did you get to know many of those people or were you totally involved with the theatre?

WC: Well, I knew some of those people because at Yale we had a model named Rene Botka who also posed for Laurents and had took one of his shacks during the summer in exchange for posing for him. Her husband was a sculptor. Steven McNeely, and I was. I was very fond of her and very fond of him and I sued to go do and visit them in Agunquite, having studied with Laurents too, and Kunyoshi and Karfial was still there and he had just done a portrait of the Two Long Boys in a Pony Cart, one of his famous ones and I never knew Karfoil well. I knew Laurents very well and liked him very much and loved his house. There he had a marvelous including a lot of American primitives, when you could get them for five or ten dollars a piece. And I got, you know, quite a few of them in the thirties and then at this same time in New York when I left there, or in the fall, I shared a studio at 51 West 10th Street with Frank McNitt and another boy, and Brooke had a studio in the same building, Alex Brooke, who Frank had studied with. He left Yale and studied with Brooke and Kunyoshi and they were both good friends and they had both been in Maine and Kunyoshi had been in Maine extensively earlier and in the same way I met a lot of people with backgrounds like the Owen Davis in the theatre, well Davis got the Pulitzer Prize, he was one of the famous playwrights and they all came beasingly. So Maine has always been a contact with artists and theatre people for me. and I got to know Brooke very well and you know, he said what do you do and I said I'm a portrait painter and he came and looked at the work for himself and said, oh, Bill you're much too good a painter to be a portrait painter, why don't you give it up for something else and I said, how shall I put it, I said I was in the Met and the other day I saw all those canvases, you're damn good. So of course, Alex didn't like being confined with famous portraits and he didn't usually get a likeness like I did, which of course caused him some confusion and

PC: Do you thing there's a special technique in that, or is it a skill or a talent or an ability in catching a likeness?

WC: I guess there must be, I think it's really liking other people that much, a lot other painters don't.

PC: Cause some people seem to be able to and others just fight every stroke and it never happens.

WC: Can't get it, no, I think, I suppose it's, I think it's just a question of liking it that and doing something else really. But, and then my first studio in New York, after I left Yale, was on 13th Street, and of course Brooke and Laurent and Sourich, who I hadn't yet then met, Zurouch of course remained then too. All showed there and these were the artists I liked best at that time, I mean Kunyoshi and Brook I though were just marvelous.

PC: Oh, the Whitney was downtown too.

WC: And the Whitney was on Eighth Street.

PC: Right, were you ever interested in what was going on there? Did you ever go to the Whitney?

WC: Oh, sure. I used to go to the Whitney all the time to see the exhibitions, they had wonderful annual exhibitions and an awful lot of, that's where I saw the Babette Man Calls Babette, which I think is the finest Kroll I ever saw. And other work of many other painters and you know, Dickens and lots of very fine things, Hartley, a great many of them and so I got to know Alex and Yass quite well and I also got to know Edith Halpert a little bit. And at that time I was interested in collecting primitives. I'd been up to see them at Netson and seen some things and I bought a couple in a bookstore in Springfield and they had a lot more things and I didn't have much money to invest in those days so I came back and I wanted these things badly. It was a series of six, eight portraits by Nathaniel Pryor, not signed but I'm sure they were Pryor and two other very fine paintings and I saved up some money and went down to the American Folk Art Gallery which was over the, over the Downtown Gallery and looked at the exhibition and got very enthusiastic about my catching the five o'clock train and said to the old man there, I said what are these and he said oh, those aren't catalogued yet and I said do you mind if I look at them and he said not at all, go ahead. But I can't give any prices on any of them and I looked at eight pictures. So it was a little late for those and I used to go quite often to look at the, you know, look at the things in the downtown gallery and see what Alex was showing.

PC: How'd you like Edith in those days?

WC: ... the Alaska Scouts which had a very remote outpost and on that, my Gunark from Adak who Shenja and then Shenja on LST and the captain had been a, I'd met him before and he looked familiar and I looked familiar to him and it turned out he was a good friend of my wife's, we'd been together, he'd gone to in the meantime and John Joyce Adams and we'd seen quite a bit of him while we were waiting in San Francisco and Ed was with me, he said, Joe I'm on the bridge all the time, you take my digs and so I did, and then he knew the captain, the general who was in charge of Shenja and he introduced me to him and he and I became very good friends and he had one funny experience there because he got all ready to go after about three weeks and got all checked out and the general had me for dinner the night before and said, you know, I've never met an artist before, you're really not such a bad buy and so forth and so on and you seem, you know, fairly bright, not as stupid as I thought most artists were and so I said, you know, thanks very much, the next day I got all checked out, was waiting at the dock and was doing some drawings of them loading this LSD, Transport T, and so I was working on this drawing and they closed the doors and took up the ropes and I kept on drawing and then the thing moved out and I thought that's great, you know. It'd be nice to have a view of this in mid harbor and the boats only went every three days and so I finished drawing in mid-harbor and then they really took off and I got a drawing of it in the distance, finished the drawing, you know, suddenly realized that I just missed my boat, who were living in tents then and so I went back and told them I was going to spend a few more days with them. And I went over to the generals and said, you know, I'm really terribly grateful to all the nice things you said about me, artists not being stupid and so forth. But last night, this is what happened. He roared with laughter and I said, just as a souvenir of your words, I'd like to have the drawing, he said he was very pleased, so we spent a few more days together and finally did get back to and there I must say I was very touching, Father Hubbard was there, the Jesuit priest, and a lot of people were killed onto, or I must say the soldiers were absolutely incredible. It was after I'd gone to York and a lot of them posted for me and they'd gotten the silver star and so forth and they had decorated the graves with marvelous wildflowers in Alaska and they decorated the graves of all their buddies in the most fantastic ways I'd never seen so beautiful, with these wildflowers.

PC: In what way?

WC: Well, they'd made wreaths and garlands of wild darfinian and all the flower that grew there and done beautiful things with the moss and the tundra and so forth.

PC: How long were you up there?

WC: In Alaska?

PC: Yeah.

WC: Ah, about two and a half years.

PC: Oh, a long time.

WC: Two years I guess.

PC: You covered the whole

WC: Well, I never got up to , except on the way out at the airport. I never got up to Fairbanks and my run was from Anchorage to Adtu and of course the pilots were bombing Camchat and all of that at the time. You'd be in these places and sometimes they would and sometimes they wouldn't, it was just terrible. All these pictures standing around with their wives and their kids, but we had some bad flying there too.

PC: In what way?

WC: Well, we got out to Adak once and couldn't land and the plane went right up against a mountain and headed back in the fog and the pilots didn't expect to make it out of it anyway, they were actually wet with sweat and all of a sudden we saw them that, Uman, we didn't have enough gas to get way back to Anchorage, there was an opening in the clouds and they could see an airport. Actually it was almost a closed up airport an they took one dive and got in, but they hadn't expected to make it at all. I was the only passenger, actually I had to calm them, they were so nervous. I wasn't bright enough to be that nervous, although I though there wasn't very much of a chance, but they, you know, they practically passed out when they hit the ground, had to be carried some place and be given a drink.

PC: Have you been back up there ever?

WC: No, but I'd like to go. I'd like to go, no I never have been back.

PC: Great going place I hear, well, what happened after Alaska?

WC: Well, then we came back and I thought I was going to get with General Godfrey, I'd always wanted to go to India and the former what's the present none commission, ah, warrant officer, what's between a sergeant and a second lieutenant, warrant officer, had become in the meantime a major, that was with me in special services a man named John Sarkas, who's the one that I had worked with on the first soldier art project, helped set that up from Washington and he was here in New York in special services, and he, I wanted to go to India and almost did but he requisitioned me specially to be here and my wife was here in New York at the time. She'd been living with her sister, we got a small apartment and my daughter had been born, she was nine months old when I got back and so I was assigned to special services on 45th Street and Colonel Warburg was the Colonel who was a wonderful guy, absolutely marvelous man and General Kerr was head of the whole department. Very nice man who's son was interested in art, he was young, but he had been taken around to several art schools, looking and so forth and we got some good people in and we got, they had an advisory board on the Trimsovie and Hildreth Mier I think and Maz Stonehill and education man at the Modern Museum, Dimico and another man who was head of Solomon I think who was head of the education department at Riso, Rhode Island School, Rhode Island Museum and then we got into the office, we got Jack Bauer and Paul McGrill and then later Natt Silverstart which started the

PC: What was this project, now that you were doing?

WC: Well, we one thing that we did was to do a whole training manual on art, I mean how to paint a portrait, paint a still life and this took in all kinds of things, etching and small kits and we sent kits out to special service committees we got from Brown or we made up special for us and the whole training manual on this for, to make artists a legitimate part of special services and then the other thing we did was to hold a soldier art contest which we held in each quarters of, each of the service commands and this in Washington and for those we had exhibitions arranged in most museums throughout the country, in the areas and we sent around juries to jury them and choose so many things in each category, painting and sculpture, water color, graphics, photography, and then the final selections were shown at the National Gallery in Washington, and then Henry Simpson did the forward for the book and simultaneously we got in Valentine, who had Penquin books at that time, he still does, who was the son of an artist and then this guy lived very close to 21st Street at about that London Terrace at 23rd, his brother here and Simon Telly did a catalogue, just came out at the opening, based on the selections that people had made in the service commands then to Washington, we took all the photographs of all the winners and had a book published, which was called Soldier Art.

PC: Who's idea was the exhibition, the book and the whole thing?

WC: Well, I think it was, I guess it was mine and then Jack Bauer's and then we got awfully good juries, you know really top not professional juries like Alfred Barr and Richard Soby and Dubas.

PC: Was it successful from your point of view?

WC: Oh, I think it was very successful, yes, yeah, it exposed quite a few of the good artists in the army and it also gave a lot of you know, it was a broad kind of incentive, very good entries in all the service commands for these things people were very excited about and during the show in Washington various exhibitions wasn't world shattering but it was a very, very nice show.

PC: Given all the

WC: You know given the democratic and schematic idea of the whole thing it really came out quite well.

PC: Well what things besides that happened, how long was that that wasn't very long was it?

WC: That was about a year and a half I guess and then after that I got my discharge which was just fine and by that time well before the war I had talked about going, Chuck Tyler who had a place in Maine and being a portrait painter, I knew that I'd just wander around and I liked Maine and wanted to stay there, I wanted to have some reason for being there and my wife liked it too and well, we were all together in San Francisco waiting to be shipped out, we talked a lot about American art and American artists and the only thing for an American art student to do before the war was to go to Europe you never studied with the great in their own country so we thought it would be good to have a school, using the summer which Americans just use for play, at least in those days where the very serious students could come and work. And by this time the family had moved out of the farm and had moved to Gilfor and the summer cottages that we owned were being rented so I talked to Henry Poor and Dizurachs and several people and asked them what they thought of the idea and it was a good idea. So Sidney Simon and Henry Poor and Charles Cutler and myself got together and talked to the family about renting the property and we incorporated as a non-profit organization. My brother in law, Chauncey Hubert was a great friend of a Paul Mellon's and he got Paul interested and Paul gave us a thousand dollars or something like that the first year and we did over the chicken houses in the middle of winter and in the spring opened up the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

PC: So that was what, '46?

WC: Our opening season was '46 yeah, it was in '45 we started organizing the fall of '45 was when we got our incorporation and all that business.

PC: So you ready in the spring?

WC: So we opened the summer, the spring of '46 and we got all our friends to come up and us. We were the first people to start a visiting artists series, the other summer schools as far as I knew were one-man schools. Two other schools started about the same time, one on the Cape, which didn't last very long, and then Robert Laurent had a summer art school at Adonquick which was very casually run, you know he and his friends, he and Karfial and two or three people, but they didn't really put much into organizing it and it was quite pleasant and casual.

PC: The Hofmann school is basically Hofman fund..

WC: Yeah and summer studies so we got all kinds of people together and the first summer, Kunyoshi came up, Jack Levine came up. Baziotes came up and people who in those days were certainly the leading before all this post-war stuff had started with the abstract expressionists and de Kooning and all of this, and in any degree, so that all of us, Libby and Tort and so forth went to people and exciting young students wanted to meet and study with

PC: How did you promote it those first years, was it through all the art schools?

WC: Yes, we put ads in the magazines and we'd get all kinds of letters about people who wanted to come, and when they came they liked it and spread the word and we have very little housing and very little space in those days, but it's grown a lot now.

PC: How many students do you have first summer?

WC: 38.

PC: A pretty good number.

WC: It was a good number. We were very lucky of course there so many GI's and also they were older and we got the GI bill and they could attend on the GI bill and we only had a few older people, Mrs. Garrick came up with Mary Rogers, Mrs. Benjamin Rogers, Standard Oil, and Countess De Zapola and Mary Canfield which was, well, they are odd companions for the GI's I can tell you, chauffeurs and painting bonnets but they were nice.

PC: Well, how do you pick the instructors over the years? Because it seems that people, many people have gone there as students and then three or four or five years later some return as an instructor.

WC: Well for a long time we haven't wanted any alumni to be an instructors because I so hated the kind of thing that happened to Yale, it was so inbred and so bad you know. As far as any progress they were 20 years behind. So it was a long time before we asked any of our alumni to be instructors.

PC: When did it start then?

WC: When we had alumni?

PC: Yeah.

WC: I don't remember exactly when, in the fifties, late fifties.

PC: So it was about ten years or so.

WC: Oh yeah and when we first started there were just four of us and then Ann Poor jaundice was a member of the board next year and we had a secretary, and you know everybody said, well Bill you're so good at organizing you just do that and we'll do the teaching. However, so we had a little office down on 14, 13th Street and we had a secretary and we set up an advisory board, Jack Arnold, and old friends helped us, Lloyd's sister and brother-in-law had been in Skowhegan for a long time in the theatre and Francis Goodyich now Hackett, go into those man's stories later and so forth, they had been up there as very young people and working in the theatre and writing plays and so forth and Lakewood was very exciting and I suppose it was seeing what these actors got out of working, you know, young actors like Humphrey Bogart and Diana Winyon and so forth got our of working with really seasoned pros like Arther Burn and Martin Wincell and so forth that gave me the idea that this would be great for painters and it didn't have to be restricted to a one-man school and you know, artists say from Chicago or Washington and various places and weren't exposed to many professionals they had good teachers

but they weren't exposed to the professionals who were too busy to teach like except in New York, like Seurat and Barns and Levine and so forth. Levine hadn't done any teaching and Kunyoshi who did teach some. And so we ran, the four of us, the five of us ran it and each year we'd take a year off, one of use would take a year off, and we would ask some other artists. And we asked Jacke Levine and we asked Abraham Ratner and so forth and then in 1960 we had the big fire, we reorganized the thing totally with a Board of Trustees and since the school was designed as a school run by artists for artists, we wanted to keep that consideration very much alive so we set up an artists board of governors, a lot of us taught at the school, which is 24 artists connected with the school or taught there or were graduates from it which now includes quite a few of them. Alex Katz and Robert Indiana.

PC: I know Jack Beal is on it.

WC: Jack Beal was not a student of ours but he's been up there as a visiting artist, very good. He's been wonderful for the school. And then we at that time hired, you know, a full time director to run the thing with a salary, low salary. I hadn't taken anything previous to that and so then we had some of the buildings.

PC: What happened the year of the fire, what caused that because we read about it.

WC: Well we've never known who started the fire, as near as we can tell it was some sort of a bounce back on the power line that brought the electric wires and started it. I had gotten up at three o'clock in the morning to give about six students breakfast at my place. The morning school closed. They were the last students there and I had taken them down to the bus in Waterville and came back and did the dishes and it was by that time quarter past six and I went back to bed and woke up about nine-thirty and my son was with me, and my wife and daughter were on the coast, and I looked out and I saw smoke and I told my sons who was about eleven I guess, yeah about eleven, to call the Skowhegan fire department on the house phone. And I rushed up to the office to call the other fire department and by the time I got out making the call the whole thing was aflame and it was completely dry, completely windless, cloudless day. The had been very, very dry, very dry and the flames went right straight up the house from 25 feet away and they you know, when the fire department came, we had two ponds there and they fed the hoses on and the house was scorched and burnt and demolished but the funny thing there wasn't an ash around the barn itself. But you know 150 feet out in the fields it was just black with ashes and the first thing the insurance people did was not looking at the barn but looking at the land was to grab people and to go and get more water and pails and brooms and go out to the surrounding area to put the fire out, you know which had just started up in the fields. So at that point we did reorganize with a full time paid director and a Board of Trustees and a board of governors, and we continued our advisory council of museum people and so forth.

PC: What's the difference between the trustees and the governors?

WC: The trustees are responsible for the overall accepting, the policy of the school and the financing and the projects and so forth.

PC: Oh.

WC: The governors make all the educational policy, they have all the say about what schools receive scholarships, they choose the faculty. They set all the educational policy, everything.

PC: Does that have any influence on accepting students and things like that or is that ...

WC: Yeah.

PC: Yeah.

WC: Yes, they are the ones who choose a list of schools to which scholarships will be awarded or part scholarships, which ones will get full scholarships and which ones will get part scholarships.

PC: Does that change a lot?

WC: The board of governors?

PC: No, whether one school gets a full scholarship or

WC: Oh, yes, it changes quite a bit dependent on how much they need and how much we have and which send us the best students so we've had very good students consistently and we get repeats. When the school for a couple of years sends us poor students, a nonserious student. Somebody not really qualified to be in the program. We drop it and pick up on another school. Schools do change and some get better and some get worse. Maryland Institute in the old days was no good. It's excellent now. And Cooper in the early days was absolutely tops and doesn't stand up to the same level any more. It may again, I think it's coming back very fast.

It has had a slump, the students weren't very good. Brooklyn had sent us some good people for a while and then they got very poor and

PC: But you mentioned Brandeis was selected.

WC: Oh, yes, Brandeis used to send us good students and then they started to send students which were in the theatre and not interested in painting. Dropped that and the art students were quite good students. San Francisco has sent some good students.

PC: How many do you have now in a given year?

WC: We take about 65 students and there are only about 40 of them on scholarship or part scholarship.

PC: That many?

WC: Yeah, we used to take as many as 70, we found the extra five just crowded the classes. And so it was, because the artists all have their own studios and houses and they worked there and sixty-five seemed to be a much more manageable group. Everybody got more out of it and we could be more selective and so we found it works much better.

PC: Why do you have so many scholarships? I mean the proportion just seems to be

WC: Well it isn't that large. Yale, Yale summer school is all scholarships, I believe and of course it costs us, even the paying students it cost us twice what we charge, I mean on our present budget. If we had more money we could save money, but carrying on all of these fund raising operations are expensive but there is no other way to survive.

PC: Have you built up an endowment or anything for it?

WC: We started an endowment, it's very, very small, I mean I was talking to somebody who works at the bank last week and he just, it's \$119,000. He just ignored it.

PC: It's not even worth thinking about.

WC: He didn't want to think about it as far as he was concerned. But it is a start and we do keep adding to it when we can, but it's very hard to raise money for a summer project even though it's very concentrated. And we, there are always new things that we need. New buildings and equipment and students want different things all the time and we started out sculpture was all carving and modeling and

PC: And welding.

WC: And welding came in and now it's power saws and band saws and all sorts of and all equipment is very expensive to maintain.

PC: Right.

WC: And of course 28 years ago canvases were reasonably sized, now if you can't, you have to give a student a place where he can do at least an eight or ten foot canvas, well changes.

PC: Right, right. Well one thing that interests me is that all those years you had some of the founders had have continued along in the people as instructors, people seem to be a change subtlety in what happens up there, kind of things that goes on and the ideas.

WC: Well, we try to select what the students want and the art scene has changed so much since 1946 and, as I said in 1946 and poor Jack Levine and myself and Zurachs were considered you know they weren't considered old-fashioned, but a few years later we were so far out of date you couldn't see us in history even. And you know we try to give the student a good cross section of what is going on and of what we feel is you know, very sound basic training. and we do, we have kept you know, life painting and life drawing and such stuff alive and it's coming back now with a vengeance. You know, we had like 48 people in our life class last year, six years ago I doubt that there were six

WC: ... year we did turn away 88 qualified students and the artists have been so marvelous in back of it. I've been sitting in on the board of governors, the ones who have been there and I never think of artists as having anything to do with the schools they've been to, I don't know of any schools that ever approached them but we have a chairman for the alumni committee each year and the overall chairman of the whole thing and then they care all willing to serve on the board of governors and make all these decisions and contribute schools that they know are good. Jack has been a great help, Indiana has been a great help. Alex Katz has been marvelous help.

PC: Yeah, he ...

WC: Yeah, right me about it and so one of the policies of the school is not only to I mean even in the early days, and this used to irritate some of the founding members. We would no, although we were making all of the decisions so it was kind of harder to push something else through than it was with the board of governors. We would you know we had like David Smith and so forth, it was very good. So we've always tried to give not only sound training in one sense but also to represent the very best artists in various trends, various trends so that the students if they are a realists or abstractionists he is exposed to all points of view. If they had been very influenced and they if you don't open them up to painting. I had a few exhibitions, I guess my last exhibition was in '61 at Maynard Walker Gallery. But I have been painting I guess less since then or I guess since '65 than I had been before. We spend one year in England and I did a lot of drawing there. I was completely off and really dug into drawing which I hadn't been able to do for a long time. I was very pleased about that. And we lived there and the children were in school in England and so forth. And we traveled on holidays.

PC: Whereabouts were you?

WC: In London and I had a studio out on Lanbook Road out at Nottinghill Gate section and then we spend a month in Italy and so forth an so on you know Nottinghill Gate?

PC: Oh, yeah.

WC: Do you know Lahbrick Road?

PC: Oh yeah.

WC: That's where I was.

PC: Used to work at the Mercury Theatre.

WC: Oh did you really? Oh yes that was there of course, did you really? That was exciting.

PC: Well did you, did you maintain your interest in the theatre after the war? Or was that

WC: Well, I mean I had old friends in the theatre but I mean I don't know who the young actors are today at all. I mean I'm crazy about, I like to go to the theatre but not the same I do, I used to follow it constantly. I knew people in all of the shows, and in touch with all of them and saw them all the time. Went to all the parties, I still had very good friends in the theatre and but they are of a certain vintage.

PC: Not so bad.

WC: I don't think so.

PC: I'm curious about how you approach a portrait. Say you are going to do you know, a painting of a man who is successful business executive that you know, is it different from a man who might also be successful who you don't know who wants a painting by you, is your approach different? What do you think about, how do you decide what to do?

WC: No, I don't think it's different. I think that you have a certain feeling about the sort of impact of a person you know and what they, you know, what their tempo is, what their energy quotient is or something like that, and just what they sort of are in silhouette. You can sort of tell, now when I did Bill Benton, I was completely absorbed by the ideas that he just never stopped, that he was you know, very, very electric and when I did Stevenson, I had quite an experience with him because setting up this portrait I was doing for Brittanica Films and I had, had seen pictures of Stevenson, seen him on newsreels and all that sort of thing and I really didn't have any idea of what he looked like you know. So I made an appointment long before, several months before I did the portrait to arrange a time and setting with him and so forth and it was at his offices. His office was here in New York and I was supposed to see him at 1:30 and I was there at 1:30 and he came in about a quarter of two and he saw me sitting there and looked and went to the desk and asked if he had any phone calls and she said yes and told him what they were and he took them and he went into his office and she called in and said he's here and he walked in and he said how do you do, and I said how do you do, and he said you wanted to see what I looked like didn't you. And I said exactly. I said that's exactly because of all the things I've seen of you and on television and every sort of medium and magazine and said if you're painting a portrait you have no idea until you see the person what they look like and he said I can understand that so, oh, I think it doesn't really make any difference whether you have known a person for a long time, I think it makes some difference how you respond to someone and how comfortable they are with you. I think that's the biggest thing. I know when I was doing Casals I always wanted to do, I heard him play in Royal Albert Hall in London in 1927, 28, and with Tibor Cocteau and I always wanted to, I was always fascinated with him and then a few years later some friends of

mine opened a gallery in Puerto Rico, Terry Morales asked me if I would come and do some portraits and I said well, Casals lives there and she said she knew him and I said if you can get him to sit for me I'd come down and do the other portraits. So she took him my work and he liked it and said he would sit for me and so I knew I wanted to do, I wanted to do a live size with the cello, playing and I had seen him I guess since '28 really, even in concerts. I had seen him a couple of times on television and but, so I got down there and went out to see him and he said I have some guests now and you don't want to wait and I said well, I waited and the guests and the guest happened to be very good friends of mine, Maranara and Rudolph Tsuckobi, both are artists who I had known very well here in New York. We all had been to the same studio on 15th Street and they were very nice and Casals asked about me and they said he was a very good painter and nice man and you'll like him and so on. And so on and so this was fine and so we went in and talked after they left, he and his wife. He was just delightful. He started out as a painter and then the family decided he should really stick more to music. He likes are and he had known millions of artists and the first day I was doing this, he was so nice and charming and easy to work with and I suddenly saw, really saw him sitting there you know, playing the cello and saw this big canvas. I wondered in I was out of my mind and I know had gotten some charcoal notes here and there and laid it out and had a couple of brushstrokes down there was really nothing to see and sort of laid out generally where I wanted this and where I wanted the cello and him and the background and so forth. He said do you mind if I look and I said no, there's not very much to see and he looked at it for about three or four minutes and he came over and put his arm around me and said you know, I want to tell you I think this is going to be a very important portrait and of course if anybody says that then you know I guess it was so marvelous to work on. If you get a person that is keen that is anxious from even before you put the first brushstrokes on the canvas as whether it's going to have the right sparkle in his eyes, the way he did in Robin Hood. You go crazy.

PC: Yeah, yeah.

WC: He's a master.

[END OF INTERVIEW]