



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Esther McCoy,  
1987 June 7-Nov. 14

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Esther McCoy on June 7-8 and November 14, 1987. The interview was conducted by Joseph Giovannini 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.

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**37-42** Her first writings on architecture applies to architecture school at USC after World War II, but is not accepted; writes novel about architecture (protagonist is based on Tim Robert) while in Mexico on vacation from Douglas; Tim dies in New York; attends his funeral with Dreiser; designs a house; reads from her current manuscript about R. M. Schindler and how she came to work for him.

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**53-56** Her family history; the house she grew up in; the family library; oil industry in Texas, Oklahoma and the Midwest.

**57-58** Her architectural writings in the '40s for *Arts and Architecture*, *Mademoiselle*, *Harper's Bazaar* and for the *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine* on young architects and modernism; husband Berkeley becomes ill; her freelance writing; in 1950 visits Cuernavaca, Mexico, for nine months; earlier trips to Mexico; writes about Mexican architecture and landscape architects.

**59-61** Goes to Italy in 1956 for the *Los Angeles Times* travels to other countries on writing assignments; continues to write on Southern California architecture; husband Berkeley dies in 1962; writes for television.

**62-65** Writes *Richard Neutra* and *Five California Architects*, both published in 1960; contributes articles on California architecture to Italian periodicals *Zodiac* and *Lotus* problems with Neutra; writes for *Forum*, her short fiction.

**66-68** Changes in Southern California architecture after World War II; interpretations of International Style.

**69-72** Receives grants in mid-1960s from the Graham and Ford foundations to study young architects; writes *Vienna to Los Angeles* plans book on young Italian architects which is never published; writes for *Arts and Architecture*.

**72-74** Reception of *Five California Architects* importance of biography in understanding architects' designs; experimental architecture; the economy as reflected in architects' floor plans; young architects.

**75-78** Mexican architects and architecture in the 1960s; works for UCLA on the Neutra collection; involvement with Dodge House preservation project.

**78-80** Writes exhibition catalogs for Los Angeles County Museum of Art and USC; travels regularly to Italy; writes for *Zodiac* and *Lotus* as well as for British magazines.

**81-84** Does film *Architecture West* in 1947; lectures at UC Santa Barbara in 1969; her honors and awards; her architectural writings; her health; her memoirs.

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Robert Venturi  
John Collier  
Eudora Welty

**Interview**

[BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE 1]

JG: The interviewee is Esther McCoy, in Santa Monica, on June 7th. This is tape 1.

EM: Oh, let's see. Eight of my grandparents [ancestors] came to the United States before the Revolution. They were all intensely political and intensely interested in lumber. My mother was born in Illinois, my father in Ohio. My education started with one child reading aloud to the other, so we read very early and...

JG: Were you the oldest?

EM: No-- You're not to ask questions! My sister and I went to a boarding school. She was two years older than I, a little less than two years, and I think I was thirteen and she was fourteen and three-quarters. Or I was twelve, I can't remember. [Laughs] It was a very great experience. In English class, there was a Miss Hamilton and we had half, maybe a month, or a month and a half on one thing. One was *Canterbury Tales* and we memorized a great deal. I still remember the opening lines of *Canterbury Tales*, "Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote" et cetera, et cetera. And then we [also read] Shakespeare and others, but it was nice to spend enough time on one thing so you began to know it and like it. But there was a great deal of memorizing, and I think it was many years after I memorized the Milton's "On His Blindness" that I understood that when [it said] "My light was spent" that it meant that he was blind. I took it more literally that his light, his *electric* light--so... I read a great deal, and my sister was a very bright, much brighter than I was. We were so close and we were in the same grade in school, and so it wasn't any use for me to try to keep up with her. I was always the youngest one in my class and not a great deal was expected of me, but my mother urged me just to do the best I could and so I did. But I usually went into things that my sister wasn't interested in because--I can remember once in a psychology examination where the professor said, "You will know this so well that all you'll have to do is just start writing," and I was sitting next to my sister and she started writing and I [laughs] --I couldn't. And I've found it happened later too. Once, anytime Schindler--R.M. Schindler--would come up behind me and ask me for some figures on something, I simply couldn't--under pressure--do anything. And so, I'm writing about that right now, something about Schindler and his asking me for an area of...

My sister and I then finally went to different schools. I went to Michigan, Ann Arbor, and she went to Northwestern. I was very eager to go to New York and to Paris. I'd had quite a bit of French, but I did go to New York, then, after school, and I have written about that in *Grand Street*.

There isn't very much more to say about it except that when I got off the train I left my bags and trunk at the station, at Pennsylvania Station, and took a taxi to a bookshop. What's the name of that bookshop?--publisher and bookshop?--on 47th street?--Brentano's. Because I'd had an account at Brentano's there while I was in college, and so it seemed a good place to get a job. So I did get a job. It turned out that it was selling Christmas cards.

I loved New York; I loved it. I wanted to live some place not in a big apartment house but in one of those nice [laughs] Georgian houses. I think most places I go I like to pick out my newspaper early and my cafe in all cities, European cities especially. So I found the *World*. Also, I was intensely interested in the Sacco and Vanzetti case and so I found *that* in the *World* and found they were sympathetic; they were on my side. That was one of the things that endeared me to the *World*, and also I liked the columnists. So I found a place listed, and I took a taxi and went over and rented it. It was on the Bowery and it was [run by] the wife of a reviewer--a writer, who reviewed books. So, they'd separated. She rented me a room. I didn't have any sense of money, whatever. None. Because I was using up... I didn't have too much and I was determined not to depend on my father, so that was using up quite a bit on taxis and the rent. I was getting, I think, something like sixteen dollars a week from Brentano's and paying ten dollars a week on rent.

I went to the theatre almost every night. I would run from Brentano's to Gray's cut-rate place... Is this the kind of thing?

JG: Yes; also some of the items, some of the people you met in the meantime, and some of the ideas that you encountered as well.

EM: I didn't encounter any ideas then, I was just all eyes and ears.

JG: What were you reading?

EM: I wasn't reading anything except the *World*, and I took lots of books with me to New York, a Victrola, and lots of records, but I really didn't do anything except just learn New York and go to the theatre, the cut-rate.... After [work I'd] run down to Gray's and get cut-rate tickets and then standing room. I would usually get in late from the theatre. And I had a friend who would stand in line at the Met for me--so I could get standing room at the opera. That would be one night a week anyway.

JG: What years were these?

EM: This was '27, I think, 1927. No, it would be '26.

JG: So you were twenty-two.

EM: I was twenty-one and a half. Then I got a job in... As soon as Christmas was over, Brentano's let me go. I got a job in... Well, the place I was living, the woman decided to close the house and leave it, so I had to move very hurriedly. Someone at Brentano's, a girl who lived on in the hundred's in New York, in the Bronx, took me home with her to get a room. So I got a room in her house. She was going after work, after Brentano's, to get a job in garment center. And that was a wonderful experience, working in garment center. I got on as a-- You know, showing dresses, and modeling them. I was on a draw and I sold only one.

JG: You were on a draw, that's a percentage?

EM: Yes. I wasn't making any [money]. At the same time I was going to publishers at noon to see if I could get a job. I wanted to get a job doing editorial work, which I finally... Dreiser [and I] had met and--

JG : How did you meet him?

EM: He came to Ann Arbor, and so he gave me a job doing a small research job, doing research at the public library in New York on Emma Goldman.

JG: Back to Ann Arbor. Had you been an English major and a French major or...

EM: English. So, then Dreiser left. There may have been another little job I did for him, I don't know. He left, and so I was just going to publishers and answering ads and at the same time working at the garment center.

JG: This was the start of your long association with Dreiser as a researcher and as a friend. When you researched for Dreiser what did you do? Did you read and calculate the material, or...



EM: Yes, it was on Emma Goldman, because he had wanted to write something about her. He felt that she needed something sympathetic written about her.

JG: During your association did his writing techniques and his approach affect your...

EM: No, because he wrote at great length, and I was always a short writer. I liked the French very much and in New York and in Ann Arbor...

JG: The French, meaning ...?

EM: Well, I had been with, I knew people who read Proust in French as it came out. It came out then separately, each volume, in French, and they would read it. And then they read other French books, and so I had read in translation, the French. But see, I can't remember some of the current things, the younger people--Raymond Radiguet...

JG: But Proust wrote at length, like Dreiser---not that they were the same, but it was hardly short.

EM: Well, Dreiser was a person that I liked intensely, but I read him without... You could read and like things without being too aware of style. And I read Henry James at the same time and, you know, I read for the story and the emotion. I couldn't have told you what the great difference between them was, except that they wrote about different periods. But I wouldn't have known the great refinement of Henry James and I wouldn't have known that Dreiser had sort of a lumbering style. I simply liked them. I think the intensity of their presentation... And I read slowly--you might say I lip read--and I've lived what I read. In memorizing poetry I used to shout it out. I would go horseback riding at times and I would shout poetry to the...And one of my favorites, I can remember. I had a red jacket I wore with riding britches and I used to shout:

He did not wear his scarlet coat  
For blood and wine were red  
And blood and wine were on his hands  
When they found him with the dead.

[Laughs] You know that? You don't know Oscar Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol"--which when I was a child, I pronounced it "reeding goal," and a professor laughed [laughs] or a teacher laughed.

JG: When did the ideas of modernism in literature start affecting you, or when were they around? Were they in Europe at that time?

EM: Yes. Because very quickly I began to read--I think I'd always read--before I went to New York I'd always read the reviews in both *Nation* and *New Republic*, and so I kept up. I knew what was new and I'd read Fitzgerald and the young before I went to New York.

JG: So was that new style coming from the United States, or France, or both?

EM: Well, Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*, that was certainly United States, and then Hemingway--the first Hemingway--I can't remember the year of it--this was part of the United States. Dreiser was United States. And Sherwood Anderson, he was rather young then--I was trying to think of the other--oh, Edgar Lee Masters. These were the older ones, the old established ones, when I went to New York, of the Americans.

JG: Whom would you consider the modernists among them? Hemingway, and Fitzgerald, obviously...

EM: They were a different generation. These were the old ones.

JG: Sherwood Anderson and Edgar Lee Masters were the older ones? It seems there's a break at some point...

EM: Say that again, who?

JG: Sherwood Anderson, Edgar Lee Masters, and of course...

EM: and Dreiser, were the older ones, yes...

JG: But what interests me is when this spareness, or the modernism, in writing starts affecting you, when you start, that seems to be a style that's kindred to your spirit. You took to it in a way that continues today. The minimalism...

EM: Well, I'd followed it from reviews. Any book that was interesting I saw reviewed in *Nation* or *New Republic* and then by Heywood Broun in New York, I would naturally get. And so I read Joyce--his stories--and let's see, who else? Gertrude Stein, I read something of hers, and...

JG: In New York, or Michigan?

EM: In New York. I'm trying to think who else were the ones. I think those two, Joyce and [Gertrude Stein], they were the ones who were most controversial.

JG: Did you like them?

EM: Oh, very much, yes! I didn't understand them very much but I believed in them by principle, that these were people who were cutting a new path. I felt it was my lack that at twenty, twenty-one, that I didn't get it all, but I thought I would in time.

JG: Was there some thought that this was all part of a new world, with the new painting, and the new sculpture, that there was a new writing?

EM: No, I didn't see that they had that much relation, the painting and writing, because it was later that I got to the new painting, and as for architecture, I was still in the--I wanted buildings low, and Georgian. But very soon I began to see there was something. I think all interest in modern architecture may start with the Georgian, because it has the cleanness that the...

JG: Well, it's the cleanness that interests me about your tastes in architecture and in your writing. Did that emerge--when were you first conscious of it, when did it happen, when did you start writing cleanly?

EM: Writing cleanly? I always rewrote cleanly. I think I was not really a born writer. It came too hard; it took me too long to make it. I wanted it very smooth as glass on top and I wanted much, much boiling up underneath the surface and much--but to tell it in a way, rather, I think I may have been influenced by fairy tales. I adored fairy tales, Brothers Grimm, Andersen, and there were several sets of fairy tales that we had at home. *Fairy Tales from Many Lands* and other things--lots of children's books--but I can remember especially *Fairy Tales from Many Lands*. And they were so neat, the fairy tales. It told it so compactly. Good God, I can remember the children sticking their fingers out for the witch to feel to see if they were fat enough to kill, putting sticks out because the witch was blind, almost. Well, that's really dramatic stuff, you know, and it makes your heart really pound. But it's neatly told; you use the fact to grab the reader. And then poetry too, I'd always liked, and learning. I kept close to it by memorizing it. You know, you don't try really to memorize, you just keep saying it over and reading it over.

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

EM: I got out of the Bronx as quickly as I could. I got an apartment on Chariton Street, stayed there briefly, and then went to Patchin where there was sort of a built in circle of friends.

JG: Patchin Place?

EM: In Patchin Place. The people living there at the time were a woman writer named Bonnie Grainger, John Flanagan the sculptor, E.E. Cummings, John Cowper Powys--they were all on the south side. On the north side, there was only an unknown poet, Norman something, and myself. I began working a great deal for Dreiser then, doing small jobs for him. For two or three weeks I worked full time for him and then he got an experienced secretary and I then did reading. I would read manuscripts, research various things for him. The parties at his house on Thursday nights, once a month or so, were great fun. I met a great many people there. It was the first time I'd seen the successful writers. In the Village they were more or less hopefuls.

JG: Whom did you meet there?

EM: At Dreiser's? Well, let's see, of this generation you don't know most of them. Let's see, Burton Rascoe, well of course Horace Liveright who was Dreiser's publisher and also was then producing plays. He produced a play on *American Tragedy*, I believe it was, and then Ford Madox Ford. Now who is that, oh--can't remember the name of the man with the little red beard. It's published, all this, a typical party there was published in the *Grand Street*, so see *Grand Street*.

JG: The one on Dreiser that will be published?

EM: No, in the one that was published, on Patchin Place.

JG: And where did Dreiser live?

EM: He lived on 200 West 57th Street, just across the street from the music...

JG: The Carnegie Hall?

EM: Carnegie, yes.

JG: Did he live in the Osborne?

EM: No, it was called the Rodin Studios. I don't know whether it's still there or not.

JG: You said something earlier, about Georgian architecture being a root of modern architecture because of its simplicity of design.

EM: Yes, one comes to it that way, I think.

JG: One comes to modernism that way?

EM: Yes.

JG: Had you at this time... You were leading a literary life; did you start developing an inclination towards architecture other than simply liking certain buildings and gravitating to interesting neighborhoods?

EM: No. That began in California. I did, I had a feeling for it, yes. But actually no, it wasn't until... I came really close to it in California. And I left New York. I worked on a magazine, and then I went to Paris. In Paris, it was mainly around the Deux Magots.

JG: When did you leave New York, what year?

EM: '28, yes, and I guess I was in Paris about nine months. Anyway I came back. I'd decided I wanted to live in Paris and I wanted to close my apartment. Someone was living in my apartment in New York and... See, the *Tribune* there--(Incidentally I noticed that in the published story they changed this to *Herald*. There was a *Herald* there, but there was also a *Tribune*, the one that I think James--you know, the funny man--Thurber worked for there, and Eliot Paul.) Anyway, I became involved with someone who worked there named John Mitchell.

JG: Was this after you returned from Paris?

EM: In Paris.

JG: Oh, the Herald-Tribune in Paris?

EM: Yes, and so most of them wrote. Elliot Paul was the coeditor of *transition*, the magazine, and Eugene . Jolas I saw a great deal of Jolas in the Deux Magots. He would come in. It was a morning paper, and they worked at night, and very often I would go down; they had a little café where they would go for their dinner and drinks and I would meet them there. So I got to know most of them very well.

JG: Were you writing at that time?

EM: Yes, I was doing what writing I could.

JG: How did you support yourself?

EM: I had saved enough working on a magazine to keep me, and it was very cheap in Paris then. The franc was four cents and you'd get a meal for two or three francs, four or five francs.

JG: Was the intellectual climate in Paris different from the one you'd known in New York?

EM: Yes, yes it was, yes. The two things that Jolas talked about were, and you get it in the magazine too, were the Freudian thought and...

JG: Freudianism and surrealism?

EM: Yes, and surrealism. Elliot Paul I like too. But Jolas was very superstitious, and he would tell me his dreams and there's quite a bit that reflected the interest in surrealism.

JG: Were the conversations themselves at all different? Did people do surreal things to each other...

EM: No. But there was more intensity, and there was more time especially. These people were working at night, and I would go for my second breakfast to the Deux Magots, maybe at ten o'clock, or eleven.

JG: When they were having their first breakfast?

EM: Yes.

JG: So how would you spend your days, at the desk, or [inaudible] Paris?

EM: No, I would go home then, I would do some writing, and I walked enormously, too, mornings. It's awfully hard, because--oh, and someone else too. Bob Sage. Yes, he was one of the editors of *Transition*, and his wife--they were living apart then, Maeve Sage. I saw quite a bit of her. She gave me lots of advice about Paris. Especially I remember one piece of her advice was to marry a Turk, because they had lots of money. [Laughs] And she had a lover who was a Turk, and recommended them.

JG: And what were you writing, it was fiction?

EM: Yes.

JG: And were you experimenting in any of the newer styles, or developing your own style?

EM: No, I felt really at a loss in writing because I was among people who were so literary that I wouldn't show anything to anyone because I felt that I was not as good as they were. And they had asked me, you know, send something, you know, let's look at something of yours for *Transition*, but...

JG: Had you been published in New York yet?

EM: No, I'd had one thing published, a small piece of humor in *Judge*, a magazine called *Judge*.

JG: In writing, in Paris, were you trying to... You have an extremely pithy style, it's very reduced; were you trying to reduce at that time? Boil things down?

EM: No, no. No, no. I was born that way, reducing it.

JG: Cutting it down to the bone, and all that.

EM: Yes. And if not on the first time, I could edit it closer down so it was...

JG: And by cutting it to the bone you mean there's absolutely no repetitions, and very little embroidery, not decorative writing. Can you describe that style?

EM: No, I can't; but I think of one thing John, Barbara's [Goldstein] John Pastier, said in a review--"You better get it the first time because she's not going to say it again."

JG: Yes, she says it only once...

EM: The things I liked, the writing I liked, was, more and more, cut down.

JG: But that form of minimalism became a mode of writing--was that true in the twenties especially? Or...

EM: No, and I can't say that I strove for it. It was native to me. It was my natural way of talking, of writing.

JG: How were you dressing at that time?

EM: Oh, I had, beige, beige, beige, beige--a beige coat, caracal coat, and then a beige camel coat with pony, and a cloches (I would have them cut to my head, in Garment Center). I'd buy my things in . S. Klein, or at sales in Peck & Peck. S. Klein used to take over the things. After the 57th street houses or other good places would have their sales S. Klein would buy up what was left. You could get some wonderful things there. It took a long time, to shop, but you could find it if you had patience.

JG: Did you travel much in Europe, when you lived in France?

EM: No, I didn't, no. I travelled around Paris constantly and went to the south once, and I went to Berlin.

JG: On the train?

EM: Yeah.

JG: So that was also [inaudible] in 1928?

EM: Yes. That was the time of *I Am a Camera*. I met an English girl who was a Communist, and she was governess or companion to the children of a Soviet who was an official, in Berlin, of the Russian government. So she was very much interested in American literature, and I'd have to set her straight about some of it. She thought the great, really the great American writer of all time was Upton Sinclair, and it was in fact the only one she really knew. Because he wrote about the left wing. So I told her a lot. Oh, I knew someone who worked for Amtorg, which was a Russian trading...since the United States didn't recognize the Soviets, it was comparable to some official thing at that time. So, Voba had taken me to the plane; in fact, he brought a little typewriter to me,

to the boat, for me.

JG: Voba is who, now?

EM: Is a Russian, who worked for Amtorg. He introduced me to two engineers, who had been in the United States for about a year. They had [gone] to see all the dams and the works of engineering in the United States.

JG: These are two Russian engineers?

EM: Yes.

JG: And how do you spell his name?

EM: Voba. Vladimir. Voba is a nickname for Vladimir. So

JG: ...So you were in a boat?

EM: I spent a lot of time on the boat, with these two engineers. One of them was very literary, and he had asked the engineers here to recommend books for him to buy to take home, American literary books, for his wife. They gave him Harold Bell Wright, and Zane Grey. So he mentioned this to me and I laughed, I howled. I said, "Oh, I'll give you some books"; I had a big bag of books I was taking.

JG: It's not a boat where, in Berlin or on the Baltic?

EM: No, it's on a boat--I've gone back--it's the boat New York to Cherbourg. But it was rather interesting, because I had... It was really through this that I met the girl who was going to Berlin. They were on their way to Berlin.

JG: I see. It was on your first trip to Paris?

EM: Yes. So, anyway, it was a month in Berlin that I spent, and that was fascinating. It was the opera, and just walking in the Tiergarten? I was there at Christmas, I know; I remember the singing. So--that's--what kind of thing do you want to know?

JG: What about the intellectual life...?

EM: In Berlin?

JG: Yes. [Inaudible]

EM: The intellectual life was with the Russian Communists and the English girl who was a Communist. So that wasn't anything; it was just explaining to her that Upton Sinclair was not the highest literary talent.

JG: Did you find that Berlin at that time was a great clearing house of ideas; it was washed over by certain intellectual waves from Russia and the United States and France? In Berlin?

EM: I didn't get in any group there, so I could get this. If I'd known more, you know, in advance...

JG: Did you speak any German?

EM: Yeah, I spoke a little German, but I spoke more French. As a matter of fact, I got in the bathtub in Berlin, and I couldn't remember the word for soap. It was so comfortable, so much more comfortable in Berlin, than in Paris, but I adored Paris.

JG: So you went back to Paris after Berlin?

EM: Yes.

JG: ...and you decided you wanted to stay, partly because of a relationship you were in?

EM: Yes, partly, but Paris, too. And because the talk was so... There was such freedom. The man that I had known so well in New York, Geoff Eaton, was quite old school of writing, and he adored Mencken.

JG: Now who was Geoff Eaton, this was somebody you knew in New York?

EM: Yes. He had a magazine. He was the literary editor on the *Telegraph*, which was mainly a racing [magazine], favored by all the racing people--not the *Telegram*, but the *Telegraph*. So he was a literary editor, and then finally they decided to drop the book page, and so he was out. But he was able to get someone to back a magazine, which he called *Plain Talk*. It was very much Mencken, it was Menckenesse. The people he liked were

the ones that Mencken would have liked, did like. He was very contemptuous of me for liking, you know, Joyce and anyone who was, well... Let's see, even Hemingway was... The reason I happened to have so many books on board with me was that he had just cleaned out the books--anything that was new, and it would interest me, he gave me, because he would not have reviewed them.

JG: Did you review for him at that time?

EM: No. I'd done reviews for a little publisher that published reprints of classics, Socialist classics, and I did some reviews for them which they sent to little newspapers, along with the books. That was it.

JG: So, when you were on the boat to Paris you were just about twenty-four.

EM: No, I was younger than that.

JG: Twenty-three?

EM: Yes.

JG: When did you graduate from college?

EM: Let's see, '24, '25.

JG: So , you were . . .

EM: No, '24. Let's see, no, I was twenty, so it was '24. And then I went to New York in '25, I guess, or maybe it's a year later, '26.

JG: After graduating you came straight to New York?

EM: Yes.

JG: Did you have a sense that you were always the youngest in your class?

EM: I always was. I was the youngest in my class, always.

JG: In New York, who were the people who were most important to you during that time, that initial time in New York?

EM: Well, for different reasons, let's see, there was Josie Herbst, because she was so forthright in everything she did, and she was such a good storyteller. I can't remember where I met her, but there were so many places you'd meet, and then we all went to the same restaurants. There was Gran Ticino; I think it's still there, in New York. That was one of the places, and then we all went to the same Italian gardens, the Italian restaurants.

JG: And who else was there?

EM: Well, I'm trying to think. Let's see, there were the two southerners, Caroline Gordon and Alan Tate, and lots you would not have heard of. I'm trying to think. God, I should get a book of someone's of New York of that period.

JG: I have the sense that it was a literary life, or literary society, that you were involved with, downtown [inaudible]...

EM: Yes, I always lived downtown.

JG: It was very cohesive?

EM: No. Oh, no; it was loose.

JG: But there were a lot of people with similar interests?

EM: Yes. Now let's see, there was lots of it around this Bonnie Grainger's little speakeasy. The people around there were all writing, and that's the time, you know, when you want to be a writer, you want to publish, but you really don't know how. And I, being the youngest, had always, and I still have, in most things, the feeling that I'm not going to be able to do it, that it's going to be beyond me. And I sit down and do it.

JG: Did you look at each other's manuscripts, was there a sort of sharing?

EM: No, I was very cautious about showing anything, mainly because I thought it wouldn't be all that good.

That's why today, when you seemed a little critical of, you know, that I'm ... [Tape runs out]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1]

JG: Where were we?

EM: Well, let's see.

JG: You were talking about your shyness about, your hesitation about...

EM: Showing things, yes. And then I read for Dreiser many manuscripts that he was given to read, he would give to me to read for him, to make reports on. So because of that I wouldn't give anything to him to read. He was extremely sympathetic, and wanted me to write, but I was hesitant about showing him anything; I thought he would give it to someone else to read. Writers, any successful writer has so much to read that I didn't want to.

JG: So the practice then was that aspiring writers would send something to Dreiser, and he would give them to you to read, to report to him on, and then he would make a comment to somebody?

EM: Yes, and very often then, if I recommended it, very, very highly, he *would* read it. But it's too... To take the time to read two manuscripts by someone else a day, writers don't have the time for that.

JG: So you came back from Paris to New York with the intention of closing the apartment. Did you?

EM: No, I didn't. The Depression had settled in, had started, had begun.

JG: You wrote a bit about that in *Patchin Place, Grand Street*.

EM: Yes. In "The Crash." I think that's covered in *Grand Street*, so...

JG: You think we should cut then to...

EM: California.

JG: Well, you went down to Florida for two...

EM: Oh, yes, yes, the winter in Florida.

JG: So this was after Patchin Place. Did you move to Florida, or did you vacation...?

EM: No, it was sublet, the place, to Mary Heaton Vorse. She was a writer you probably have never heard of.

JG: That's right, I haven't.

EM: [Laughs] She wrote books about, she wrote--well I won't tell you what she wrote. I'll say that I wrote a novel in Key West and John wrote one too. John came over from Paris then.

JG: John?

EM: Mitchell. We went down to Florida together. We lived in the house on Leroy Street. I did give up the Patchin Place apartment and got this little house on Leroy Street. Three stories, one room to a story. It was off a court, and it was off the street, Bleecker Street. A wonderful house, wonderful house! The main room was the kitchen.

JG: So you're still in New York now?

EM: Yes, well yes, Florida. Oh, you want to hear about Florida! Well, the novel, I wrote it, I came back, I sent it out and it really... By this time the Depression was in full swing, you know, and this was not a book that reflected any of this, and the publishers were in great pain, you know, because of the dropping sales and it had been... It's like now, you know, with so much money everywhere, and if a depression would come, it would really be very much like this, [laughs] like what it was then.

JG: How long did you spend in Florida? It was a winter in Key West?

EM: Five months.

JG: What was the name of the novel? What was it about?

EM: I think it was called *Blackberry Winter*. Then to get back...

JG: Is that among your papers?

EM: Yes, that's gone too. [Papers have been donated to the Archives of American Art.] It really got a good reception, except no one bought it. So John's book, I always thought it was so wonderful.

JG: You thought yours or his was so wonderful?

EM: I thought his was so wonderful. He wasn't given too high praise; he thought mine was okay. Okay. But he wasn't given too much praise, for women especially, and he thought his was more literary. I remembered some phrase he used the other day and began laughing, something about "the *penumbra* of your silence." [Laughs] So you can see we were going in different directions. [Laughs again]

JG: He was not a minimalist.

EM: [Laughs] No, he was not a minimalist. So--in New York there was very little work from Dreiser. I got work from publishers and there wasn't too much of it.

JG: But--I hate to keep on backtracking, but back in Florida, was there sort of an intellectual life in town there, was there a community of writers?

EM: Oh, yes, Mary Heaton Vorse came down. She was going on assignment to Cuba and asked us to get a place for her. Then Jo Herbst wrote and asked if we could get a place for them. She and John Herrmann were coming down, after he got back from one of his trips. So there was John and Jo and Dos Passos, Mary Heaton Vorse, Hemingway and his wife and family, and then there was a fisherman who was a kind of an intellectual. But Hemingway's life was fishing and writing, and he would go out of afternoons to fish.

JG: Was he famous then?

EM: Oh yeah, sure. It was after *The Sun Also Rises* and it was after *A Farewell to Arms*. *A Farewell to Arms* came in, what--I don't know, maybe it wasn't. Anyway, he was famous. It was Dos Passos that I loved--I loved both of them. Dos Passos was in--for an entirely different reason. But the way his book was put together, woven, the different things, in. It is now published as *U.S.A.*, but then it was in different volumes.

JG: Oh really; I thought he'd done it as a whole text.

EM: No. See there was *39th Parallel*, and anyway it was in three volumes; it was a trilogy. It came out two or three years, three or four years apart.

JG: Had he come out before this year?

EM: What year?

JG: 1930.

EM: Yes, I think *39th Parallel* had just come out then. And *The Big Money*, I think, came out after that, the third one.

JG: So this was a literary community of some interest, if not importance?

EM: Yes, yes. Except everyone was working.

JG: You wrote a little bit about this also in... I think it was in the second of the articles in *Grand Street*.

EM: Yes.

JG: So back in New York, then, you went to Leroy Street?

EM: Yes. And it was hard getting any money. Hard getting any jobs at all. I did finally get a job in a Newark department store editing a magazine for them. And I was to start a month in the store. You know, to get the feel of the store. [Interview is interrupted; EM is coughing]

JG: You're in New Jersey. You were supposed to work in the department store, to sort of get a feel for the place.

EM: We had two other friends there. They had been in Paris. A playwright.

JG: So you're living with John now?

EM: Yes. A playwright, Virgil Geddes. He had married Minna Besser. They had a little place, a stone house in New



Jersey, and they built a theatre and he began writing plays for the theatre. We went out there quite a bit. He was a damn good playwright.

JG: And Herbst came out too.

EM: Came out where?

JG: To their place, I recall from *Grand Street*.

EM: She didn't come to the Geddes's, no. I went to her place... So, where were we? What do you want to know?

JG: So you came back to Leroy Street, and you were...

EM: Yeah, and I got pneumonia. I was in the hospital and it was double pneumonia, and so they finally got Dreiser and he got me some good attention at the hospital. A nurse; it was before antibiotics, and so it was more or less a nursing job, to keep the fever down. So then Bonnie, this friend, had been in California and she had set up some friends of hers at a bookshop, and so she wrote them, the Needhams, Ida and Wilbur Needham. She wrote them and asked them if they could put me up for a month and let me do odd selling, spell them on selling. So I did. I came out in '32.

JG: So this was part of the convalescence?

EM: Yes.

JG: And the thought then was that a warm climate would be good for your...

EM: Yes. I was just getting out of it for the winter, but I stayed on. I had letters from people saying it was still pretty bad in New York.

One terrible thing happened. The novel did not sell, but Scribner's had a competition for novelettes (I think they were about 10,000 words). So I cut my novel down. One of the things about it was they felt it was a little short, you know publishers. So I learned to write even shorter, though, you know, in time [laughs] with working hard at it. So [laughing] I cut it down from about... Anyway, I cut it. I've forgotten how many words it was in the beginning.

It went in, and I was at my sister's. She was in Denver, she was having a baby. That was on my way to California. And the word came that... I think it was four they were going to buy, print three, no, print two. Anyway, it was just out of the running--the last one. I think there were four, and I was fifth. And God, you know, how close, how chance, really. I had a letter from one of the editors saying how sorry she was, that she felt it was very, very nice, and it was a pity. So that made a hell of a difference, you know. God, that would have--to go back to New York with a...

JG: Book...

EM: And it *paid*, you know. So that would have... It was all I needed. But instead--and California was nothing, absolutely nothing. I'd done so much editorial work and research and there was nothing like that here. So I did get a job rewriting a book for a woman whose English was very poor; she was Russian. God, that was deadly. I got jobs like that, and then a couple of times I worked in a bookshop, you know Christmas rush. What's that big one down, who is it, the end of Olympic?

JG: Downtown?

EM: It was an old, famous bookshop. Well, it doesn't matter. And then I did a lot of reviewing here, because Wilbur Needham reviewed for the *Times* and for...

JG: The *Los Angeles Times*?

EM: Yes. He also reviewed for a magazine called *Fortnight*, I believe the name of it was. He would give me lots of books to review, but I wouldn't get paid for them and I couldn't keep the books, because they needed the books to sell. So I got nothing out of it, but I did get published. I remember one was Buckminster Fuller's *Seven to the Moon*. [note: title is *Nine Chains to the Moon*] What is that book of Fuller's?

JG: I don't know it.

EM: I became very keenly aware of building here, of architecture.

JG: Why was that?

EM: Well, it was wonderful. You could see it in the houses. And I began reading on architecture, all the books.

JG: Who was wonderful at that time?

EM: Neutra, I learned, very soon. And oh--the first thing I saw that I liked were the Monterey houses, you know, of John ...?, in Santa Monica.

JG: Parkinson?

EM: No, not Parkinson, John Byers. Over on Georgina Street, in Santa Monica.

JG: These are traditionalized Spanish?

EM: Yes. And then from that, I would stop and look at houses that were under construction if they looked interesting, and I got to see a great many of them. And Neutra I found very early, and liked him. Harris I found very early. First week I was here I met John Entenza. He had nothing to do with architecture then.

JG: He had not bought *Art and Architecture* yet?

EM: No. That was '32.

JG: That was '32 that he bought it or that you were here?

EM: That we met.

JG: What did you find about the intellectual life here? Was there much of it, or...?

EM: No.

JG: Not much, and you missed the conversations from back East?

EM: Yes, I did.

JG: But what did you like about the city?

EM: I loved... It was laughed at so, Los Angeles, in New York. And they thought no one came except the people to make money, and get their money and pick up and run. But when I got off the train in San Bernardino, I said, "What is that, what is that, what is that?" And [they] said "What's what?" "That wonderful smell." "Oh, that's orange blossoms."

God, you know, that was the beginning, and then I got to Santa Monica and the Needham's shop was half a block from the ocean. So I could go down every day and swim, and God, it was close to one of the inclines down to the ocean; it was on Santa Monica Boulevard.

JG: So, you were better by that time?

EM: I got better here, yes. It was so stimulating, and I've always liked warm climates anyway.

JG: You mean just that physical aspect is stimulating?

EM: Yes. And the mountains, too. To have the mountains and the sea so close together. That was just heaven.

JG: How is it that you came to Santa Monica, rather than, say, Pasadena, or...?

EM: Oh, that's because they had the Needham's bookshop. I was going to stay with them. That was the agreement, with Bonnie. I think she'd put up several hundred dollars which, in Depression days, went...

JG: It was a lot of money then. Santa Monica in that time was a vacation town, a beachside...

EM: Yes, yes, it was always end of the line.

JG: So did you stay on for longer than you thought?

EM: I stayed there about a month, and that's when I got the job rewriting the book, the Russian woman. Her husband's family had a little shed with living quarters above it. It even had a bathroom in it. That was on Pico. So I lived there. Loved it.

Then I fell in love. John didn't come out, and John became something of an alcoholic, too. It was such a disappointment to him that his book was not taken. I think I can see now, you know, "the penumbra of your silence," why it may not, but I really couldn't understand it because it just seemed absolutely wonderful to me.

He was hurt. I don't know, did I say this before? That when mine would get attention and his didn't, it really hurt him. He was writing when I was working in Newark, at the department store, and I can remember he would read what he'd written aloud to me, and I was exhausted, you know, and would fall asleep. And that would hurt him. So he became very, very sensitive, and then he began getting awfully drunk. He would sort of lurch out into the street.

JG: This was before you got sick with pneumonia?

EM: Yeah.

JG: And then when you came out here, he stayed there?

EM: Yes. And I really didn't want him to come because he was too comfortable in the position of my going out and working and his staying home and writing. Because he did feel that he was the writer in the family.

JG: So you supported the family?

EM: Briefly, briefly.

JG: So out here, then, you were here and then you met somebody?

EM: Yes.

JG: And you stayed on.

EM: Yes, I stayed on. I went back to New York in 1935. During this time, those two or three years, that I was here, I began doing work in the left wing, the radical movement. I did things, articles, for--there were three or four of them-- *EPIC* [End Poverty In California] *News* was one of them, and then there was the communist paper in San Francisco, and then there was another one here. I can't remember the name of that other one, but I know that Kathryn Smith found it because I did some housing surveys, slum housing surveys, that I published there. This was something I just set myself to do. If you have lots of time, no money sense, and-- interested in the subject--so that was good. I published a lot of other things then, in the papers. I began publishing in the little magazines in... God, I don't even remember the names of them. One, I think was called *Blast*. Could that have been Jack Conroy, or one of those, that edited it?

JG: I don't know. I saw the word *Blast* somewhere, in the sketch here.

EM: Good God.

JG: Was it at this time that you lived in Malibu?

EM: Oh, yes, after I left the place writing for the Russian woman, Tim and I house-sat a house in Malibu.

JG: What was Tim's last name?

EM: Robert.

JG: And you house-sat in Malibu?

EM: Yes, Zuma it was. I heard from his son not long ago.

[END TAPE 2, SIDE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 2]

JG: On June 8, in Santa Monica, this is tape 2, side 2, the second day of our sessions. Esther?

EM: Yes. I want to say that I think the chronology impedes progress, and I'd like to depart from that. And then I want to comment further on your categorizing me as a minimalist, and then asking me to say how I became a minimalist, and what my influences were in becoming a minimalist. As I understand the minimalism, I'm not sure that I am a minimalist, and I'm not sure that's it's correct to categorize what I am for researchers. I think they might come to their conclusions. I think that should be treated with some little... Well, drop it, since I can't find the word. Now let's close it off for a minute and talk about how we're going to--and whether we should [machine switched off, and on again] So what should we talk about?

JG: At the last session, we ended with you in Malibu.

EM: Yeah. Tim. He'd had some heart trouble. He was in the first World War and there'd been some injury, some

slight, I think, gassing or something, and it had begun to affect his heart. He had just stopped everything and had begun to write and to do the things he wanted to. He was French-Canadian. His interests were Montaigne, and Remy de Gourmont and--I can't think of the others. But it made a difference. Oh turn it off! I can't, I don't know-- [Machine is turned off, and on again].

The Depression was a curious period, where everyone had lots of time, and there was nothing much to do. And in California, where there was no editorial work to do, it was almost impossible to earn livings in the way that I would have in New York. No publishing. So I did do odd jobs for writing, editing manuscripts, people who wanted to write. Then I began, through the Needhams, to get into the radical movement.

You have only to see someone beaten up, a speaker beaten up, pulled from the platform and beaten up, to incense you, and turn you to the left. But it was a period where everyone was more or less a protestor. In Malibu, people would stop off who had no money whatever, and they were hitchhiking from one place to another to look for work. It was a terribly sad period, but there was a great deal of camaraderie too, during that time. Turn it off. [Machine turned off, and on again.]

When I went to New York, I had very definite ideas about,...sympathies with Sacco and Vanzetti, and one reason I chose the *New York World* when I got to New York was because of their coverage of Sacco and Vanzetti. When I was working at Brentano's, I would get the paper every morning and look for things on Sacco and Vanzetti. And then I went to Union Square, finally, the night when they were executed. I went alone. I was working then on a magazine, and it was near there, and I'd gone with one worker, a colleague from the magazine--she'd gone over with me to Union Square. I remember how incensed I was, because the cops said to this girl, "What are you, a good Irish girl, doing here?" She'd laughed at him, and I was shocked at her fraternizing. [Laughs]

JG: So there was a rally, then, at Union Square?

EM: No, a vigil, at Union Square. I'd gone home after work, but then I went back that evening. I think there were...there were cannons on all the buildings around Union Square, on tops of them, pointed down, you know, for possible riot.

JG: So before the Depression, you had a strong political instinct?

EM: Yes. Let's see, what else can I tell you about that.

JG: Were your political leanings similar to that of your parents?

EM: No, it was farther left, and then during the Depression, it became much more left. From the Needhams. There were all political groups came in there and so... But even Entenza, you know, who was not really political, but there was no one who wasn't on the left. It was a period of protestors, the thirties.

JG: Was Southern California a sort of conservative place at that time?

EM: Yes it was, it was--the *Times* called it "the last white hope," you know; it was a non- union town.

JG: Did the *Times* establish that climate or steer that climate?

EM: It prolonged it. [Long pause] Turn it off. [Machine is turned off, and on again.]

EM: I finally went back to New York in 1936 or '37 because things were not getting any better out here. I thought they might have been clearing up there. I was still hoping to get back into fiction and to sell more. I'd sold a couple of things--they were non-payment things. So Bonnie was going to England, offered me her place. She was going for a couple of months, so I went and stayed at her apartment. She had one on Ninth Street then. By this time, a friend that she had taken care of when the friend needed help set up a trust fund for her. So, she lived on Ninth Street and I stayed in her place. But there wasn't very much. I saw Dreiser, and I did things for publishers and applied for jobs and got little small jobs, freelance, and then I began to--because of California--really to like the freelance life. I think I've written even on John Flanagan.

After Bonnie returned I moved to the Chelsea [Hotel]. A friend of hers lived in the Chelsea, a woman who'd been brought back from exile in Europe by the Depression. God, I think of more interesting stories to tell about other people. This was a woman named Carlota Thrasher, and her father was a doctor in San Diego and there had been some mass murder that [he'd] been involved in. Anyway she didn't go back there; she wouldn't go back to San Diego. She married a sculptor who was killed in the war. So she was very good company and knew Europe very well from having lived there for twenty years. She was in the Chelsea.

Then I ran into an old school friend from Detroit, a woman. We had argued, when we met, in Ann Arbor. I was reading Dostoevsky and she was reading Turgenev, and we had many arguments. We always argued about everything. She was married to...

By this time I was interested in architecture and it was mainly the house architects, but so much of California that was good was house architecture. There were very few large buildings, and I think this is the way movements start, through the house.

Then in New York I got involved with a group that wanted to raise the standards... They were investigating the standards of laundry workers, women laundry workers, and so I joined that committee and was doing some writing for them and I continued long after I might have dropped out simply because the meetings were held in the William Lescaze townhouse. His wife, I think her name was Mary, Mary Lescaze, was a member so I could go and sit there. Have I told you this before?

JG: No, I've not heard it before.

EM: Then there was the Corb show, or one of the shows, at MOMA, and then I met Dorothy Rogers, and she at that time was married to an architect, a German, who was... He wasn't an editor then, but he was assistant on the *Architectural Forum*, Paul Grotz. They had a place on Bleecker Street, 0 floor, and we talked a lot. I remember it as Breuer chairs and scrubbed oak table and Thonet or some other chairs that were new--just the right thing that was required, in the modern, at the time.

I was very much interested in how different New York and California were, the houses, and especially being able to spend so much time, maybe four or five hours over the months, in the Lescaze house. How everything, not one thing, was out of that modern, the International Style, in the Lescaze, and how different it was from, even the Neutra, and the Harris. I knew a Harris house very well, two Harris houses, very well, out here. It was later that I got to know Schindler.

JG: What do you mean, that not one thing was out of the International Style?

EM: I mean all the furniture, every object in the living room, was compatible.

JG: And that was not so in California?

EM: It wasn't strictly International Style out here. Since that was owned by the architect, he could control everything that was in it, and being a Swiss himself, he perhaps, you know, it was more European, International Style, more Corb, perhaps, than...

During this period while I was in the Chelsea I went out to Dreiser's a couple of times. They were living in Katonah. He had a place there; he'd given up the apartment on 57th Street. He and Helen were together out there. He did have a little place on Columbus Circle, in town, at the Ansonia Hotel. He had a suite there, but I think he was working at that time on... I remember one thing he was working on was a book on Thoreau. It was a series, and someone was working with him on that. I did some reading for him, books, manuscripts, but he also had lost enormously in the Depression. He'd made so much money, and he'd lost, oh, maybe half of it.

And so, anyway, he asked me to bring John Flanagan out. He didn't know him, but from the things I'd said, and he knew something about his sculpture.

JG: Did you bring John Flanagan out, you mean, to write about him or...?

EM: No, no, bring him out, you know, some Sunday. Very often they had lunches on Sundays, and people would come by train and then go back the same day. So we did.

And John was an alcoholic. Dreiser was usually impatient with alcoholics, or avoided them. So I warned him about that, but John did get drunk. There was someone who had commented on it, and so I got up to take John out, and Dreiser said, "Take him down to the studio."

That was a stone... Built on a slope, and this was one wall of stone and the slope, up following the slope, the stone, and this house was--I call it a "Hansel and Gretel" house. The windows were like something that might have been taken from Doctor Caligari. It had shingles that were overlaid in different colors. He thought it was wonderful and I, by this time being a purist, was a little bit non... Couldn't accept it. But it he loved it so. And then he had a couple of little guest cottages, just one room, places for people to spend the night. I remember Powys was up there one time when I was, and he saw one, and he had a way of just clapping his hands and throwing up his arms. And when he saw this little, you know, it was gable roofed, thatched, Powys thought it was just enchanting.

I took John downstairs; Dreiser said, "Take him down to my studio." I took him down there and then Dreiser came down himself before the lunch was over. We were sitting at the table eating when this happened, when I got him out. And he was getting terribly drunk. So, John was taking off his shoes and his socks, and I was trying to get him to put them back on, and Dreiser came down and he looked at him, and John couldn't get his socks on, and

Dreiser sat down on the floor and put his socks on, and his shoes. It was very startling, and so it sort of sobered John and there was sort of a communication between them. By that time it was evening. We left soon after that and John was pretty sober by the time we got out. It did sober him, this sort of...

And, let's see, John was a philosopher; he said he liked having a common name, John Flanagan, because he could make of it anything he wanted to. I thought of that very often, having a common name myself, and having a first name that I disliked intensely, or being called by my middle name which I disliked intensely.

JG: I'm sorry, what is your middle name?

EM: Esther.

JG: What is your first name, then?

EM: Dorothy. At times when I dreamed of changing my name, having something fancy, I would think of John, and [laughing] what you could... You had a free field, to make it what you wanted to. I still have, you know, that... I'll see a name, and think, oh, I wish my name were that. Knowing full well that I really didn't want it to be anything else but what it was.

I was thinking about things about writing. I think the conversation that day, at the table, was on rather a low level and I think John was the only intellectual there, or the only *philosophical*...

JG: That's what Dreiser liked about him?

EM: Yes.

JG: If you can repeat what you said about even when John was speaking drunkenly...

EM: Yeah, even when John spoke drunkenly he spoke from a philosophical base.

JG: And you think that's one reason that Dreiser was sympathetic towards him, putting his socks on, when he was downstairs?

EM: Yes, he had seen at the table, I mean there had been some occasion at the table, and then to see him get drunk, I think he felt that he was probably better company than the people upstairs and--he could be *extremely* tender, Dreiser, immensely tender. The man who's writing the book about Dreiser, the questions he asked, seemed to indicate that he was very--you know, all the hard things about him. I found him always very understanding and very gentle and extremely good in understanding women's, the things about women. I talked to him very freely about Geoff and why I couldn't, why I didn't want to marry Geoff. Geoff wanted to plan my life for me, and would say, "Now, I think you should write this; now, it's time for you to ask for a raise; now, you should do a biography on this" and so... I just did not want that attention. It's like I was put off when the--maybe I shouldn't say that.

[END TAPE 2, SIDE 2]

[BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 1 JUNE 8, 1987]

EM: Some habits established at home as a child were helpful: closeness to family, in meals, and in the games after a meal. Later it was card games, hard-fought ones. My mother saying [laughing] with a burst of apology and enthusiasm, "Oh dear, I think I'm going to have to bid six" in a game of pitch. There was much laughing, as we played. On the other hand, few people came to the house except family, close or distant relatives. This meant that all of our close friendships were outside the house. No one in the family announced their arrival. I remember one time when there were, oh, some thirty guests, and they all managed to be put up. The amount of food cooked was incredible. There was always a live-in maid, who with my mother did everything. My sister and I did so little; we had to learn it from scratch when we did our own housekeeping.

My mother had her activities, in the Democratic party and her church, but they were never part of the house. This double life made a lasting impression. After we were grown, neither my father nor mother enjoyed really, really enjoyed long visits from their children. Two weeks was a good visit. I fell eventually into the pattern of a double life, my home life separated from my work life. Although I always worked at home, I had friends separate from the home friends. It was this I think that made it easy to write at home.

I established work habits that have always helped. But I always felt that it took me twice as long to write something as anyone else. Another thing that helped in writing was that my father didn't want me to go to New York, and I claimed that I could make my way alone. But I had no money sense. I always left behind a string of bills at college, which my father paid, lectured me, and then...but he was never strict. As for money, what helped very early was that I learned the difference between comfortably off and what was really rich. Going to a

boarding school for the last two years of high school, my sister and I were thrown among the rich oil money. Two of the other academy girls were the Phillips girls, who owned their own oil wells, and had telegrams about big gushers coming in. So that was a good lesson to learn, the difference between the little rich and the wildly rich. My brothers never learned it, to their disadvantage. But no matter how much I was plagued by money troubles over the years, I always had a sense of security, I think, because of being so secure in my early years.

The Depression changed the picture for my father. Before that, I knew that if things got really bad I could swallow my pride and ask for help. And then I had to face the nitty-gritty, and I learned to think ahead. This is something every free-lancer has to learn, to know that the checks, when they come in, don't belong to you, but to the creditors. When I meet people who can write or paint, and want to free-lance, I always look to see how they use their money, because that's the way to know whether they're able to go through the lean periods, to write a book, or to paint. In my case, getting the last installment from a publisher, which went to the photographers, and to repay what you may have borrowed, that was the problem. It's only after you're established that you can expect to get grants.

So, in my case, gradually, very early, I began to cut down on my needs, to simplify my life. You live more and more simply and need less and less, and that's good. I saw how Schindler lived, R. M. Schindler, the architect. He wanted something more than money and he simplified. So, I guess that's the morality that I'm trying to say, of writing. All of this is sort of a moral tale. You learn to go to the typewriter every morning and you learn that the money isn't yours, that you spent it before you get it. You come out of a book exhausted, and also broke, and that's something to handle. Because if you like the book, and you think you did a good job, you really have an inclination to reward yourself, and you can't. The money's not there for any real rewards.

Berkeley (we married in 1941) had money from the Rhode Island Greenes. We had a wonderful time with it. But after the war, there was the inflation, and then he had two bouts of cancer that were very expensive, and so it all fell on me. But he was a wonderful companion. He was the kind of man that women go to for comfort after they've had a mastectomy. I know, remember two, who wanted to see him. He was a wonderful storyteller. When he came in of an evening, he was full of stories.

And we both loved food, serious food, a leg of lamb, a rib roast, a pork loin, or a tongue, or a filet of barracuda, or a good pea soup with ham hock. I like cooking. Even now with so little breath, I eat very much, I eat very well. Schindler used to come sometimes for dinner. This was in the mid-forties. Sometimes with Barbara Myers, who was his more-or-less steady girlfriend when I first went into the office. We would complain because Schindler ate so heartily. Too little left of a leg of lamb, after Schindler had had what he wanted, and Berk. Anyway, not enough left for what Berk loved, cold lamb, or lamb hash. I really don't know what food has to do with writing, but it really helps.

For a period I wrote at night. I don't know why. Maybe two or three years I wrote at night. Six months of this was on TV writing. A friend who had become an agent, briefly, sold a couple of published stories of mine to television, and I had the assignment to write them. I really enjoyed that. I enjoyed the dialogue, writing the dialogue. It was incredible, the money you made on it, more than I'd ever made. That six months is more than I've ever made in my life in any six months. And the residuals, then. But that was a period I wrote at night. I wrote *Five California Architects* at night, too. We'd have dinner, and then I'd go to the typewriter, and work till--maybe from eight till four. But there were always the telephone calls, the doorbell, and others that cut into sleep.

I must have been almost seventy, before I stopped writing, you know, finishing something, writing until it was finished, sometimes mailing something at two or three in the morning. Then suddenly I decided I was going to close the typewriter at five or six, have dinner, and listen to the news, and go to bed. Or see friends. I don't know what brought me to that decision. It wasn't health entirely, because I've had several bouts of sickness, but I could always convince myself that it must be put off, being sick, until I finished something. I don't think I've ever really been unable to finish something because of sickness.

You spend so much time, in that box, alone, the typewriter room. I sat where I could face a view, through the... The typewriter room is elevated, oh, two feet, above the one in front of it, upstairs, and I could see out to the eucalyptus trees, and then on my left hand, I could see onto the upstairs porch. At times I had hanging baskets, and lots of plants, so that was pleasant. And then I always sit and stare, when I'm writing, put my elbows on the typewriter and always turn off the electric typewriter (it always says, "hurry up, hurry up, hurry up") and I can't write that way. I don't know how people write fast, although in television, I could take a script in of a morning, and we'd go over it, and decide on rewrites, and I could take it home and write it that night and have it back the following morning. Or they'd send a Red Arrow out for it. But I was always good on keeping...able to meet deadlines. I think you have to, if you're going to depend on writing for a living. There's so few, few people who do that.

I remember once when I went to the bank to borrow money. I usually had loans going, maybe a thirty-day loan, a six month's loan, and then a long-term loan. So those had to be paid, and I really depended on this quick

money. But it was that or try to borrow from friends, and I always felt borrowed, with my tail between my legs, and I just didn't want the pain of having to look at someone in the eye and ask for money. And I never have, if I could avoid it in any way. I suppose that's one thing that kept me busy. I felt that I would have to explain my life to someone that I asked for money from, and I didn't want to do that, because I didn't know what drove me. What does drive one to write? Because it is a losing thing.

And then I quickly got into this thing. I got into writing about architecture because...to support fiction. Because it would take a month to write a story, and then if it didn't sell, it would go to one of the university quarterlies that paid nothing at the time. So you really couldn't do it. It's one of those...

But these were the ones that I eventually made money off of from television. I must say, what television did with them, even though I wrote them they could hoke them up in a way I can't tell you; it was always so unbelievable. I was determined that I was going to do one. I'd even go on the set and watch. And God, just in front of your eyes it could be hoked, and I wouldn't know it, I was too innocent.

Anyway, I got to the point where I would be making changes, writing in or out a character on TV, after shooting had started. I'd call in to tell them what sets were not needed and any new one that was needed.

This all stopped at-the end of the season, and I went to Italy. That was for an issue on Italy (for arts and crafts in Italy) for the *L.A. Times* (that was *Home Magazine*), and then things on architecture for *Arts and Architecture* magazine. I did this every summer for five years. The Italians routed me through various cities, and the *Times* would do the story. Actually I made very little off these, but the travel was well worth it. I think I was always in revolt against provincialism. So was my mother, she adored travel.

But it was good living in Santa Monica, the edge of a city. Santa Monica, the end of the line, that was where you could write, and then stopping and going to Europe. Before Europe it was Mexico. For my first visit to Mexico, I stayed a month. I wrote an issue for *Arts and Architecture* on domestic architecture. It was 1951. On Luis Barragan, O'Gorman, Max Cetto and all the others, Candela. And the following year an issue on New University City for *Arts and Architecture*.

Mexico--the air was very clear then, and the volcanoes beautiful. I loved it; I loved it. And there was this feeling that the strong shadows...and on Barragan's architecture, was made for strong shadows. Barragan, he drew much of his inspiration from the small churches of the villages. Chapels. Planes. Those clear, blank planes. And the pine, the wood's poor in Italy [sic], and he emphasized that, in these broad pine boards, the poorness of the wood. It gave it a simplicity, a sort of a purity, that was thrilling.

[END TAPE 3, SIDE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE 2]

JG: This is a repeat of something that's not on the tape. We mis-registered about half an hour. This is side two of the third tape; it's Tuesday June 8, Joseph Giovannini interviewing Esther McCoy in Santa Monica. We've just gone through about a half hour of discussion that apparently was not recorded, so let's try to retrieve a little bit of what we talked about. We were talking about... Let's go to what you were just talking about, you were...

EM: We were talking about money, were we, is that it?

JG: No, you were talking about Tim and you had just met Berkeley, I think. We had talked about money before. Do you want to go back to the money part?

EM: Well, that's where it left off on the tape before, I think--borrowing from, asking a banker for money.

JG: You had talked earlier about the free-lance life, and being able to know whether somebody was going to be able to do their art or...

EM: Yes, to make it, yes.

JG: And how they control their money or spend their money, use their money, as to whether they are going to need to work nine to five, for that regularity, that support. Do you want to continue with that?

EM: Well, I don't know that there's much more to say about that except that I observed them. And I think with Kay Metz I felt that, you know, she had three jobs, and I didn't see how she was going to get much painting done, and so I was glad when she did finally take a nine to five job, or when she went to U.C. Santa Cruz and gave up on free--lancing.

JG: You had said that people who work nine to five and come home and watch television or read a book are all in some way enjoying the labors of people who live a free-lance life.



EM: Yeah, I was talking to a banker once, and said "Oh, it's feast or famine with writers," when I'd wanted to borrow quite a sum of money.

And he said, "It's feast or famine."

So I said, "Well, what do you do when you go home, and what do most people do when they leave the office? They read a magazine, they watch television, they read a book, and this is done by people who are working on this same feast or famine thing, and so they should have more understanding."

I didn't get the loan. [Giovannini laughs]

And then, what else? But we got over then to Tim. Tim was an extraordinary character. I learned drafting from Tim, although he had no feeling for modern architecture. At that time I was reading Lewis Mumford and seeing Neutra houses and Harris houses. He was more interested in Spanish Colonial and really not too interested in any architecture, although he was... Yeah, he was, but I remember his own house. It was a rectangle from which the living room, a long narrow living room projected, with a gable roof and glass at the end. But the house we had, you know, [house] sat, in Malibu, was one he had built, and it was really without any design quality at all.

JG: Was he a builder, or carpenter, or...?

EM: Yeah this was Depression. Yes, he began building.

JG: Was he a contractor, or...?

EM: No, no.

JG: He'd just build it himself?

EM: Yeah. Oh yeah, he would bring on people to build with him. He did have a sense of architecture, but not of the modern at all.

JG: You had said that he wanted to teach you to do his journal with him and, like Montaigne, retreat to a tower.

EM: Yes. He had this feeling... Heroditus was very much someone who was--a story of Heroditus seemed as modern to him as the newspaper.

JG: You said before that he would leave books on the couch, on the table...

EM: Every surface was covered with books sprawled out, open, you know, their spines breaking.

JG: You had mentioned to me before that he had been married and his wife had left. There was a child, I believe, and a house in Brentwood that with the Depression was lost?

EM: Yes.

JG: You said that it was terrible and wonderful.

EM: Yes. It was. He was a fascinating man, and people were drawn to him, very much.

JG: Dreiser liked him?

EM: Yes. And he had a print shop, finally, that he sold prints and framed them. He had quite a knowledge of... Nothing of modern art. I don't think he..., but then the French-Canadians were all very, I think, opposed to anything that was new. No avant-garde among the French-Canadians, ever.

JG: So he was a classicist?

EM: [Thoughtful pause] Yes. Not--that's the wrong word, classicism, but...

JG: [Inaudible]

EM: Yeah, he wasn't a classicist. He never went back to Canada, but he came here. He was ill when he came; I think he'd had a small heart attack.

JG: How old was he?

EM: He was about...I think nine years older than I was. Then, finally, it was bad and I... It seemed time to go back to New York. Then my friend Bonnie was going to England, I mentioned this before though, yesterday. So I went

back and took her place. But then, finally, this was the thing about Tim. He was so free of me, and yet he could not stand to be away from me, to have me leave, so he finally came to New York to stay with his brother who worked on the *New York Times*. I think he was in what used to be called, in the slot. I don't know whether that's...

JG: Yes, that's still the term. I've never understood what it means.

EM: He was an editor, but he also wrote the style book. Or put together their idiom, their special way of spelling and so on.

JG: That's a very important position. The person who has that, at any one point, is very powerful... [inaudible] I don't know who was there before I was.

EM: His name was Eugene Robert. "Robaire," it was, you know, in Canada.

JG: Did he try to then bring you back to California?

EM: No, he got very sick, then, in New York. He had pneumonia. Or something, I've forgotten what he had. So I got him on a boat to go around through the canal, back to California. He was a long time before he got over that. So...

And then, in New York, I had problems. This was 1935 and the Depression wasn't really... No, it was '36, maybe '36 and '37, and the Depression wasn't really over yet, so it was awfully hard to do anything. After Bonnie left I went to the Chelsea and I was doing free lance for publishers and really having very little time to write.

It was because of that, when Helen Dreiser came one time and said "Would you like to drive to the coast?"

And I thought, "Gee, why not."

So Dreiser went as far as Cleveland with us. He wanted to talk to a man named George Crile, a doctor, who had written some book on traumatic deaths--why some people died of them and others didn't. That fascinated Dreiser who was then trying to put together a book on his philosophical attitudes toward life, and toward the sciences.

So we went from there to Terre Haute where he had lived and where his brother Paul Dresser's house had been made a monument by the State of Indiana. It was such a miserable little house, sort of a one-room house, and it was where his brother Paul was born, who became the songwriter, changed his name to Dresser, and wrote things like "My Gal Sal," and they made a State Song of his "Moonlight on the Wabash."

So we went to see the house, and Helen was talking, I remember, about how much the family had, how well they thought of Paul, and how little they gave to Theodore, his brother. And Dreiser was never jealous at all. His brother had helped him a lot, but Helen, who at that time was trying to get the family to agree to certain things so she could peddle a story about Paul to the movies, wanted them all to agree, you know, to sign agreements.

So anyway, on the way back, this was what she talked about a lot, how she was going to make it and make it big. She was a woman without any schooling, and not great-- It's hard to say; I liked Helen, I liked her very much, but really she was not anyone you'd want to talk to about, say, poetry. She was a, you know--she loved, what is it?

JG: You were saying that Helen was like a mystic?

EM: Yes. She was a mystic, and like so many mystics she had a great sense of money. I could name you two or three. How about that movie actress, you know...

JG: MacLaine?

EM: MacLaine, yes. Although Heany[?] would go in that too; she had a great sense of money. I think that's written about in "Dreiser," but there's no plan to publish it yet, it's about fifty pages.

JG: I thought that *Grand Street* was publishing "Dreiser."

EM: It's about sixty pages, and I just sent them the last twenty pages, and they're publishing that.

JG: So a lot of this material will be in the Dreiser section of *Grand Street*.

EM: No, not this. That was just about his death. But this is Helen, [she] figures a great deal in this. It's all about Dreiser and one or two transitional things about Berkeley.

JG: So then did Dreiser stay in Indiana and you drove with Helen across?

EM: No, he took a train back. He took a train back to New York. But Dreiser was so tight, he was absolutely the stingiest, so stingy when...what he paid was so small. As soon as we left him, Helen stopped at some little town, you know, some roadside place. There was a shoe store, and you know, this woman coming from New York, and going in to buy shoes--but she bought two cheap pairs of shoes. I was sort of fascinated because... I saw then, it was because, you know, school was out, and here she was, had a little money in her pocket. At the first chance she was going to buy something. I can remember, it was the time when they had pastel colored patent leather sandals and so, what the hell, I bought a baby blue pair too, after she'd bought a couple of pairs. [Both laugh]

JG: So were you driving or was she driving?

EM: She was driving.

JG: You enjoyed her company, though.

EM: Umm. Yes, yes, I did. There was always very much to talk about. It's hard to say what I enjoyed about her. She wasn't literary at all. She was fiercely partisan. [Long pause] I think people should read this instead of trying to get it from tape; they should just read that part. It's already said once.

JG: Did you see any architecture on the way across the country that interested you?

EM: No, we didn't stop long enough. It would be just at night, to sleep some place.

JG: So you came back to California. You returned here in '41...

EM: No, it was earlier than that. 'Cause I'd been here long enough to know that it was utterly impossible with Tim, just impossible. I simply had to get away.

JG: What was impossible about it? Or do you not want to get into it?

EM: He was so cut off from... Maybe he lived in other ages. I really don't know why, but it was... And then I think he wanted a lot of attention, and I think anything I did he was a little, ..thought it was not, you know... Any writing I did, he was not too approving of.

JG: Because you were giving the attention to the work rather than to him? Or because he felt competitive?

EM: No, it just was not that important to him. He didn't see the importance of anyone striving. He didn't try, ever, to publish anything, to shape anything so it could have been published. My feeling was that you simply must. It was necessary to publish. That was the only way, to see yourself in print, was the only way to learn. God, you learn more from yourself. You just shiver when you think of some of those early things you wrote, and how awful they were [laughs], how you wanted to rewrite them.

Interest in California architecture began in '32 when I saw the Monterey houses, the second floor balcony. That was my first love, and then I saw Neutra and then other houses. I got so I would stop and look at houses under construction. I think I've said that before. I don't want to repeat too many times. So I got interested in how they were done. With Tim, who was a draftsman, we could talk about that, and then my natural interest in how things are put together, how stories are put together, how a television show is put together...

JG: You were actually interested in how Ray Eames was interested in how things were put together.

EM: Yes, yes, yes. There were many things that I learned from him, and I learned from him a little and I learned from Schindler a great deal.

JG: I had thought that the war was a turning point in terms of your being explicitly interested in architecture, but I see that it started in the 30's.

EM: Yes.

JG: But so you hadn't started your drafting until Douglas, in '42?

EM: Oh, yes, I started. I would do a little for Tim.

JG: Oh, did you?

EM: Yeah. He tried to get... He would try to do a spec house, Tim.

JG: So he was a builder?

EM: Yes.

JG: I knew he was a contractor, but...

EM: He wasn't a contractor, no. He had no contractor's license. He would go from one thing to another. What he ended up at was reading.

JG: So you entered the program at Douglas after Pearl Harbor at some point?

EM: Yeah. As soon as the program was set up, I heard about it, and I applied, and I got on.

JG: Was that because you knew--was it patriotic for you or you needed the money or...

EM: I wanted to, and it was very clear, it seemed very clear to us, that all of us would have to be part of war work in some way. So I actually chose. I said, "I'm going to be a draftsman." You can see my age--I still say "drafts-*man*." I'll never be able to change that--and "person" is too long.

JG: Unnatural, it's true. You detailed wings of planes?

EM: Yes.

JG: You wrote a little bit about it in that wonderful introduction to the piece in the Whitney show on design, called *High Styles*, and I recall your having spoken about Shorty the foreman, and how he went off to solve...wings...

EM: Oh, that, yes. We had a six week's refresher on mathematics in which we learned engineering drawing, the special kinds of things that you did, and engineering drawing, as opposed to other kinds. Then we went to the plant and we had a month there, where we had a week in four different departments. The week that I shall always remember was in experimental, because here was this wonderful character who was out of the past and who really couldn't face all these kids coming in who knew nothing about it. Before that, the planes were built maybe two at a time, [that] would be a big order. Then, suddenly there were all these enormous orders, and he wasn't used to it. could see the old order dying, and I could see how sad it was, and how he--angry...

[END TAPE 3 SIDE 2]

[BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 1, JUNE 8]

JG: We were talking about drafting at Douglas, one of the weeks of introduction and Esther's memory of the old order--the eclipse of the old order where they used to do two planes at a time and now the orders were for many more planes...

EM: Yeah, it was the experimental department. I liked this most of all because I saw someone really working. It was still a handcraft operation with him. Everything else upstairs was mechanized and it was becoming more and more mechanized, and, by the end of the war, everything would be completely mechanized.

That, by the way, was what gave us the hope that architecture, that building the houses would also become mechanized, but it never did. It should have, and that was what Konrad Wachsmann wanted, and that was what many other people wanted--to have a house, I think, in some cases where you could buy parts of it, as you could in Japan, and put them together. Or at least I was told you could in Japan; I'm not sure you could. Then you could build your house as you wanted, out of these parts. But it didn't go that far, but planes did become mechanized and that was one thing, at least.

I went, many of the trainees went, to Westwood. I went to engineering in Westwood on La Cienega near Wilshire, the big hangars there. There were several thousand boards there, just one after another after another. I worked in the wing section and I did the detail drawings. The engineers were dull people. There was once, I was with maybe four or five of them, and something came up, and not one of them had ever heard the name Walt Whitman. Not one. I think, what they were up to, the intellectual engineer, was the one who read *Time* magazine. That's the high point.

JG: Did you find that was true of the engineers particularly, or of Californians in general, or...

EM: No, of engineers. I've already said this, I think, for you.

JG: Are you talking about the difference in the intellectual life here? You said there was no way of finding the same sort of work that you found in New York. You've also said that the conversation here was not...

EM: Stimulating.

JG: As stimulating as it had been in New York?

EM: No.

JG: But why was there the architecture here? You were not as interested by it in New York; it was not happening there in the same way, was it?

EM: No. It's because, I think, here, no one was watching. And you could just do it your own way. The person who understood this best, then talking to, was Cesar Pelli, who knew that it was a good place where you could just do what you liked. But that's the history of Los Angeles, always, from the Spanish days, that it always went its own way. Even, you know (who was the writer who wrote about the early Spanish days?), he said that people would not--you know, they had to go some place, and they wouldn't--they never walked, they always rode a horse. It's the same thing today, the way they never walk, they always drive a car. So it was always that way.

JG: What about the difference between architecture on the East Coast, and modernism on the East Coast, and the modernism here? You had said that you enjoyed... One of your groups had met in Lescaze's house, and that it was very strictly...

EM: But you saw so little of it. There wasn't very much of it. There was the Museum of Modern Art, but it was impossible in New York City to see it. This was one of the few things, that I could see. The two things were the house, Lescaze house, and the Museum of Modern Art.

JG: I've never understood why there was a good deal of good modern architecture in Southern California but there was not very much painting of the same caliber, and modern, or was there?

EM: You're right. I think it's hard to say. I'm not sure, I'm really not sure why.

JG: What about the movie community here, as you experienced Los Angeles? Was the movie community pretty isolated, as it seems to me to be now, or was there more interface with intellectuals and certainly people from...

EM: Well, now let's see. There were so many people, Germans, coming over, and I think there was the German group. I didn't know about that until I knew the Davidsons, later, and Ernst Lubitsch. And I think he was a friend of Thomas Mann's, and I think that was how Davidson got the design for the Mann house, through Lubitsch. It is Lubitsch, isn't it, Ernst Lubitsch? It doesn't quite sound right. Anyway, it was separate--it was quite separate.

And music was separate, too. But architecture did impinge on this. Let's see, Schindler did--all the architects I've known did something for musicians. Schindler did a remodel for Kompinsky, a violinist I believe he was, and Davidson did--they've all had-- Harris did one, it was never... It was a project, but it was a house for the composer who was at UCLA. What's his name, you know, the famous one...

JG: Schoenberg?

EM: Schoenberg, yes. He did a house for Schoenberg.

JG: He also did a house, Schindler, for the music critic of the *Herald*. [note: was music critic for Arts and Architecture]

EM: Who was that?

JG: [ note: 1938-1947 Schindler renovation, homeowner/music critic Peter Yates ] Oh, it was the hillside house, I think in Silver Lake. It's the one with that wonderful rail, that kind of a paperclip rail, up to the uphill part of the site [inaudible]. My impression of the art of that time, through *Arts and Architecture*, was that there was a lot of conversation between people in different fields, but apparently that was really not the case.

EM: That is what a following generation always likes to believe. It sounds as if they must have liked each other, and they must have discussed, talked a lot. And I know that they always felt, in Europe, during that transition period, *transition* magazine, that everyone liked each other. But I have never found that true. In any case, there were--and I know Neutra was the most jealous of people.

JG: Was there more sort of interdisciplinary conversation in New York than here, or was it that there was more conversation in New York?

EM: More conversation, but I think there was as much backbiting everywhere.

JG: My impression of that is through *Arts and Architecture*, which seems to be quite remarkable in tracking... Such a high caliber publication in which there was literary criticism and music criticism and architecture.

EM: Yes, yes.

JG: I know that period primarily through *Arts and Architecture*, and that remains my impression.

EM: Uh-huh. But do you think *New York Review*... Do you think they all love each other? Because they're in the same magazine? They probably hate each other's guts.

JG: No, I don't know the people on the *New York Times* –I mean *New York Review* at all, but at the *Times*, it's not... There's a lot of hate at the *Times*, certainly, but there's a lot of camaraderie as well. The problem at the *Times* is that people don't have the time to speak to each other very much. You're constantly on deadline. You go in, and you put your noses to your computers for most of the day. There's really no interchange. But it's not because people are trying to avoid each other, it's just the obligations of work.

EM: Yeah.

JG: You know how these were the halcyon days. So when did you start writing for *Arts and Architecture* magazine?

EM: Let's see, I met John in 1932. The first thing I wrote for him was on... I think it was the issue, 1951, a whole issue on building, on residential building in Mexico. Now I may have done one or two small stories for him before that. I think I probably did, but they would have been unimportant. This was the one. But I'd been writing during that time, for other magazines, and so I wouldn't have written much for John. John didn't pay.

JG: What was your first article on architecture? You were at the Schindler house, with Schindler, weren't you?

EM: Yeah, I wrote about Schindler in 1945. The first one, though, was a letter to the *New York World*, on a review, Harry Hansen, a review on Le Corbusier's book *Cathedrals Are White*. I wrote a letter about his review. It had to do with the silos, and silo architecture, and he published it. So you can imagine my pride, in having a letter in the *New York World*, in the Harry Hansen column. [Laughs]

JG: This was the newspaper you had first gravitated to when you were in New York?

EM: Yes, oh, it was a great newspaper. [Inaudible]

JG: When did it fail?

EM: Oh, the bastards, the sons and daughters, wouldn't take the losses any more. [Laughs] I think it was in the thirties or forties. It was a Depression death.

JG: So, I think we're jumping the gun here [inaudible]. Was there anything more about the time at Douglas? Anything more that interests you?

EM: It was the time, the time it took. You were really--and you know, you had to be so damned organized to be able to get a house in order and everything, to get food. You had to stand in line for your meat and other food, after working a ten-hour or a nine-and-a-half-hour day, so it was exhaustion.

There was a woman, the only person about my age (she was slightly older than I was) who was in this program, who had a very wicked sense of humor, and so that helped enormously, that helped enormously. Then, when I chose to go to engineering, she decided to go too, and so we were in different departments there but we could always have great laughs together. I decided I wanted to get into architecture after I left Douglas. I knew we'd all be out when the war was over, and so she decided to do that too. She got a job with Fred Barienbrock, who did the Santa Monica City Hall, you know. It's a pretty poor job. She was loaned to Edla Muir; they loaned people back and forth, Ed and Fred.

JG: You tried to apply to architecture school after the war, didn't you?

EM: Yes, I did; I tried to get in USC. I knew it might be a terrible problem of money, but I did try. I was--oh, this was something! I was completely, you know, discouraged. A woman, and a woman who was over thirty--that was just the laughs for them.

JG: There was no other architecture school that you were interested in?

EM: No. By this time I had, I was so deep in architecture that...

JG: So that was in '44? '45?

EM: Yes, '45. Now here's something I never talk about. It was when we had a week off. We had a week off each

year at Douglas, a vacation, and we went both times to Ensenada. We would rent a house there. I wrote during the week fifty to seventy-five pages of a novel, and it was about an architect, and it shows that I was interested, by 1943, enough in architecture to want to do a book on one.

JG: Is that among your papers?

EM: Yeah. Each year Houghton Mifflin gives awards for--you submit manuscripts and they give you awards or something, not awards, but they give you a contract. Mine was sent in, this fifty pages, because at the end of that week I went back to work, and just mailed it off to Houghton Mifflin. Well! Goddamn if I didn't place--there were two of us first. It's funny, that's my luck in a way; it was the same thing on this novel I'd written in Key West, which I'd cut down, which had been...

JG: ...out of four.

EM: Yeah. Just out of the running, *just* out of the running. Well, this was second. So, I did get a small advance, and I'm sorry to say--I don't talk about it because lots of it was based on, the character was based on Tim, but it was a Tim who was a young architect, which Tim was not, and which he never stood still long enough to... And he certainly would not have been a modern, and this man was a modern.

JG: That was a great distinction at the time, to be modern, not to be modern?

EM: Oh, yes indeed, yes. It was like being... Sinning and not sinning. [Laughs] I think I got fifteen hundred dollars which was just... And this was after two years at Douglas, and it was after V-E day--or was it V-J day, whichever was first--and so the war was winding down, obviously, so I quit. I got this money, I quit, and I went to my typewriter. But I also put a drafting table by the typewriter, because after I'd just tossed off a novel, I wanted to go back into architecture. I wanted to go into architecture.

So, it was going very well, the book, and this terrible thing was that Tim died while I was writing it. It was... Oh God, I had no idea how terribly important he had been in my life. I think I wrote about that; it will be in *Grand Street*, "Dreiser." I went to the funeral with Dreiser. I just, out of nothing, just squeezed, squeezed out of me the most penetrating and horrible and very brief shriek of pain, just a moment of terrible pain, that just squeezed out of my throat. And I heard it, and Dreiser was with me, and then when we got outside together... He had sent in a message to the family, at the funeral, saying he would like to speak, to say something. He felt that friends should say something. And they hadn't answered it, the family hadn't answered it, so he hadn't. But they had asked us to--since there was no one in the big room, we were the only ones there--they asked us to come into the family room, I guess to save the lights. [Laughs] Anyway, I went outside, and I said to Dreiser, "I don't want springs ever to be beautiful again."

JG: Did that kill the novel for you then?

EM: I sent it in. It had two things against it. It did hurt it. I was stupid to go on and finish it, but I did. And something else had happened that was not in my favor, Ayn Rand's book [*The Fountainhead*] had just come out. So what they said was, couldn't you get more architecture in it, because you know, it [*The Fountainhead*] was doing so well. It was this new one on architecture, but not enough architecture. So, it was very hard. I tried; I rewrote it. It's good I did it while I was designing a house. That house design is still upstairs some place.

JG: It's not among the papers?

EM: The house? Oh sure, it's up there. I don't know whether they [the Archives] have taken it or not. They probably should, because I detailed everything you know, every damn wall, where a wall met a roof. I detailed everything because, as I wrote in this thing about Schindler, I just wanted to keep my hand on the drawing line. I wanted to be close enough to it. I thought if I had my hand on it, it was going to tell me something about architecture, pass on some wonderful message. But, wait a minute, turn it off, and I'll read you bits of that.

[END TAPE 4, SIDE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 4, SIDE 2]

JG: This is Joseph Giovannini, in Santa Monica, with Esther McCoy, Side 2 of Tape 4. This is from the...?

EM: This is from manuscript; it's what now is in the typewriter. It's on Schindler. I want to finish it; there's a celebration for his hundredth birthday in October, and I'm writing about my days with Schindler. It's how I set up a typewriter, drafting board next to my typewriter, and [EM reads]

I did all sorts of cross-sections and then necessary details. The house had an L- plan, like one of Harwell Harris's I knew in Santa Monica Canyon, and many of the details were borrowed from Neutra. The plans could easily have been squeezed into three pages, but with all my cross-sections and details, I stretched them out to six. I did this

mainly because I wanted to keep the drawing close to me, hoping that the pencil under my hand would teach me something more than how to set down the condition, when a wall meets a floor or a roof. I was hoping that if I'd listen carefully, I would get a clue to why one building was wonderful and another ordinary. That is, the pencil yielded no secrets. I stuck close to Neutra and Harris.

That's enough, isn't it? And so that's the transition between... Then I gave up on the novel because, after rewriting it, then the great success of Ayn Rand's book put me at a disadvantage. I must say, that her research on the period, Chicago period of Sullivan and Wright, was fascinating.

JG: You gave up because you didn't want to continue, or because you'd finished the second draft and the publisher didn't like it?

EM: The publishers didn't like the second draft, and I could have worked out something, but I didn't think I... By this time a year had passed, and I was in other writing, and

JG: It's hard to go back.

EM: Yes. And also, there were many things that I was learning so much more about architecture by this time, working for Schindler, that it became really passé. It was not what I believed, and so this was another reason why I didn't want to rework that again.

JG: So you were working with Schindler at that time?

EM: Yes.

JG: What houses were you working on with him?

EM: Well, let's see. I can't find the Gebhard book on Schindler where I've marked the ones I worked on, but let's see. I think the first... I don't remember the first house I worked on. I've gone over the names many times but it was a project... But it was extremely painful because I didn't know...

I was to get a couple of elevations ready for the blueprinter when he got back, to be ready. He was off on his jobs. I couldn't find where it indicated in any way what the windows were to be in the living room, and it was a great pain, my first day there, feeling that it was my fault.

Finally he came in, and I had to admit defeat.

He said, "Oh, that's OK," and he just took the pencil, a blunt pencil, and drew in something fast and said, "Call the blueprinter." And he said, "I don't know what I want to do with that yet."

So he just waited, you know, was waiting. They said, always, at City Hall, that they knew that he was on his jobs, and that he'd take care of them. Nothing would get by him.

JG: How did you get the job there? You knew you wanted to work with him, or did you...?

EM: No, I was very much interested in the house, and I knew Pauline. Well. It's easier to read it. Can I read it?

I saw the house first in 1941, when Berk and I were taken to meet Pauline, and then... I couldn't understand it. It was curious and disturbing. What Pauline said about it was poetic, but to someone who had lately worried about 032 metal at Douglas and was concerned with how things were put together, the Kings Road house was a closed world. At Pauline's I stared at the clerestories, my eye followed the transfer of loads from member to member, the transition between high roof and low roof. I tried to guess how it was done. I tried to guess why it was done. I even tried to guess how it would be drawn. I gave up questioning Pauline because the kind of questions I asked brought only assurances that structure was not the route to an aesthetic appreciation of Schindler.

Then one day Pauline told me that Schindler's only draftsman had been called into the armed service. She suggested that I apply. I'd seen Schindler only once. He was standing by his parked car kicking a tire. His thick dark hair stood out from his head in a wiry wreath (he always cut it himself), and his heavy torso was covered with a silk shirt with V-neck and no cuffs. He designed it himself.

[inaudible] was offensive. He looked dusty and tired. I remember then that one of the reasons that people said he was not serious about architecture was that he did his own contracting. How could anyone serious about architecture spend most of the day on the job sites, one of my architect friends asked.

It took some courage to go to see him. I selected from among a dozen or so engineering drawings the two most precisely drawn and most complicated. Then I cleaned up the drawings of the house that I designed. I dressed in something that made me look serious and dependable. What did I expect? A cool dismissal. My wildest hopes



were to be in the office long enough to study a set of drawings of one of his houses.

At eleven o'clock one morning I went along the row of wild eugenias to his door, a heavy redwood swinging door with a small glazed peephole in which there was a sign reading "By appointment only." The door was ajar. I entered.

The drafting room was off a hall to the right. It was a large room lighted by windows and clerestory on the west and thin slits of glass between the concrete panels on the east. The room was divided in the middle by a low row of shelves, with the two drafting boards at the far end. At the near end was Schindler's long desk, and back of it was a piano bench covered with a piece of cowhide. Along the west wall, was a table with nothing on it but a small, portable typewriter, locked into uppercase. [Laughs]

Schindler was sitting at the drafting board with his back to me. When I spoke he turned around, obviously annoyed at being disturbed. I could see that I'd come at a bad time. "I wanted to ask you about a job. Maybe I should come back another time," I said.

He didn't look up from the drawing as he asked me what I had done. I took the two engineering drawings out, and said I had been two years at Douglas. He brushed them aside. "Aircraft draftsmen never know anything about the plane except the part they're working on," he said. Then, indifferently, he unrolled my drawings of the house.

I dreaded to hear what he would say about them. I hoped he would only say, "You need more experience," and I could leave. Instead he anchored them to the very dirty drawing on the board with a long flat camel's hair brush, and looked at them closely. Then he turned the pages, once even referring back to the plan on page one.

"The glass," he said. He was looking at the strip of glass I'd used in all the rooms between door height and ceiling height.

I waited. I was ready with the reason for using the glass, to bring south light into north-facing rooms, to see the trees when the curtains were pulled, and then a reason I would not have had the guts to give, to make the house fly, perhaps a hangover from working so long on the airplane wings. But he wasn't curious about why I used the glass, but how I'd used it. The glass was broken up with the studs.

"You could have used a longer span, you know that." That was the most encouraging thing he could have said, that I should have known something. Once pointed out, I saw it immediately, but the architectural standards book I'd been studying deigned no variations on the 2 x 4 stud system, 16 inches on center.

There were other bits of advice, and with each one, I became more confident. For instance, I'd located the sofa too close to the flow of traffic. I wanted to thank him profusely and go home and rework the drawings. Then I could take them out next week to another architect.

I said in apology, "I tried to get in USC, but they discouraged me."

"The less to unlearn," he said. "Come in tomorrow at eleven, eleven to five or six. I can give you a dollar an hour."

I was stunned. He'd already helped me, and a dollar an hour was not bad. I was getting \$1.30 an hour at Douglas when I quit.

My job the first day was to have a set of drawings of a house ready for the blueprinter when he returned from the job sites. We went over the drawings together before he left, and it all seemed clear. Blow up two elevations, which he'd done almost free-hand, in 1/8 scale, to 1/4 scale, use a four-foot module, and with a grid system, it was easy to follow the dimensions.

"Don't etch them," he said, referring obviously to my neat engineering drawings. But after he left I discovered that there was no way to get the dimensions for the view windows in the living room.

Now, is that enough?

JG: It's...

EM: This piece, which is called "Happy Birthday, R.M.S.," for celebration of his hundredth birthday, begins

The Eugenia hedge at the north side of 83335 was neatly clipped to head height with not a sprig out of place, while the one to the south grew wild and tall with tufts shooting out everywhere. Two people of different tastes and of equal strength obviously controlled the landscaping of the house on Kings Road. It was the same inside. On the north, the canvas of the sliding doors had been replaced by glass, the concrete wall panels covered with

mahogany plywood or painted a Frank Lloyd Wright sun burnt apricot, and the redwood beams painted white. It was as if the house stood up by the pressure of opposing wills. I went to work on the south side in the spring of 1944 for the architect R.M. Schindler. On the north side lived my friend Pauline Schindler, who, after ten or so years of absence, returned to a divided house. The two sides were connected by one kitchen in the house, which Pauline took over.

That's enough.

[END TAPE 4, SIDE 2] [NOTE: the last half of the tape is blank]

[BEGIN TAPE 5, SIDE 1]

JG: ...for the Archives of American Art, on Saturday, November 14, 1987, in Santa Monica. Esther?

EM: Before we start, I want to say something about the papers that were in my possession for several years, that came from the files at Taliesin. They came to me through Bruce Richards. Bruce, from Oklahoma, was a student of art at U.C. Berkeley, where Wright met him, and he asked him to Taliesin after seeing the exhibit of Bruce's work. Bruce threw over his...the school (he would soon have gotten his degree) and went to Taliesin. Betty Barnsdall came to Taliesin while Bruce was there. She was the daughter of Aline Barnsdall, for whom Wright designed the Barnsdall Hollyhock house. While she was there, and Bruce was there, a basement flooded, and Wright directed his boys to put the Wasmuth portfolio out in the sun to dry, and each to take one themselves. Betty used the occasion to go into the dead files and remove a stack, a hundred pages or so, on her mother.

Betty Barnsdall was unhappy about her status; she was an illegitimate child, and she must have been eighteen at the time, something like that. So she took the files out of the basement, and after she read them she was very unhappy, and she and Bruce went, several evenings, to a beer joint, near Taliesin, to talk. Then she left Taliesin suddenly, and she gave Bruce the files to return. He was called on the carpet, however...

JG: Have you any idea what date this was?

EM: This would be the 30's. Bruce was called on the carpet, and they were unfriendly about his going to beer joints, and he did not want to involve Betty Barnsdall, so he left. But he had no opportunity to return the files, so he took them with him. Wright was friendly with Bruce after Bruce began designing houses in La Jolla, where he opened an office. So Bruce was eager not to return the files, not knowing a way to return them without involving Betty.

In the late 50's, he gave them to me, and asked me to find a way to return them. My concern with the removal of the files, in getting them back in, was that they not be laid to Schindler. Because of my connection with Schindler, it might be assumed that he had taken them out. I quoted from the letters in the files on several occasions, and very heavily in *Vienna to Los Angeles*, never attributing them.

Then I found a way to get them back to Taliesin. I gave the files to Kathryn Smith in 1978. She was finishing a book she was writing on two grants on the Barnsdall house.

She agreed not to mention Bruce Richards on returning them. She reported later to me that she had been forced to tell them, at Taliesin, where the files came from, but she did not return them. Nine years later, now, she still has them. I have photocopies of all, and they are with my papers at the Archives of American Art, at the Smithsonian collection point in Pasadena, where they are available to researchers. [Note: it sounds like EM is reading some of this, or at least speaking from notes, regarding the files - trans.]

In the meantime, after the death of Pauline Schindler, Kathryn Smith asked if I would abet her in removing Pauline's papers to her place for safekeeping, as she expected to start a book on Pauline as soon as the one on the Barnsdall house was on the press. She especially wanted to keep them away from Tom Hines, for she considered that he would weight his sympathies to Neutra and away from Pauline. Kathryn still has the Pauline Schindler papers, which include material on Wright and also an unpublished novel, the protagonist of which is Schindler. Any [writer of a] study on Schindler as well as Wright should be aware of this material, and they should know of Betty Barnsdall and Bruce Richards' part in removal of the files from Taliesin. [This also sounds as if she is reading, you can hear pages turning as she speaks - trans.]

EM: In 1940 I married Berkeley Tobey, and in 1941, at the end of '41, we were on a picnic at Malibu with George and Elaine Biddle. When we came up and got to radios, we found out about Pearl Harbor. That was the end of the honeymoon and the beginning of a wholly new life. The end of the Depression. The end of leisure, and writing at leisure. I applied for admission to a training program at Douglas for engineering draftsmen. It was mainly made up of women, of 4-F's, and of--well, that's about the main thing, most of them were under forty. They were all under forty.

JG: Men and women?

EM: Yes. So we reviewed mathematics and worked on engineering drawings for six weeks; then we went for a month through various departments at Douglas, before we were assigned to drafting boards. The place that interested me most was the experimental department, where there was a man who had worked with Douglas on models of early planes, and he was very unhappy about all these young people coming in, who really didn't know the plane, and didn't love planes the way he did. It made him really physically sick, all of this, and everything coming down in triplicate, or having to go up from him in triplicate. What he would do would be to go to the plane and fit a part, come back and draw it up on the board, and then cut it out of sheet metal, and go and fit it on and see if it worked.

JG: What was his name?

EM: I don't know. We called him Shorty. I don't know his name. I was in that department for a week. It was in one of the hangars at Douglas, very, very cold, and grim. Then I went to engineering, which was not at Santa Monica but it was off Wilshire on Sepulveda, and there were maybe a thousand drawing boards or more, just one after another. I worked on the wing section for the most part. That meant drawing lightening holes which were in wing assemblies. The lightening holes were being changed constantly, so you'd just check out the electric eraser, and erase what you'd done, and draw in the changes.

JG: I don't know what a lightening hole is.

EM: In the wing. It's the rib, a wing rib, and the hole is to... The thing about planes is that you measure weight as much as possible, to keep them as light as possible. A wing rib is stronger if it has holes in it, and it's also lighter. So that was a lot of what I did. I was there for two years.

JG: Doing the same thing?

EM: Yes. I worked on various parts. It was all on the wing section, what I did.

JG: Had you known how to draft before?

EM: Yes.

JG: You learned how to draft then, or before?

EM: No, before. I'd been interested in it, and I learned it from a friend of mine who was building houses, a Canadian. I liked it very much. It was a nine-hour day, and the engineers I found were very stupid. Their idea of intellectual reading was *Time* magazine. There was one time when something I mentioned, something came up about Walt Whitman, and not one of the engineers standing around my board had ever heard of him. It's sort of typical.

I remember once, on my first trip to Europe, when I was twenty-two, twenty- three, I was introduced to two Russian engineers who were going back to the Soviet Union after a year in the United States. One of them was very literary and had asked one of the engineers to get books for him, you know, to send back books for him and his wife, American literature. Well, he'd sent Zane Grey, and Harold Bell Wright, and he said to me on the boat... Well, he'd expressed some reservations about this, as literature. So I had laughed, and I gave him all the books that I was taking with me to read, which were... There was some Hemingway then, early Hemingway, and some of the avant-garde writers--books that'd I'd been given by a friend who had a magazine, *Plain Talk*--Geoff Eaton, who had review books, and had given me the ones that he liked, that he didn't want to review, and these were all the ones that I liked.

So anyway, to go back now. How do I get back on track?

JG: If back is Douglas, you were talking about engineers, and you had been there for two years...

EM: So then, we had one week off a year, at Douglas, and we'd gone to Ensenada a number of times before the war started, and we went there...

JG: You and your husband?

EM: Yes, for vacations. While I was there, the week, I started a novel and got about a hundred pages. And so when I came back, I slowly typed it up and I sent it out to Houghton Mifflin. You know, they had young writers. So I got a... Two people were awarded this whatever it was, the award. So then I stopped Douglas at that time, after two years, and wrote the book. In the middle of it, the person I was writing about, or who was the protagonist, died. I was very unhappy about it, really just thrown off. It was about architecture. I did an enormous amount of reading about architecture at the time. When it was turned in, Ayn Rand's book *The*

*Fountainhead* had come out a couple of months before, and it was making a great hit.

JG: What year? Do you recall what year?

EM: It would be late '43, I think. You could find out the time of publication of *The Fountainhead*. They wanted me to rewrite it and put in more architecture. I tried to. It was very disturbing. Anyway, it was dropped. About this time, I decided to go into... While I was writing, I had a drafting board by the typewriter, and I began designing a house. At the time I left Douglas, all the young architects there, and engineers, were designing houses for themselves. Most of them were engineering feats of some sort or other. I see some of them along the beach now, some of them that had very novel kinds of construction. Turn it off. [Machine is turned off, and on again].

JG: Okay, we're on again.

EM: I designed a house.

JG: After Douglas?

EM: After Douglas, I designed a house. I bought a book of architectural standards, and then [laughing] at Douglas one of my bosses was Rodney Walker, who had worked in Schindler's office and was very much interested in low-cost housing and had designed some case studies for *Arts and Architecture*. So he gave me a set of drawings, and I had another set from someone, I can't remember whose it was. There were a great many architects at Douglas. They would stay there until they were called into the service. One was Bill Becket. Let's see, let me get back on track. Where was I going?

JG: You were talking about designing your own house.

EM: Yes. So I wrote something about this in the *L.A. Architect*, published in October 1987. After finishing the house, I did endless sections, you know, just to try them out. I think the odd thing about it was that I had a transom strip between all rooms, and even the bathroom, you know, so light would just pour into the place. I was also writing.

I knew Pauline Schindler; I'd met her through Beryl Lacaba, who was the ex-wife of Gregory Lacaba, and they were both in the radical movement, which I was too. I was fascinated with the Schindler house, where Pauline lived. She had been separated from Schindler for eight or ten years, and then she moved back when Mark was ready for high school. She moved back; they just split the house--legally separated and split the house down the middle, and he took the south side and she took the north side.

JG: She'd already been in there, and he was always in there?

EM: Yes. He was out for a little while He tried an office in the architect's building on Figueroa, but he wasn't happy and so moved back to King's Road. Anyway, I was just so fascinated with the house, with Pauline, seeing her there and not understanding how it was done, having been working on a house, and seeing how different this was, and how the difference between something that was really enormously important and my own, which was very modern. I was fascinated with modern. I'd already known Neutra's work and had seen quite a bit of it, and Harris. I knew Harris and Am, and several others. I'd never seen a Schindler house until this. It was so different from the stripped-down work of Neutra.

Pauline told me one time... I saw her maybe four or five times, often I'd see her because over the years I did reading and other work for Dreiser, who lived a block and a half from Pauline on King's Road. I would just go by her place sometimes, or when I had to go to Dreiser's. Then she told me once that Schindler's draftsman had left, had gone into the service (they were still being called up into the service at that time, it would be '44). So I cleaned up the drawings of the house that I'd done and got some engineering drawings together and took them in to Schindler. He was not interested in the engineering drawings. (This is all in the *L.A. Architect* piece that I did on Schindler's office, so I don't know whether I should go on too long about this. Do you think so?)

JG: Go ahead. Try to do things that are not covered in the article itself.

EM: Well. I was astonished anyway to have him offer me a job so quickly. He had no one in the office then. He never had more than two draftsman at a time in the office. Often he had students that would come for the summer, and some he would use on construction work. I worked there for two years, and worked on the... The first thing was to do some detailing on the church, Bethlehem Baptist Church, and then there were several others, houses, that I worked on. I don't have the book here. I marked them. Is that interesting?

JG: Go ahead.

EM: There were times too when... This was still wartime and materials were hard to get; they were frozen for the most part, or very restricted, for houses. Even after the war ended, when I was still working in the office, the

shortages were so great that the office would be closed for several days or a week until materials became available.

JG: How did you get them, when they were short?

EM: God, they'd sit on the telephone for hours, you know--not hours, but, trying to find even 2 x 4's...

JG: Uh-huh. Did that make a difference in the design? If you could get 2 x 3's, would you use 2 x 3's?

EM: You can't use 2 x 3's; they're not permitted.

JG: Well, you can use them in some non-structural situations.

EM: Well, no. This would be for framing.

JG: But, I mean, did he make substitutions that affected the design?

EM: No, no. And they were working around the clock in the Northwest, you know, to get lumber down, so it was coming but just... No one knew when. And then often things would be stolen from the site. You couldn't stockpile because someone would be around with a truck.

JG: Was this just after the war or...

EM: Just after the war, mainly. Because even after the war there were restrictions on the type of building you could do--the square footage and what materials you could use.

JG: It was very small, wasn't it?

EM: Yes.

JG: The houses...

EM: Yes. And that's why in the case-study houses, they were two bedroom houses. But then, too, another reason for this was that the families during the Depression were much smaller. Two was a fairly large family during the Depression. After the war, when small houses were planned... You see, even before the Depression, there were not many small houses built. What you did was just to take an old big one and make do with it. Very little work had been done, experimenting with the small house. I think in England they had, and various other places, but not in the United States. So that's why the case-study house program was important--to get good designs for two-bedroom houses. An innovation was that they all had two baths, which was good.

Now, where am I?

JG: About houses. At the time, did the floor plan reflect any change in, sort of the sociology of...

EM: Yes, yes, they did. Take Davidson's first case study. It had no halls, and it had the...

[END TAPE 5, SIDE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 5, SIDE 2]

JG: This is Joseph Giovannini interviewing Esther [Mccoy] for the Archives of American Art on Saturday, November 14th, in Santa Monica. We're continuing, Esther. We were talking about the floor plan?

EM: Yes. That was a hall-less floor plan, on the Davidson's case study in Brentwood. I'd almost have to show you the floor plan to show you how it worked, but the...

JG: What did it reflect about the family? There weren't servants?

EM: Yes. Also, there was a division, another new thing was, between the two bedrooms. There was space. They weren't banked together. Schindler had done that; he did that in the Pressburger house, which was the first one of his that I worked on. I guess that was about '44, and the master bedroom was separated from the children's wing. He may have started that; I don't know. But Wright had really established the open plan. It had come from others before him, but Wright was the one who gave it authority and gave it architectural significance.

JG: That was true of Wright in a lot of things. He was very derivative; there might have been a Leif Ericson who discovered America first but Columbus was the one who made the significant discovery.

EM: Yes. So, what shall I say now.

JG: We were back in about '46 or '47. You were talking about the two-bedroom houses, two bathrooms.

EM: The case-study house program was initiated in 1945. Many people have asked since then why was not Schindler invited to do one. There was a great distinction between the postwar architects and the pre-war architects. Most of the prewar architects were not invited, the ones who were important. First of all, it was a program that was planned to be short-lived, but it was so successful that it went on and on. It was not only the case-- study house, there were all sorts of houses that were built as model houses, and they were constantly visited. They were very popular, some on Wilshire Boulevard. One was Neutra's plywood house.

JG: In Brentwood?

EM: Yes, it was moved to Brentwood, but it was first a model house and was moved there. It was bought by John Entenza's father's law partner, whose name was... I've forgotten her first name, but her last name was Gramer. She bought it and moved it to the Brentwood location, where it now still is. Any place you'd drive, there would be some model house, flags out, "open to the public," and you could see it. They were mainly ranch houses, or colonials, or salt boxes, anything, but this was the only case studies that were modern. Another thing, too, they had all modern furnishings and modern kitchens, and the landscaping was done by good modern landscape architects.

JG: Was this the only place in the country where this sort of modern case-study house was...

EM: Yes, yes it was.

JG: Neutra had been asked by Levitt to study Levittown, but I guess that was a little bit later.

EM: That was later, yes.

JG: That Levitt decided against doing the modern...

Can you place a little bit the importance of modernism, the presence of modernism in Southern California and its importance for the modern movement?

EM: Well, it was late coming. It was strong, but it was late, and most of the architects... First let me finish why Neutra, why Schindler was not asked and others... The case--study house program started as a short-lived thing, and some of John Entenza's friends and Charles Eames's friends from... Where did he go to school?

JG: Oh, Cranbrook.

EM: Cranbrook were invited in. Those are the younger, Eero Saarinen, and others. But after this group, the only older ones... There were older ones, Davidson and Wurster. And it was, not Honnold & Rex, but, well, Rex was the one of that partnership who designed the house. Most of the houses that were case studies, after these first six or eight, were ones that were in the works. The architect came to John, and told him, you know, that they had a house, and it looked good, and so then they worked it out to see whether it was going to fit. It usually did.

Some of them were not all that good, the case studies. I wanted to take them out, when I did the book on the case studies, but the editor wanted them all in. That's why, if Ain had had a house, and had gone to John, he would have done it, put it in the case-- study house program.

But after a while it was the younger ones, and that was a very important thing. It was why the magazine became so important, because all the post-war architects wanted to be published in it. It was a sign of having arrived to have something in *Arts and Architecture*.

While I was working for Schindler I did... Schindler, like so many of the other older architects, was rather contemptuous of John Entenza. They looked upon him as a Johnny-come-lately. And since John was more oriented to Europe, and Schindler by this time had cut himself off from Europe, he was rather cool to John. And many things, you know, I would take of Schindler's. Call John and ask him to publish things of Schindler's as they were photographed, and Schindler was always critical about the way the stories were handled. They were not too happy with John, the older architects, and they felt he was too much toward Europe and not enough toward Wright and the modern, the native. What is it now I wanted to get back to?

JG: I had asked you about the place of modernism through the national picture.

EM: California?

JG: Yes, you'd said it was late...

EM: No, I think that after Chicago, I think it... Modern architecture really came to fruit in Chicago, and then it was killed by the...

JG: Columbian Exhibition?

EM: World's Fair, yes. It then came to California where it really established itself. Since the East has always looked to Europe more than inward, or to the West, they really did not believe that anything was happening here. Maybeck--well, Schindler, even--was considered by most of the architects who came out of the Beaux--Arts school as a clown.

JG: Where, here?

EM: Yes, here, and also in... There was a Dutchman who became the editor of *Reinhold* after the editor who commissioned *Five California Architects* left, before the book was turned in, and he, when he saw it, was appalled, because he thought that Gill was just like Oud, but Oud was better, and he thought that Maybeck was just a fool, just a clown, and that Schindler, you know, that this was pulling his leg.

JG: Why did they give that impression?

EM: He came from Europe and...

JG: Couldn't he see their work was serious?

EM: No. No. But you know even in San Francisco they didn't-- When I was writing about Maybeck, some of the people I talked to did not believe that he could do anything. Gill's nephew, who went through architecture school and then came to work with Gill in San Diego, was quite contemptuous of him because he couldn't, didn't know (he really was not a good architect). But Maybeck was generally considered very lacking in taste and ability by the people who came out from the East. One of them said to me, when I was interviewing various people that were left, that he couldn't even do a simple "Hotel de yule." [Both laugh]

JG: That's a great loss for California! For Mr. Maybeck. The reason I asked about the place of Southern California modernism in the nation is that at a recent exhibition in Long Island on modernism there it was clear that modernism had a struggle in Long Island. Here you were just miles away from New York, and there really weren't very many interesting buildings done in the Modernist Style. Neutra had done one.

EM: Yeah, on Fisher's Island.

JG: ... and it seemed to be fairly interesting, but there were really very few, and it was a hard show to put together. There may have been a lot of Modernist architecture...

EM: But there was Lescaze. There was some Lescaze there, in that show.

JG: Possibly; I honestly don't recall. There were some interesting aviation buildings that were just in La Guardia... There was modernism, but at least in residential terms it came late to Long Island and in residential terms it was never fully developed, or not as developed [as] here, and I realize as a result of seeing the show there (this was just last summer) how important and substantial the opus was in Southern California.

EM: Yeah. Well, you see, there was a magazine, *Two Times a Year*, it was called (I think that's the title), and they had a big story on architecture, and they had maps, and there was more in California than any other place. The map was just...

JG: clotted?

EM: ...peppered, yes [laughing], on the West Coast. The only magazine... All the Eastern magazines still printed eclectic stuff, along with modern. *Arts and Architecture* was the only one that printed just modern. I was writing to Harwell Harris yesterday, telling him this, because he had said some nasty things about John Entenza to Carter Manny and Manny had told me, and was hurt by them, and I was trying to tell him the difference, you know, between the pre-war architects, post-war architects, and that John really had done something to establish architecture on the West Coast. And I was writing for *Arts and Architecture* and they weren't all out of Europe... There were many things, and I did things on O'Gorman for the magazine which were, you know, you can't call those out of the International Style. (I'm wavering again, where was I going?)

JG: One thing about the O'Gorman's, it was not International Style but it was still Modernist.

EM: Well, there were his early things that were International Style, and then he went, really you know, to the Aztec, and it was the decorated. His library, on the campus of Mexico University, was a box that was papered with mosaics.

JG: But it was still volumetrically modern.

EM: Yes, yes.

When California began sending things, you know, it's message, they got sent back at the Rockies; it never got to the East. [Laughs]

JG: [inaudible] never made it to the city.

EM: They did in San Francisco. San Francisco was always the city that was closely connected with the East, never Los Angeles.

JG: Well, what is it. I know this is a digression, but what is it about California that makes it so discredited, Southern California?

EM: Oh, well, because Los Angeles was a pueblo and San Francisco was a presidio and that meant that ships could not call into Los Angeles. They would go to San Francisco and goods had to be then brought down to Los Angeles. Los Angeles at that time had no port. It needed a great deal done to it, and the thieves could operate in Los Angeles. The center of the city was some distance from the sea, but also it was an agricultural center, Los Angeles, and it was always... The reason it's so spread out is because the large land holdings that were given to the... The land grants were enormous. That's how the ranch house developed; its form came really from just getting materials to these distant places, and also the heat and the way they lived, and they had enormous number of people to take care of. Often they had their own grist mills and their own... They had to be self-supporting. So the ranch houses were very long, broad buildings, and they had porches around because they lived outdoors. I wrote about this in *California Magazine* about two years ago, and it's called "California, Los Angeles, something"--"Destiny through Geography," I think it is.

JG: Wasn't that in the collection of shows that occurred here?

EM: Yes, that was the basis of it. But this is more about what happened, how it developed.

JG: Uh-huh. "Geography As Destiny" [inaudible]?

EM: Yeah. So it would be freer, and Los Angeles always had the larger population; it had more thieves, and more speculators, and it was livelier from the beginning. And it's always from these very lively places that new design comes. You find it in Texas, you find it in Oklahoma, and in Arizona. You don't find it in Iowa or Michigan in the 19th century, or the first quarter of the 20th century. I think people who made their money easily, vast speculators, they were plungers. And I've written this about Bruce Goff, in writing about him, and people making money in oil. And there was that plungers approach to money. That's why so many houses of Bruce Goff could get built. I know that Lisa Ponti in Milan asked me, "Who are the people who build these, these Goff houses?" She couldn't understand. It's hard to explain to an Italian what oil does to people.

JG: But he also did them for people who didn't have very much money.

EM: True, yes, but it's the design that's unusual.

JG: Uh-huh. But it wasn't the plungers only who, it wasn't the financial plungers who...

EM: Oh, the atmosphere of plunging is in the air.

JG: I see.

EM: Yeah.

JG: ... and by plunging you mean sort of bet what you've got and...

EM: Here today. Yeah. It's fast. It's like stock market money. You get it. It's like the yuppies who make it, the quick millionaires. Especially with oil coming in, waiting for that oil well to come in. I know the money. I went to a boarding school where there were many, many people with oil fortunes who came, and I'd always thought of myself as well off, but there's a great difference between being well off and oil rich. [Both laugh] I change that. I didn't think of myself as well off, I mean it was just money was never mentioned, but it was, you know, we were comfortable. Well, we were well off, damn it! To hell with it.

JG: Why... we can erase this if you don't want, but why do you think you're so reticent to talk about your family?

EM: Well, let's see. The thing that I've been writing about them should be finished. My eight grandparents were all pre-revolutionary. Seven of them came in through the South, and they had a strong southern feeling, and then they moved across the continent, and many of them stayed in the South. Well, one of them was a preacher who wrote his autobiography that I have in here some place, and he writes something about that.



JG: In your papers?

EM: No, it's published. His name was Cartwright. Let's see, my grandmother's names were Cartwright, her mother was Stillwell, she was Cartwright, her mother was Stillwell and then there was Alsop, and--most were from the north of England. Only my mother's father came from Germany, pre-revolution. I mean his ancestors. But her mother was a southerner, a southern woman. Anyway, most of them ended up going from Virginia through Kentucky up into southern Ohio, near Cincinnati. I have some pictures upstairs of a house they had. It's this gabled house, you know, with my grandfather and grandmother sitting on one side, and then the children on the other, and the girls with their pompadours, and high, high...

JG: collars, bonnets?

EM: No, high, sort of net things. Let's see, they had two distinctions. One, they were the only people in the township who took the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. [Laughs] They've all been great newspaper readers; all my life, you know, there've been papers all over the house. Where I grew up, in Kansas, there was the *Kansas City Star*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and a local paper, and *Tulsa World*, Sundays. And then endless magazines. And endless sets of books. The books my mother... You know, what's a wonderful thing about that period, there were book salesmen who went all over the United States, and they sold sets. And my mother had such faith in sets. They didn't do... We lived in a house that was built in 1902, a brick house, and

JG: Recently sold for \$57,000?

EM: [Musing, faintly] Yeah. I don't--I wanted to see what it sold for. I wanted to see the things. My nephew told me it had. I wanted to see the... But, what was I going to tell you about that?

JG: About the sets of books?

EM: They had what they called "Globe Warneke" bookcases, sectional bookcases. Have you seen them?

JG: No, I haven't.

EM: Well.

JG: With glass, or...?

EM: Yes, you could just buy them endlessly. So, they were all along the walls, you know, from the... I remember the bottom shelf, the Harvard classics. And then there was Shakespeare. Then there was Tolstoy. Then there was Dickens...

[END TAPE 5, SIDE 21

[BEGIN TAPE 6, SIDE 1]

JG: This is tape 6, Joseph Giovannini interviewing Esther McCoy in Santa Monica on November 14, 1987, for the Archives of American Art. We were talking about the Midwest, and Esther's family...

EM: I don't remember what the last was.

JG: You were talking about the house, and the sets of books, the Tolstoy, the Shakespeare, and your mother's fondness for sets of books.

EM: Yes. But they did really do something, the salesmen. They performed a great service. You were really close to books. You grew up with them. We all learned to read early because we read to each other and then people, any servant read to us, and it was constantly--we were aware of--there was no emphasis put on it, but all the newspaper reading and magazine reading and book reading. My father had an oak revolving bookcase by his bed. In it were Mark Twain, George Ade, Ring Lardner. I'd never seen a case like that until I saw one in Milan, with Rogers, what's his name Rogers?

JG: Richard Rogers?

EM: No, no, no, his uncle.

JG: Oh! Um. I don't know. Rezzo? No...

EM: Not Edgardo, but--anyway, he was editor of *Casa Bella* [ note: Ernesto Rogers, cousin of Richard Rogers] And he had one in his place. [Exclaiming] How this could have gotten to Kansas I have no idea! Or how it could have gotten there. It's more American, I think, than it is Italian. It could be something that may be done there. But

anyway, we lived close to the oil country, and it's a triangle, sort of, the oil. There was lots of money being made, lots of sense of freedom, and people travelled a great deal. My father was in the lumber business. He had a group of lumberyards, a chain of them, and he had some lumber mills. [Long pause] Now let's see. But the house itself, it's... If you grow up you spend much time in one--you dream about it, and you know every part of it, of that house. You know the newel posts, and the front stairs, the back stairs, and. ...and...

JG: You were saying that there was something of a prejudice about the Midwest? People thought of it as all the same?

EM: After the war, I think. Because they came out of the... The small town died at the end of the war. And it was a small town, 25,000, and so...

JG: Was the Midwest, or was the United States more equalized before the war, were the...

EM: Oh, no, no, no. It was more regional.

JG: More regional?

EM: And this was not like Kansas, not like the wheat country at all. This was the oil and the mining country.

JG: What states made up this triangle?

EM: Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, Louisiana. And then Texas, too. Then the next strike was in Texas. But the first big strike was in Oklahoma. And that's where Getty got his money. He went there, and so did Barnsdall. They made their money in Oklahoma.

JG: Oh, I didn't realize Oklahoma was older than Texas oil.

EM: Well, it wasn't in the Union, it was a... But they were in there, you know. And Getty made great friends with one of the chiefs, and that's one reason why he was in on the ground floor. And Barnsdall, too; he made friends with the Indians.

JG: So that would have been at the turn of the century?

EM: Yes. I don't know when Oklahoma was opened up, but it was... They'd moved the Indian tribes to the most *terrible* part of the United States, I mean where there was nothing. The soil was red, nothing would grow there...

JG: Oil alone.

EM: ... and then put them there, and the Osage--Bruce Richards was half Osage, and he was part of that, you know, where they'd walked for a thousand miles and died along the way and then they got there, nothing would grow, or they just had to be cared for. And then [pauses] oil came. [Laughs]

JG: Now, getting back to the 1940's, where were we?

EM: Now let's see, I got through Douglas, I got through Schindler, I was writing for *Arts and Architecture*. I wrote for other magazines. I was publishing stories; I had several stories in... I was writing while I was in Schindler's office, I was writing while I was at Douglas, and I seemed to have boundless energy. I don't know how I did it. And then did all the cooking. But I loved to cook.

JG: Mmmmm. She's a very good cook, for your information. [Both laugh]

EM: So, I was a scout for a magazine when *Mademoiselle*... I published some stories in *Harper's Bazaar*, which was considered a literary place. I mean they had a high percentage of stories in *Best Short Stories of the Year*. Also *Mademoiselle*. I hadn't published in *Mademoiselle*, but because I'd published in *Bazaar*, *Mademoiselle* asked me to scout architecture out here for them. They were starting a new magazine for young. So, I did. That's my first, in getting--they had to be young. So it was most of the young architects coming back from the war, and they were all modern. I think that was the first time that I began my concentration on young, the youngs, and the moderns. So I did stories for them all over Los Angeles and the West Coast, went up to the Northwest, did a series of stories for them from the Northwest, and went to around Santa Fe. That lasted about maybe three years. It would take about one week a month, went to that.

JG: This was in the early fifties? Late forties?

EM: No, that's the late forties.

JG: What happened to radical politics and your involvement in radical politics in the meantime.

EM: Well, the war changed a great deal of that. Many of us were not happy about the way things were going in the radical movement here, so it was easy to sort of drop out. I sort of dropped out. But then when the hearings came, in the fifties, there, you know, we were all so horrified that these things were--that they could do this--that it changed. I'm really a grass roots liberal, I suppose, when it comes down to it, and I resented all this. Let's see. Then, I did stories... Shulman--I'd gotten him to do stories for *Mademoiselle* magazine.

JG: Julius Shulman?

EM: Yes. I'd first gotten him to do Schindler work. Schindler wasn't very happy with it, but, anyway, it was done. Then Shulman asked me to do things for the *Times*, because so many of the architects... There were two places the house architects wanted to appear in, *Home Magazine* and *Sunset*. So I would do them, you know; I may have done them for another magazine in the East, and the *Times* would take them second. But I'd do the story then. So I was writing for the *Times* and then doing my own writing.

JG: It was always a free-lance life though, wasn't it?

EM: Yes, always. Yes.

JG: What did that mean in terms of what you were able to do and couldn't do.

EM: Well, there was no great pressure until Berkeley had cancer. He had it twice, and this was about 1950. And then the second time, it sort of used up--I guess the second time was in 1950--it sort of used up all we had. So I really--it was dependent--the household--it fell on me, to--and I wasn't very good at it.

JG: What, to make money?

EM: Yeah. I was good at work. I had more industry than money sense. And I had great zest for what I was doing.

JG: You've always worked very hard, your entire life.

EM: Yes, I have. I started out doing nothing, and then, you know, I don't know how it happened but I did. Then I had an idea that we could make some money going to Mexico. I mean we could live on what I was... I could write from there. Berkeley was very much, you know--after having x-ray and all, needed something else, and so we rented the house to someone at UCLA and went down for nine months to Mexico. Someone got us a house in Cuernavaca, and it was much less. But somehow it didn't work out. Also, while I was there, I did a big story, a full issue of *Arts and Architecture* on domestic architecture. Oh, I'd done that before! That's right, I'd gone down to Mexico before that, and had done this story...

JG: When was that, the first time?

EM: That was 1950. That was the way it was. I went to Mexico in 1950, and Berkeley was over his first cancer.

JG: That was your first trip there?

EM: Yes, yes. We'd gone down to Ensenada a lot, and we'd stayed there often, but that was the first. A friend down there, I was going with a neighbor, someone VD worked at Douglas with, and we went down and I knew someone there who got an apartment for us with a bedroom. It was in the center of town, and we had a wonderful time. There was a show at the Belles Artes on Mexican architecture. I just flipped when I saw it; it was so wonderful.

JG: Belles Artes in Mexico City, obviously. The apartment was in Mexico City?

EM: Yes, yes, on Oaxaca Avenue, off...

JG: They had an extraordinary plastic sense, it seems, the Mexicans.

EM: Yes, yes. So, let's see, there were stories on--a big story on Barragan.

JG: For the *Times*, *L.A. Times*?

EM: Well, no, this was for *Arts and Architecture*. I did it first for *Arts and Architecture*, and then the *Times* wanted me to do it. So I went down again, and did it for them. Then we went back. Then I'd sold a couple of things to *New York Times Magazine*. That was when they thought I could write. Later, they wanted everything changed. So, I thought it would be good, you know, that we could live. But after nine months it didn't work out. So we came back.

JG: Nine months in Ensenada or nine months in Mexico City?

EM: Nine months in Cuernavaca. It was when we went down to Mexico that I did the big story on University City, all the buildings. That was another issue of *Arts and Architecture*. But in the meantime, I was doing stories also, big stories, travel stories for the *Times Home Magazine*. I worked there for a man named Jimmy Toland, who was really wonderful, and would let me do whatever I wanted. But I was organized enough, so it worked.

So then *Sunset* asked me to scout for them down here, and so I did. But they wanted just the wood, you know, lumberyard houses. They had no interest at all in the case studies. But I got interested in the landscape department, so I did an enormous number of things on landscape people. It was the beginning of my travels, and I went to Mexico. I went to Yucatan and Guatemala and Mexico for *Sunset*, and then for the *Times*.

And then one time Toland said he'd like to meet the editor of *Sunset* who was down here. So then we had lunch with John Entenza and Toland and the *Sunset* editor. We walked out to the car, Jimmy walked me out to the car, and he said "How'd you like to go to Italy for me?"

Well, I didn't throw my arms around his neck, but in spirit I did. It started my trips to Italy. I first went over on my own, and it took a long time and I really didn't see how I was going to do it until I hit someone in Florence. They were in charge of quality control of all material that came to the United States, and they had photographs of everything. The head of it had been in a prison camp with the English in North Africa and so his English was perfect. I had just studied Italian on the plane over. But I did get on with people so well, I loved it, and it was so wonderful.

So I came back, did this full issue on Italy, and I hadn't asked the help of any of the Italians here, and when they saw it, they immediately came out with all sorts of presents for me. After that, I went for five years; they paid my expenses, the Italians. I would go over for a month every year, and they would route me through various parts of Italy so I got to know it; I got to know all of Italy.

JG: This started in what, '52?

EM: No, that was '56, the first trip to Italy. But I'd had lots of trips to Mexico before that. Actually the work in Italy was three weeks, and so I took another week and travelled. Once I went to Egypt, I went to Greece a couple of times, I went to Germany, I went to England.

Very often I'd go to John Collier's place in Grasse, in St. Francois de Grasse. They had a big house there that was built by Josephine and her Italian lover--they had a stage--her Italian lover was an actor so... But it was a great place, great, and I loved John. John had been in Mexico a couple of times when I was there, and I adore him. He is so funny, he is so great. So I'd go there, and stay for...

JG: This was after he--you knew him from Southern California.

EM: Yes. So he was in movies, he wrote for movies then, and he'd made quite a bit of money on *African Queen*. He owned the story rights and had done the first script for it. But he controlled the... He made a lot of money on that. So they bought this [house].

So anyway, my travels ended about 19... Let's see, in the meantime I had some books out, 1960.

Oh, yes, I went to Brazil; the Brazilian government asked me as one of their critics to go over. I was astonished how much *Arts and Architecture* was prized in Europe. The people I knew, you know, they knew my name from having written for *Arts and Architecture*. It was unbelievable to me, because it paid little or nothing. I went to Brazil... Saarinen was there, too, Saarinen and Eames were at Brazil.

JG: Where, in Rio? They were at [inaudible]

EM: Yes. It was the opening of Brazilia. And Zevi was there.

JG: Bruno Zevi?

EM: Yes. It was incredible, the people in Brazilia.

JG: Now were you writing about--go ahead about Brazilia, I'm sorry.

EM: Well, I came back and did an issue for the *Times* on that, on the architecture.

JG: Now, during the time you were going to Mexico and to Italy were you writing about architecture in Southern California, or in the United States as well?

EM: Yes, yes.

JG: Berkeley was still alive at that time.

EM: Yes, yes. He died in '62. But it was awfully close. We lived well. We didn't have any... Well, there was nothing really to save because I--this was the only way I could do it, to get any reward myself [laughs] for sitting at the typewriter so closely. To take trips. And they were just paid for, they were just barely paid for. So, let's see, the first book came out in 1960.

Oh, there was a period of four months when I wrote television, and that happened when a friend of mine, a writer, had become an agent. He took some of my things, published stories, and took them around and sold them, and he sold a couple, and I got incredible prices for them, and then an extra price for writing the screenplay. Of course I work like hell, and I could bring it home if there had to be changes, and after having written all night and taking it in the morning, I could work--come home, and make the changes. So it was worth it. It paid up all our debts and got us in shape again, paid off the mortgage. I must have written about ten, and I loved it. I loved writing dialogue.

JG: What shows were they? Are these among your papers?

EM: No, oh, no, they're thrown out. They could take a good story and I don't know what they'd do--they'd just muck it up, and you know, once I went in to watch how they did it, how they could muck it up, and I even abetted them in it because they asked me if they could take out a certain character. Well, they thought that it wasn't a structural character. It was. [Both laugh loudly] What it did, it gave the actress more room on the stage to say...

JG: [Both laugh uncontrollably] Sorry, folks.

EM: But even there, I was going to go on; I wanted to--to do that right, and to do it well, and to get some really good... You know, to crack television and not just write, you know, the things... Well, I got so I could turn them out very fast.

[END TAPE 6, SIDE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 6, SIDE 2]

JG: ... Esther , McCoy for the Archives of American Art, on Saturday, November 14th, 1987, in Santa Monica. This is side 2 of tape 6. We were talking about the...

EM: Yes. Well, this was ended when I got the contract for *Five California Architects*. And so then I began working--that was my downfall. Just when I had a taste of leisure and money, then this comes.

JG: You had said before that you had spent your life trying to escape the middle class, though, do you recall?

EM: Well, yes, I have escaped it. I escaped it. I escaped it at age 21 when I went to New York because I didn't want, I really didn't want possessions. And that's what appalls me at all this stuff--it's no value, but it's, you know, to have this much stuff.

JG: So you were escaping affluence by going into architectural writing? I mean, did you know it at the time?

EM: No, I didn't. And I wanted to do the book because I'd already done the catalogue for the show of the "Roots of California Contemporary Architecture," that had been shown here. And so it was from that that they gave me the contract for the book. So then I worked on that for a year, and then I got the contract for the Neutra book, and came out of--turned it in in '59, the manuscript, and then went into the Neutra book. And that was, oh, that was hell. This man was no one to write about. That's when I knew that I must always write about the dead. Wherever I could. [Both laugh]

JG: So you wrote the Neutra book.

EM: Yes.

JG: Was that published before *California Five* [*Five California Architects*]?

EM: No, it was published after. They were both published in 1960. But it came out afterward. *Five California Architects* was delayed because the editor who commissioned it had left and... Did I tell you this a little while ago? The Dutchman who took over didn't like... He thought they were all pretty crappy.

JG: But you were able to salvage the manuscript; it went through.

EM: Well, I fought for it. You know, if you spend a year on something, by God, you're going to fight for it.

JG: And it sure proved very successful, even on their terms.

EM: Yes, yes it did.

JG: It's a remarkable book, I think. Whenever I go into an architect's library, it's always there. Sometimes it's out. It's almost hard to say why the moment for it was so right.

EM: It was slow. It was slow catching on, and I know that someone told me that he could tell, in going into a young architect's office, that it was... He'd see it up by the book on engineering [laughs], and knew that it was something that... I think the young architects liked it, because...

Oh, by that time, too, I'd been writing for the Italian magazines, and in Mexico I'd written a whole issue on California architecture for *Architectura*, the Mexican magazine. Then, in Italy, I began contributing the California architecture to the Italian art magazines. To, not *Lotus*, but what's the other one? *Zodiac*. The Pirelli magazine. I think the first thing I wrote for that was on Pierre Koenig, and then Moore, and then I did issues on young architects for them and for *Lotus*. Bruno Alfieri, the editor, when it died, he opened his own magazine, *Lotus*. So I went on writing for him.

JG: Did you save all these articles and are they in your papers?

EM: Yes, they're here. So then I would come back from Europe and publish things in *Arts and Architecture* and then in the *Times*. But after the book writing (after the *Neutra*), it was so traumatic, the experience with *Neutra*, that I was in New York...

JG: What was traumatic about it? He was difficult?

EM: Well, yes. He wanted me to say things that were not true. He wanted me to say that he was still in partnership with Alexander, and when the manuscript was in, I went to New York, and I sat down with Braziller. He said, "But *Neutra* showed me the contract--it was dated just months ago--to show that he was still in partnership with Alexander."

I said, "All right, I'll pay for the telephone calls. Let's call."

And then there was something else too about Davidson that he had said was untrue and he wanted out, so we called Alexander, and Braziller was listening, and he said that this contract was something... They had had to draw up a new one because of changes.

But he said, "If you say I'm in partnership with *Neutra*, I'll sue you."

So then I was going to call Davidson for Braziller to hear, and Braziller said, "No, no; that's enough."

But *Neutra* did get his way in certain things after I'd gone. There was one point where he picked up all the photographs. He said, "They belong to me. I own the negatives; they're in Shulman's keeping, but I own them."

JG: Is that true? He owned them?

EM: Yes, that was his agreement with Shulman.

JG: So he really tried to control his image in the press?

EM: Yes he did, yes. He sent his son out to see me once, to beg me to be kind to his father. Well, God, he wanted everything changed in the book, as he wanted to see it. He wanted everything changed.

JG: You showed it to him?

EM: Yeah, I showed it to him. And then at the end, I wouldn't let him see it. But he did see it at Braziller; Braziller showed it to him.

JG: It was to create a more positive image. But was it negative to start with, or...?

EM: No, no.

JG: You liked his work so there was no problem?

EM: Yeah, yeah; it was very... I just had to divorce him. I had to make the decision--would I stop it, or would I divorce him from his work and just look at his work.

JG: What sort of self-image did he want to portray, that would...?

EM: Well, he wanted--now, for another thing, he wanted me to put the date of the Lovell house in 1927, and I said, "That isn't true." I told him I'd had a check through the records at City Hall and got the date of when the drawings were filed and when the building permit was issued, and this was 1929. And then, finally, he said, "Yes, but I *like* 1927, that was the year that the Barcelona Pavilion..." And then a couple of other things, too. He wanted to be that year.

JG: Yes, he wanted to be seminal.

EM: Yeah, uh-huh.

JG: So he was competing historically, but not with Schindler? When did Schindler do the Beach House? '23?

EM: It was underway when Neutra arrived, and I think he came in '25.

JG: So he wasn't trying to beat the Lovell house, the beach house.

EM: No, but he did get the next one.

JG: I wanted to know whether he was actually trying to lie to pre-date Schindler or...

EM: No.

JG: ...but it was actually the Mies thing.

EM: And then some of the drawings for the Lovell Beach House. Lovell was having Schindler do so many things for him that a certain letter of Lovell's shows that he couldn't decide which would be done first. But many of the drawings were already in, and the sketches for the Lovell house that were done, I think, in '23.

JG: The Lovell, the Beach House?

EM: Beach House, yes.

JG: Which one first? Lovell didn't know whether he was going to build the..

EM: Well, he was doing a house in the...

JG: Los Feliz?

EM: No, he was doing a house in the country, a farm. He had a farm.

JG: Oh, I didn't know that. And Schindler had designed that too?

EM: Yes, he did that.

JG: Was that ever built?

EM: Oh, yes.

JG: I didn't know that.

EM: Yeah. A ranch house.

JG: I've never seen that illustrated.

EM: Yeah, it's in David's book. It wasn't an important house.

JG: So we were getting--Neutra...

EM: So that was over. That was '60, and then things began to be rather bad. It was the end of the Italy trips and work was low. I was doing some work then for [Architectural] *Forum*, occasional pieces for *Forum*, and what John paid wasn't enough. I'd have calls for things. People would call. I did, you know, things for *Life* magazine and for others that were unsigned. Some just doing the writing and getting the material together. That would be for unsigned pieces. At that time, loose magazines were not... There were no...signing. They were not attributed to anyone.

And let's see, about 1957 I went on publishing stories. I think the last one I published was in the end of the '50s. And then, you see, it would take some little time to write one, and if they didn't go to one of the magazines that paid well, they would wind up in the little literary magazines that didn't pay. And so I was really stuck. It just could not do it.

Impossible to do a book because there was not the money to sit down and do a book. I could do one where I was contracted for it and had an advance, but otherwise... And I was pretty well off books by then, and then when Berkeley died, in 1962, I said I will never, never write about architecture again. It was almost like, you know, you're casting off a lover. Immediately, people began to feel sorry for me, and the--Italy came forward and asked me to go on a trip for them. Jimmy Toland sent me to Mexico. That's where I went with Marvin Rand and... [laughs] So, then Jimmy Toland got me the trip to Mexico...

JG: Before we go on with this aspect of your career, what had-- in the large, big canvas stuff--happened to Southern California between the war? We're backtracking here a little bit, and say 1960, how was it that California changed? I know this is a sweeping... This is a question that's a book, but it's my perception that it had been a much smaller place before the war, more contained; you knew people and something happened after the war. It changed...

EM: You knew them, just the people, I mean. There were more architects, but you knew them by their work, and there was no good work that went unnoticed in Southern California. The magazines...

JG: Before the war, or after the war?

EM: After the war. The magazines by this time were sending out people all the time to California, especially the magazines that wanted houses, because they were the only place that were building interesting ones. The magazine I worked for, did scouting for, in New York, *Mademoiselle* magazine--all their advertising was eclectic stuff, and all the houses were moderns. Everything I sent them was modern. And there were times when there would be ten houses in them and maybe eight of them would be mine. I was the only one who could put together a good package fast, I guess, and who could write on the things. Although they crapped up the writing, you know; they made them really--it was-- in first person things.

JG: They turned your articles into first person.

EM: Yeah, as if they were written by the person.

JG: By the [inaudible]?

EM: Flippant; yes, very flippant?

JG: Under your name?

EM: Oh no, no names were published. Oh yes, the name of the person, the owner, yeah.

JG: It's not as though they changed your articles into first person under your name?

EM: Oh no, oh no. I wouldn't have permitted that. Let's see. The changes? Well, the strict International Style had always been more or less corrupted here. There's very little that was not eventually corrupted by the climate, and the kind of people who live here.

JG: In what sense corrupted?

EM: Well, I mean, it was less severe. It was more... It was freer here.

JG: Did the weather in fact encourage the... You say "corrupted," but did it actually bring out the nature of International Style more in terms of flow and space?

EM: No. Well, I'm thinking about Lescaze, say. Lescaze would, you know, if he'd come out here, he would have been softened, too, I think. Neutra, was softened, at 1949, or '48, when he did the Brentwood house. You know, what's that Brentwood house? Not the one on the slope, but the flat one.

JG: Very rich materials in that.

EM: Yeah. Anyway, it was a Wright client to begin with that Neutra managed to get. It had a way of softening things, California. And it was never... I think Clark and Frey, in Palm Springs--it was closer there to the International Style, and then even the Neutra house in Palm Springs is very strict, rigid. But it's a nice house, and I happen to like... I wouldn't live in an International Style house, but God, you know, I go back to that first shock when I saw one, and it's something incredibly wonderful about it, so stripped down. You wouldn't have known its bones were so beautiful. [Laughs]

JG: Hmm. Which one, for example?

EM: Well, Neutra, I think, especially. Those apartment houses of his, and then his house in Palm Springs, too,



was very...

JG: That is a nice house.

EM: Yes.

JG: That passage of you, when you... Where was it, in...?--you walking downstairs in the Lovell house, walking into that light? Was that in the...?

EM: I think that would have been in *Vienna to Los Angeles*. The last part, I think. The stairways, comparing the stairs of the Schindler and the Neutra. Then I swore never to write about architecture again, but then I did. And then, too, you don't... Fiction is something you can't pick up and put down. In fiction you set a scene, and in other writing you inform. You can't move back and forth from one to the other.

Let's see, where am I going, in the 50's? I don't think I can stop. I would have to think about that, to break it down, about what the changes... There was a change in the... Johnson did some of it. The people that I talked to (I told you this before), in 1964. Oh yes, that's another thing, John Entenza got me a Graham grant. Well, no, it was Ford. I think he helped. He got me a Ford grant to study young architects. And that was '64. And so how could I give it up? I mean, I was just pushed back into it. And being at home with it anyway.

But it was '64 that the effects of Johnson, his softening. That the way he would, you know, he would take a column and sculpture it. And well, so had Niemeyer in Brazilia, that was 1960. But the young architects, none of them approved of him, of Johnson, and yet they were all so careful, because they knew his power and they were really afraid to say anything. Johnson was always very nice to me, whenever we met, and I liked him. God, he made me laugh; no one is funnier than Johnson.

JG: Mmmhmmm. When did you meet him?

EM: I met him a number of times, at meetings and in New York. Well, a dozen times, maybe; half dozen times.

JG: Johnson said he really should have written about you?

EM: And you know, this is what I think he was talking about. It was a book that was being re-published. What was it? I've forgotten. This was only a couple of years ago. And I think it was John Dixon who said... I said I was looking for someone to... The publisher wanted to get someone to say a word about it for the... And he said, "I can get Johnson to." And then he called back later and said that he couldn't. Johnson didn't do this. And I thought that might have been what he was talking about. (It's [the tape] not on now, is it?)

JG: It is on now. So it was, that he would have... He was talking about what?

EM: Well, he said...

JG: Oh, he would have written about the book...

EM: He said, "I should have written about you." And then I think he read it after that, maybe. It is quick reading, and I know that several architects have phoned me just after they've read it. I know Cesar called me.

JG: Oh, yes, that was *Vienna to Los Angeles*.

EM: Yes, yeah.

JG: It was amazing that he had found that. There weren't many printed, were there? *Vienna to Los Angeles*?

EM: Well, there were a lot printed, and they're still in the warehouse.

JG: In the bin, yes. It's just that it's not as though Johnson goes prowling through the bookstores.

EM: If you want me to give him a copy, I'll...

JG: Oh, he has it! He told me he loved it.

EM: Oh, I see. It's his kind of book. Because it's quick, quick.

JG: It's a very good book.

EM: You know, Konrad Wachsmann, too, came to see me as soon as he'd read it. Quincy Jones called me just after he finished it.

JG: This is the book over which you and I met, you recall?

EM: Yes! Yes. And there are a couple of other people who just read it, and, I think, architects who knew the period anyway. But no, you wrote the only really good review.

JG: Aw, gee. [Laughs]

EM: Oh, I couldn't believe it when I read your review. Someone who really *reads*.

JG: You said the nicest thing, that it was as though I had been looking over your shoulder as you wrote it.

EM: [Laughing] Did I?

JG: Yeah.

EM: [Still laughing] Good for me. [Both laugh]

JG: So, after this self-congratulatory episode, we'll sign off for the next edition.

EM: All right.

[END TAPE 6, SIDE 2]

[BEGIN TAPE 7, SIDE 1]

JG: ... for the Archives of American Art, on Sunday, November 15, in Santa Monica. We are in the late sixties approximately.

EM: The sixties was what I could call the grant period. The first one came in 1964, the Ford grant. It was sort of a reward for having worked so long in the vineyard, I suppose. The Ford grant was to study the work of young architects. Well, tapes of my interviews with them are all at the Smithsonian. I can't name all of them now, but some of the important ones were Charles Moore, Robert Venturi--people who had been in Philip Johnson's office.

JG: Jim Polshek?

EM: Jim Polshek, yes.

JG: Was this the start of your association with some of these people?

EM: Yes. And then in Philadelphia, too, there were a number of people. Tim Vreeland and... What's the name of the Italian?

JG: Oh, I know who you mean.

EM: Aldo Giurgola. And then the Detroit architect, first name begins with a G, the Latvian.

JG: I don't know that one.

EM: Gunnar Birkerts and various people in New York. I think I mentioned those in the office of Philip Johnson.

JG: This gives us an idea, but the whole list is in your file.

EM: Yes, it is. Then, I was going to do a book on the young architects, and Bruno Alfieri was interested in publishing it in Italy. And he even gave me a page make-up, to show to editors. Very bright, nice cover, the first of the ones I'd seen that had horizontal strips of various buildings pasted together. There was no money in it from Alfieri, and I was then writing for *Arts and Architecture*. David Travers had bought it, and he didn't see the... He didn't like the architects. He would do one piece on them, so it was all one article on young architects.

JG: How did you choose them?

EM: Well, I'd had some help, and I'd known the work of a number of them. Peter Blake had given me some names, and Paul Grotz had given me some names, I think, although Paul was not too keen on Venturi or some of the others. I was staying with the Grotzes in New York several days when I was there, and Bob Venturi came to New York and came to see me there. There was no indication that he was going to be an important architect in the reception.

But this is the first time I'd had such full notes and was prepared to write a book that did not come off. The cost of the trips had been very high, and there wasn't too much left from the grant by the time I had got to the point

of writing.

JG: Venturi had written his *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* by that time?

EM: No, he had not. He had published one piece from it. But this was '64, and I think it was '66 that it came out. Anyway, there was another piece of it that I had asked him to let me try to get David Travers to publish. David was not as experimental as John Entenza. He paid more, and he was very easy to work with, and he made more changes in my text than John ever had, or John's office. But I liked David very much, and he was a very fair person. But he just simply did not see this as material for publication. They looked strange to him, and he was so used to the Bauhaus that anything that was the beginning of post-modern was just not for him.

JG: This was a round-up of everybody who became the establishment of the next generation.

EM: Yes, it was. I had done earlier --very early, for the *Mademoiselle* thing--architects who later became famous. Not that famous. But most of these turned out to be very famous-- germinal figures in the seventies. I tried to get David to be more experimental in the things he used in *Case Studies*. But he had taken a road that was the middle road, and I'd wanted him to use inflatables and, oh, a spin-off from Bucky Fuller and other things. But he did do a number of experimental things--I mean, writers he published. He always alludes to this when we discuss it, that he did do some writers who became famous. Or the things they wrote about became famous.

That was the beginning of a life that was easier, and then by this time my name was known to many young architects. I was sort of an under-the-counter book that the young architects were beginning to find. *Five California Architects* didn't get too high marks among the historians because there was too much in it that was not the way architectural history was written. I think it was not until Peter Banham came along and brought engineering as a subject for architectural history that it was broadened.

JG: What was it especially about your work that was not suitable or appropriate...?

EM: Well, I don't know really how to describe it except that it did deal more with their lives, and my feeling that architecture did come out of people, and those people came out of backgrounds, and the things they saw when they were children, things they grew up with, and how these affected their choices, and also their own points of view on things, many things that were not purely architectural.

I think the usual architectural history at the time was written from the point of view of the facade, and there wasn't too great emphasis even on the floor plan. Having worked in an architect's office, knowing the importance of the floor plan as the basis for the creation, I did give it great attention. I already had a great sensitivity to floor plans, and I think now, three or four years after finishing *Second Generation*, I can still walk the floor plans of almost all the buildings that I wrote about, and would recognize them, I think. At least if the window openings were in, I could recognize them. Harris's especially. I keep walking those at night and know them all. He had a very good floor plan. His was the only one among those that was not really universal space. This was closer to space for use rather than space as simply a great expanse for photography.

There are many reasons for this, I think. Many architects were experimenting with walls and wall systems, as Soriano was, so you can't just say that one was forward looking or made a more livable space. Others were doing experimentation which has really benefitted architecture very much. Soriano, for instance, in developing walls that could be put together in factories, that even had everything in them, the electricity and the phone connections and the bed, desks and the bed head, and the doors already in them.

JG: Konrad Wachsmann was doing something similar too.

EM: Yes, he had. But not in the way that Soriano did. Konrad had never put desks and things of this sort, he never put the wiring in, and in the houses of his... I wrote about one of these houses for *Mademoiselle*.

JG: Soriano?

EM: ... of Wachsmann's. As I remember. Wachsmann's was a wood system and Soriano's was steel. Experiments in steel became very important as far as the case study houses went because they moved away from wood and they emphasized the pavilion aspect of the house, as Pierre Koenig, Eliwood and Soriano did.

JG: Pavilion in the sense of opening to the outside?

EM: Yes. And all on one level, with a minimum of walls. One funny thing I always remember about Soriano's case study, that he still believed the kitchen should be separated, as most Europeans did, from anything else. He has doors a foot apart, one to the service and one to the entrance hall. You open them both and go into the same space. But one was the kitchen, and I think that he believed that. I know Schindler and Neutra both believed in this.

When I was in Schindler's office I tried to take away the separation between the service space and the kitchen, and he always put it back in. I think once he let it stay.

JG: Service space, you mean the washing machine and...

EM: Yes, yes. He always believed that the smells from the kitchen should not enter the living space.

JG: Now, who?

EM: Schindler, yes. And Neutra too. It is a place... It's something that comes out of the many servants that were possible, servants as a class. And that, at the end of World War II, so many people who'd worked in kitchens left the kitchen and went to work in airplane plants or in factories. So they never went back. So we became a servantless people, certainly in California, until the Mexicans... South Americans really now have supplanted it. They've made another group of servants, but not live--in, as they were formerly, which required a house with a servant's room and servants' quarters, in some cases, for big houses.

JG: You think that might come back, that floor plan that reflects the servant class?

EM: Floor plans always reflect the economy.

JG: The economy now has servants. People can now afford servants.

EM: But the floor plan doesn't quite go back. Once it's made a change, it wouldn't revert to the Victorian house with the servants' quarters.

JG: Back stairway...

EM: Well, now, say even in the red house, which was an early modern house, you see the servants' spaces there. I think I commented on this some place, the long hall from the kitchen to the dining room. That's both [spelling it out] H-A-L-L and H-A-U-L to the dining room, in the red house. Mary Banham took me there once when I was in England, and I was interested in it and then studied the plan in various other ways.

JG: Whose house is that, the red house?

EM: Well, it was *for--oh*, the arts and crafts man, Morris. It was for Morris, and it was by, oh God, I know, but--you can look that up. In writing I leave these. If I can't think of a name, I leave that blank, and go on, and then turn my chair around and pull down books from the shelf and fill in the spaces. Or, by that time, I may remember them. Phillip Webb, it was, who designed the house.

JG: Getting back to the young architects that you were studying who became kind of the deans of their generation, how did you select them? You found their works simply interesting, or...

EM: I looked at their work. They had very little published, all of them, but I looked at it, and made the selection of the architects from this.

JG: What was emerging as the ideas of that time? Were things more complex or metaphorical or...?

EM: It was a move away from the Bauhaus, mainly.

JG: And these were the people who were doing it.

EM: Yes.

JG: Did you think of it as a radical thing at the time, or was it a curiosity, or did you sense a much larger thing going on?

EM: I saw change coming. Something has continued for a long time, and no real freshness comes out of it. Then, you like change.

Well, I was starting to bring in Mexico, but I find it doesn't... I was thinking about Barragan, but his was really such a cross between the European. Well, Corb, it would be, the Mexicans look to Corb. It would be a cross between Corb--in Barragan--a cross between Corb and the village churches. You saw he used this very poor pine they had, and he really made an aesthetic principle out of the poor wood they had in Mexico. That's why they use so much concrete. Concrete became very popular in Mexico because there were so few trees, and the transportation from the forested part of Mexico was not easy. So they used the material, which was concrete, and that's why Felix Candela became so...bringing something new to that.

But to go back, to Barragan for instance, he used various elements of the village churches and religious buildings, and the buildings where the religious people lived, and combined those with Corb. It was a Corbusian thing, a regionalism, and done with a skill that was unbelievable.

JG: There was a certain amount of the rancho in there too, wasn't there?

EM: No, not in Barragan. No, no rancho. None, none whatever.

JG: Cancel that.

EM: Yes. In Candela. I wrote a great deal about Candela, because in the fifties there was a shell on every student's drawing board. I wrote about him so much, I think, when he did a small shell for the university campus, a tiny building, for study of rays--Cosmic Ray Pavilion, I think it was called. At the same time he was doing this church which was made concrete. While in Italy (what's the Italian's name?) was using various parts for the concrete elements, in Mexico...

JG: Nervi.

EM: Nervi, yes, was using pre-fabricated parts, while in Mexico Felix Candela was applying it directly, and it was in doubly curved surfaces. He could use it that way very thin. And he did the church this way that was really very well known. They looked extremely complicated but as I asked him how he could get the workmen to understand this, such a complicated thing, he said, "It's not complicated; it is simply a surface that is easily--the plane is doubly curved but it is on a grid.

JG: It's the double curvature that gives it strength, isn't it?

EM: Yes, yes, it does. Which I'd understood in working in planes, too--the curves strengthened the 032 sheet metal.

JG: Oh, I see. You said that the concrete work in Italy by Nervi was pre-cast concrete, more than poured?

EM: Yeah, it was pre -cast, you know, in the salt. I don't know if it was true of the salt mines he did, the factory, but it was in the stations and the stadia that he did.

JG: What about the influences of North, across the border, North to South, South to North? Was there much then? Mexico to the United States?

EM: I think the only one that really had the lasting effect was--no, I don't mean lasting, but it was Candela. But it didn't work out in the United States because... It did in Mexico because labor cost was very low. In the United States labor cost was extremely high. So

[END OF TAPE 7, SIDE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 7, SIDE 2]

JG: ...November 15, in Santa Monica, we're talking about Candela, Mexico, concrete.

EM: I've forgotten what I was going to say, but I've written all this; it's been in *Arts and Architecture*, and I wrote about Candela for various regional magazines, literary magazines like *New Mexico Quarterly*.

JG: You have copies of this among your papers?

EM: Yes.

JG: To get back to the influence across the border. Why was there not more dialogue, or why has there not been more dialogue between the North and the South?

EM: Well, just that thing, the economics.

JG: The labor.

EM: Yes, labor, and the...

JG: But France would influence America through Corb, and Corb would influence Mexico, but for some reason the intellectual influence didn't seem to go back and forth across the borders; it still isn't going across the borders.

EM: Between Mexico and the United States?

JG: Yeah.

EM: No, but I don't think they're doing anything very exciting in Mexico now. This was a high period simply because they had a... Presidents can't succeed themselves; they have a six year office. This president was going out of office and so he was having the university built as sort of his monument. That had taken a number of years to start, and so that was part of the thing that kept the ideas alive. Before that, it had been started by the development of the concrete industry in Mexico, which had influenced Juan O'Gorman. He did the schools in International Style for the Department of Education.

JG: In concrete.

EM: Yes. But now, take something like the... Oh, where the lava beds are. What's the name of that?

JG: In Mexico City? The community is called...

EM: Anyway, it was planned by Barragan, and he invited various people to design houses there. They're all very large. All of them have, I've noticed and said in writing, entry halls larger than the servants' quarters, servants' bedrooms, certainly. This was true by a Communist designer in Brazil, Niemeyer. I saw an apartment of his. But there they were living in... They had no air in the apartment; it just came through openings in the room that went out to a hail which had some opening. But they were so small.

JG: The servants' quarters?

EM: Yes. Very, very small. Juan O'Gorman, for instance, he was designing a house, and I was there at the time, staying with them. And I pointed out to him that his entry hall was larger than the servant's room, and here, he was very left wing, and it sort of shocked him, I think. He changed it; he added a little [laughing], a few square feet to the servant's room, but I don't think he cut down too much, because they really required show, in Mexico.

There was nothing like the case study house program which was... Space was very hard to come by, expensive, and the people, they had a middle class that had been immensely expanded by the war, which could afford some houses. Mexico--its middle class began to grow with the building of the University, but never to the extent that it did here. And then it pretty well stopped, mainly because of the money that's stolen by the people in power. And I think the oil money, when they discovered oil in Mexico, I think most of that money went out of Mexico; it wasn't used. I think the difference between incomes of the rich and the poor has become greater in Mexico in the last years. The difference in United States between the rich and the poor has become greater under Reagan, but it is still less than in Mexico. One good thing, it keeps crafts, hand crafts alive. The difference between, you know, when there's no lower working class, no hand craft class, the crafts fail. And can be brought back then only by, given new life only by money grants from governments.

I was asked to be... I think my title at UCLA... I think I went in in about 1965. It was before the school opened. George Dudley was the dean.

JG: Before the architecture school opened?

EM: Yes. There were many things that I did there. In fact I was plugged into most every place. Denise Scott Brown was there, who later married Bob Venturi, and we got on very well together. I helped her in the development of her lectures, and because I knew Ocean Park, and her seminars were on a group of buildings in Ocean Park, in planning. She was a planner. So I liked it very much.

George, then, finally gave me a thing to do which was to develop, in the Neutra collection, a way of displaying certain things without their having to be touched, because Neutra's drawings were old, fragile, and they'd had them for about ten years and had never unrolled any of them. So I discovered this, and that was the first thing I set out to do.

The students were paid, oh, you know, two-fifty, whatever the going wage was then, to help, and there was always one in the office, one in the Neutra collection with me. He turned out to be someone who was working part-time in the computer. So I asked him how it could be done, you know, how it could be computerized? I'd already investigated the things on campus, the way they kept their buildings, and found that they had them on microfiche, and had to have them in drawers. The drawings themselves were in dead storage.

Then I went to Sears, to see how they--because they have a great system, you know, where they just throw something on a screen when you order something. These were very interesting systems, and so I decided on the Neutra it should be a combination of the punch card, with a hole in it that had a little microfiche--a small, small microfiche of the drawing. So we were doing that, and that went on for, I don't know, six or eight months. It was dusty, hard work, and it was fun. But I never had any satisfaction of seeing it carried out, because when the dean

changed, the new dean called me in and asked me what I did. And I did so many things, that it was hard to say, so I stumbled around.

JG: That was Perloff?

EM: Perloff, yes. And so he could see that I was of no help, and he knew nothing about architecture, Perloff...

JG: He was a planner.

EM: He wasn't even a planner. He raised money in Washington. An economist, I think he was. We'd had a little run-in because I'd wanted the school to buy the Dodge House. It had about four acres, and it was about \$900,000. I thought they could raise the money for this, and they could sell off part of it, and you know, in West Hollywood, what three or four acres would go for now. But he said, "No, if I were going to do something like this, I would want something that the kids, the students, could tear down and put together again." And then the Dodge house, of course, was one of the great houses that we had tried so desperately to save.

JG: Was that the first major historic preservation issue in the city?

EM: No, there had been others. There had been others.

JG: Such as?

EM: I'm trying to think.

JG: Atlantic Richfield?

EM: That we could not do anything about. The money of Atlantic Richfield, it was too great, I think. David Gebhard wrote a book on the building. It was a picture book, more than a book. I did quite a bit of the research for that. It was one of the things on the Register. I hated to see it go, but... And the library was always threatened. Mainly, because the financial center was moving from one street...

JG: Spring.

EM: Spring, over to this new center. Oh, many things after that. You really could not get great interest in preservation then. I had gotten some money from a small grant from Edgar Kaufman to do a film on the Dodge House, as... Because it was so tight, one didn't know. So I worked on that; that was one of those losers too. The film is still around. A copy of it, I think, is at the Smithsonian. That went a number of places, was shown widely. It opened at the County Museum.

JG: By the way, you speak of the County Museum. Let's digress a little bit to shows you were involved with. You did a number of shows...

EM: Yes. The first one was when I knew Jim Elliott and I knew his associate, Bill Osmon. When I was doing the show, I got the contract to write the book on *Five California Architects*. Another show had been done on this; I wasn't involved in the show, putting the show together, but I did write the catalog for it, *Roots of California American Architecture*. So I was somewhat known for that. And then my pieces in the *Times* had always had wide attention; I'd written on the early moderns, you know, round-ups on them, ten or twelve pages stories in the *Times*.

JG: That was when the magazine existed?

EM: Yes, well, it has existed for... It lost favor, but I mean, at one time it was an important thing. I mean, important; the architecture magazines in the East always got it, and saw things that they would not have seen otherwise. So I was known in a way, here; so Jim, I think, asked me if I would do a show for them and we settled on the Gill show.

JG: What year?

EM: I'd have to look it up, but that would be the late fifties, I think. It's in the catalogue. So I was doing that while I was writing the book. Yeah, it would be late fifties, because I wrote the thing for the catalogue, which would be the essay for the book. It was changed, I mean, second draft of it, for the book, but it was also in the catalogue. I worked with Marvin Rand on [it]. We did all the shows, all the houses, buildings of Gill. That's why it happened to be, it was through the help of the money from the County Museum that Gill got so widely photographed and collected. But I'd had to do it rather fast. I had written a couple of things on Gill for *Times Home Magazine*, on his early work, his importance here, as part of a round-up. So that show had been successful.

Hitchcock had come out to give the lecture at the show, and it was interesting because he didn't know Gill; he'd

never heard of him. He was seeing photographs of work of a man he did not know at all, and it was a little embarrassing to him, and amusing to us, how little he knew. But he did know the Viennese, what's his name, the Viennese -Loos--he did know Loos's work.

Oddly enough, Loos and Gill were born the same year, and this idea that Loos had influenced Gill was preposterous. And Gill had done some of his stripped-down buildings before Loos had. Loos had written about it, but... There was always a feeling on the East Coast... I don't know whether I've said this here, in these tapes, that they, the East, will believe Europe before they will believe anything west of the Mississippi. Even the Yale guy, Scully, had minimized Gill and had even said that he was influenced by Loos. Loos had written about "the ornament as crime" things in a Vienna paper, but they were written while Gill was already working. It would have meant that the papers would have had to be sent to San Diego from Vienna and to be read by Gill. Gill's nephew, who worked with him at the time, said that he never read anything, that the magazines came in and were unopened, and that he had stopped the subscriptions to Gill's magazines. Well, anyway, it just is one more indication that the West was not taken very seriously, and that if it was an idea, a new idea, it must have come out of Europe. And that was carried on.

When they edited my piece on Gill for *Five California Architects*, they took out several things. One of them was, they took out Schindler's given names, and so he just came out R. M. (I had said that he was baptized Rudolph Michael at the Gummendorfert?) Catholic Church. So then, another thing was that they took out of Gill... Gill had, when his nephew started studying architecture, asked him to learn German, because he wanted some things translated, and Louis Gill had not studied German, according to his son. But Scully got this, that he'd had his nephew study German so he could read the Loos articles. So it was really going far afield, to give Europe the advantage over California. It's why Maybeck was neglected so long. And why the Greenes, and, well, Schindler, too. I know, Paul Grotz told me that Neutra was published much by the *Forum* because, he said, he sent in such a complete package: good photography, all the material, the drawings, you know, presentation drawings, and text were all there. Just put it to bed.

JG: The catalogue to the Gill show I presume is in your papers?

EM: Yes, it is, yes.

JG: What other shows after Gill?

EM: The next year was the Felix Candela show for USC. I did the catalogue on that; I'd done heavy research on that anyway for my articles. And then, well, let's see, a much later one was *Ten Italian Architects* for the County Museum. I'd gone to Italy for two months on that. And then, oh, yes, the O'Gorman show of mosaics. It was when Marvin and I were in Mexico, and we did that. During this time, too, I was also writing about these things for *Zodiac* and the other Italian magazine, *Lotus*. By this time I also was doing occasional things for English magazines. I became great friends with the Pontis and had liked them very much. That came about when I was in Italy doing things for the *Times*. Ponti had worked in so many fields that if I was short of things in anything I would go to the Ponti office. One of his daughters was there in, sort of in communications. They had photographs of everything. And so Ponti was extremely well represented in the stories I did in the *Times*.

Let's see if there was anything else. Oh yes, I taught. David Gebhard asked me to take his class when he was in Europe. He did a book on Schindler after; I think it came out in 1970, and so this would be the end of the sixties. Yeah, it was, about '69, I think. I went for two quarters, and that was a change, too, because I was paid so much that I could really start a little nest egg for the poor times, so I could get it in some CD's which would help. Because I knew that they would come again; they always did, low periods. And then by this time I wanted to write the things that I liked to write, and that you have to pay for. You buy time. So I bought time.

Let's see, there was a couple of other shows; I don't quite remember what they were. It's in the list there, yes.

JG: And you started teaching, you said, at Santa Barbara. Did you do that frequently or...

EM: I'd begun to lecture quite a bit, before that, but I lectured four classes a week at Santa Barbara.

[END TAPE 7, SIDE 2)

[BEGIN TAPE 8, SIDE 1]

JG: ...interviewing Esther McCoy, for the Archives of American Art, on Monday, November 16, in Santa Monica.

EM: I did an early film, *Architecture West*, in 1947. I wrote the text for it. And there are a few other things that were left out. I was a consultant for the Hundred Years of A.I.A. in 1957. I was Regent's Lecturer at U.C. Santa Barbara, 1967. And Regent's Lecturer at U.C. Santa Cruz, 1974. I'm not sure about the dates of the first. I did a book on Craig Eliwood for Walker in 1968, published in Italy. I did it for Bruno Alfieri, for whom I'd written for



Italian magazines. Let's see, there were some honors: I had the Star of Order of Solidarity from the Republic of Italy in 1960, and I was made an Honorary Associate of the Southern California Chapter of American Institute of Architects in 1967, and received the Distinguished Service Citation from the California Council of the A.I.A. in 1968, and the M.C.A.C. award from Los Angeles County Museum of Art for distinguished achievement in 1982, and an A.I.A. Honor Award for Excellence in 1985, the Julia Morgan award from UCLA in 1987, and the--what's that last one?

JG: Oh, the A.I.A....

EM: No, from the Woman's Building.

JG: Oh, the Vesta...

EM: ...Vesta Award in 1987, for scholarship. I think that takes care of [it]. In 1969 I became a contributor to *Progressive Architecture*, and for a while did a monthly story for them, and then after that just contributed stories. That is the Craig Ellwood book [she is looking through papers], and that sort of finishes up the sixties. The *Ten Italian Architects* was 1967.

Then, in the seventies, I had other awards. I had a Graham in 1971. That was to pull together certain things from writings... Some of the work was on J.R. Davidson, and on Ain, and on various other people--to pull together papers that I had which led to writing, in the seventies, of *Second Generation*. The Guggenheim, also, was in 1979. That was what I used to write and do the traveling and expenses and everything on *Second Generation*.

I did about maybe, in all, over the years, forty pieces for *Progressive Architecture*, and for endless other magazines. I contributed to catalogues. One was on *Naives and Visionaries*, a show at the Walker Art Center, and I wrote on Bottle Village [Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village, Simi Valley, CA] near Los Angeles. It was folk art, folk architecture. Then, also, I wrote another thing on the Eames, for Walker Art, on their work. It was the work of the (what's the name of the thing they work for?) the Herman Miller... It was a show; I did the Eames section.

Then I began researching on the *Vienna to Los Angeles* book. I had done stories, or I had put together the letters between Neutra and Schindler for the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. And then also the letters from Louis Sullivan to Schindler. That also was published in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. So, in this book, *Vienna to Los Angeles*, about Neutra and Schindler, those letters are in the back of the book. It's a story of how both of them got to the United States and their friendship, and the break-up of their friendship, and their work together in King's Road, when Neutra moved into the house. It was a small book, very compact, and was liked mainly by architects. I don't know many other people who knew it. It didn't have wide distribution. It's, I think really, one of my favorite books, because it was so taut. I think it was so taut that I really wanted to loosen up, and so the next book was *Second Generation*, which just spilled out and carried the architects into various phases of their life and their development, far more fully than I did in *Five California Architects*, and with less reason to have that length.

In 1974 I had some surgery. I had an ulcer that had recurred a number of times, was very painful, and finally I had surgery for it. While I was getting over it, I set up a typewriter by the table downstairs. My workroom's been upstairs. I just began writing about my life, mainly from the time I went to New York, and first worked in New York, Patchin Place, and work for Dreiser, and several of those pieces have been published--or two have been published now and one will be out next month in *Grand Street*. That has been work that I've liked very much. I have written several other parts of this, that are unpublished, and one about the radical movement in Los Angeles. That is unpublished. Then a piece on Schindler which has just been published in *L.A. Architect*, about my work in the office, his way of working. Oh, yeah, after that I did a small piece on Robert Venturi, of meeting him and seeing his house for the first time, reminiscence, really.

And then today I just started a piece on John Collier, the English writer, who was one of our dearest friends and wonderful with food and--his wit, his wit was just superb. The Colliers had a place in France, I think I mentioned this, where I went a number of times after I went to Italy. I did work in Italy for the Italian government and *L.A. Times*, and I would go a number of times to St. Francois Grasse. I really looked forward to this, writing this about John, because he was a wonderful, wonderful man and a great cook. He died at the stove, cooking. [Both laugh] He was a small man. He liked big houses, high ceilings and big dogs, small women.

JG: Is his wife still alive?

EM: Yes, she is, yes.

JG: And you're doing the memoirs as sections, in sort of handleable sections.

EM: Yes. I started writing it just freely, and then I began to draw it into a form where one person was dominant,

or one place, as in "Patchin Place." I think you do that; you really aren't aware how much someone contributed to your life until you begin writing, and you find someone that you hadn't realized was that important, and as you write, you see what your debt is. I think that all of us are so indebted to others. I think, you know, where some one gives us a hand up, and I'm grateful to the many people who gave me a hand up. I don't think it was altogether my talent, because it was unproved, very early, and someone has to have faith in you. And it's kind of a blind faith because nine times out of ten the person will fail, I think. But--it's this generosity that I love.

I did the section in the *High Styles* show in the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. It was on 1945 to '55, and most of it was on the... The Eames dominated my section of the show. Bob Venturi designed the show.

I'm looking for things that I may have done, and it's hard to, because it's hard to remember. [Sound of papers being turned over] I seem to have written in so many fields, so long, and I don't see too much of.... I liked getting away from architecture and into writing about people I'd known. That was a great relief; I've liked doing that, and I'm glad to see them published. Simon and Schuster asked for a book of them, and if I can put them together... Some of the early things of my childhood, before going to New York, are in first and second draft, and I hope to get those together some time.

JG: You have them among your papers here?

EM: Yes, they are, yes, and I think copies of them are at the Smithsonian.

JG: So this is a different set of portraits from the ones you've done for *Grand Street*?

EM: Yes. The early sections of it, and some later sections. There's one on Paris that I'd never finished, the time in Paris, the people I met there. That is around, mainly, one of the editors of the magazine *transition*, and the people, the *transition* group, many of whom were writers on the *Tribune*, the *Paris Tribune*.

JG: And how do you see it as a book? Do you see it as one book?

EM: No, I see it as a book, really, of people, and I think it's very hard to write about oneself. It's when there is another person that you can... Yourself, your own personality develops as it's in relation to other people, is the only way I find I can comfortably write about myself. Eudora Welty had a phrase about this; "correcting history," she said, and that's what one does, in writing about oneself. You correct history. So I correct less if I write about someone else. One's family is the hardest thing to write about, I think.

Living so long in one house as a child, one remembers, I remember every corner of it and relive it many times. And I like writing about place. I place someone in a certain position. You know, Joe, yesterday you said something about my... Something I had said to you about your review of *Vienna to Los Angeles*. I think you said that I wrote that it was as if you had leaned over my shoulder, was it?

JG: Yes, "looked over my shoulder."

EM: Looked over my shoulder as I was writing. I think that is the way I write, as I set up a place, and I feel myself in that place, and walk that place, and it's very--as if I could touch things. And it's the way--the house in which I grew up... But then, also, going to boarding school at age thirteen, I can remember the rooms there very well, and the look, the colonnaded entrance, and my room.

JG: Do you know what school that was?

EM: Yes, the name had been changed to Central College, but it was an academy, and it was turned into a... I've forgotten what they changed the name to. It was a school in Lexington, Missouri. There was a military academy there too, Wentworth. There was another one that is still... This was closed; it burned and was closed. There was one near there that we almost went to that was called Stevens. I've had no diploma from anything because we finished high school there, at Central, but there was no diploma. So I've never had any diploma of any sort. There are a number of people...

JG: In college, as well?

EM: Yeah. Some of my credits were not going to be accepted, but they would be if I would go to summer school. But having been to college for four years, that seemed a little too much. I was eager to go on to New York, and I thought I'd had enough education. But I had more than enough credits for a degree.

I remember at the boarding school, the Phillips girls were there, Phillips oil. They were beautiful girls. I said yesterday that Bruce was an Osage. It's not true, he was a... Oh God! now I can't say it--it's a tribe which most of these girls were. They're very beautiful Indians. Cherokee, Cherokee tribe, most of them belonged to.

[END TAPE 8, SIDE 1; counter at 394)

[TAPE 8, SIDE 2, blank)

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