Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Robert Indiana, 1963 Sept. 12-Nov. 7

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions
www.aaa.si.edu/

Transcript

Interview

RB: RICHARD BROWN BAKER
RI: ROBERT INDIANA

RB: This is Richard Brown Baker, September 12, 1963. I am in the studio of Robert Indiana, a young painter whose fame, I should imagine, is only two years old, perhaps three years old. . .

RI: Fame isn't that old, Richard.

RB: In any event, this is early in his public career, but he's already quite well-known, and I'm going to begin by reading one or two statements that have been made about his painting by critics. In the *New York Post* of October 28, 1962, Irving Sandler wrote: "Indiana is sentimental about the American scene and Pop culture, but he also tries to be tough and ironic. Composed of interestingly painted hard-edge, flat forms and stenciled words and phrases the texts are from the names of corporations, highways, Melville, Whitman, Longfellow. His canvases look like pinball machines, roadside signs and signals." I'll just interrupt - there's one more sentence - but that, I think, is a kind of more or less accurate factual description of your painting, or. . .

RI: It is of several canvases, Dick, that's for sure.

RB: He, I presume, was discussing your first show at the Stable Gallery when he wrote this.

RI: I think this is. . .

RB: So it would be relating to that particular batch of paintings. Now there is one more sentence to Mr. Sandler's comment which you might want to make some remarks about. Sandler said: "The trouble with Indiana's simplified images is that they come across loud and clear as symbols for the American scene but not as profound visual experiences." Now, do you want to defend yourself against that, or. . .?

RI: I think all I can say about that is, Mr. Sandler perhaps needs to look at my paintings a little bit longer.

RB: That's very possibly the case, of course, because they would be the sort of paintings that would have rather subtle visual impact so that it would not automatically be perceptible. . .

RI: A little more exposure and he might be a little bit more sympathetic.

RB: Well, even before that was written, as a matter of fact, in the *Art News* of September 1962, G. R. Swenson wrote: "Indiana's concern with unsuspected artistic juxtapositions is subtle and concrete. There was something impudent in these works, something so simple-minded and obvious as to be unsuspected."

RI: Certainly Mr. Swenson must have seen something a little bit more than Ms. Sandler and this is as I would hope it would be.

RB: Well, Mr. Swenson has perhaps a greater familiarity with your work than Sandler.

RI: Much greater.

RB: More recently, on July 28, 1963, *The Providence Sunday Journal* published a review of the show at the Museum of Modern Art in which you are represented and this article was written by a man named Lawrence Rubin. He said, "The forms of Robert Indiana derive from slot machines, pin-wheels and amusement park art but are transformed in his hands to extremely simple geometric and verbal statements. The decorative and abstract elements seem to be a means toward both a childlike fantasy and sly social criticism." Do you consider you are consciously doing social criticism, or is this sly social criticism something that gets there perhaps without very great intention on your part?

RI: I don't think I really mean it to be - shall we say? - sly, Dick.

RB: No, you may not mean it to be sly, but do you mean it as social criticism?

RI: There is in certain paintings overt social criticism, yes.

RB: You see, I was recently talking with Richard Stankiewicz about his sculpture and I read him some statements that had been made in reference to his work and he said he was amused by a great many of the critical remarks that read into his sculpture social satire that he did not have very strongly in the forefront of his mid as he did the work. So since I had this experience with him very recently, I was tempted to ask you right now what degree of "message" you intend by your paintings?

RI: In many of them the message is very conscious and very strong and, in my mind, explicit. It might be enigmatic to, shall we say? The general public, but I don't particularly mean there should. . .

RB: Well, when I entered the studio this afternoon my eye immediately lit upon a painting which I at one admired, the title *Yield Brother* - which hangs opposite us at this moment. And you told me that it was going to be sent to England to. . .

RI: Well, it is a contribution t the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, and there's going to be an exhibit at Woburn Abbey this fall in London, and of al the paints contributed by artists from all over the world, the proceeds from this exhibit and sale will go to the Foundation for Peace, which I think is a new wing of Russell's activity. This painting *Yield Brother* actually has been painted expressly for the Foundation and in it I have incorporated a symbol which the "Ban the Bomb" people use, and that is the death. . .

RB: You said, which the "somebody" people use - I didn't quite get that phrase.

RI: All those people who are affiliated with Russell in his ban nuclear war.

RB: Oh: You said "Ban the Bomb" - Was that the phrase you used? It wasn't quite clear to my ear.

RI: Yes. They have adopted this symbol which is actually an old medieval symbol, and it is "death to man" is the significance of it. And, of course, that's what the bomb stands for. But it was from an earlier painting of mine which has been done for, oh, about two years. And therefore the theme *Yield Brother* I have had in mind for a long time. But I have brought it up to date with this new symbolism.

RB: Well, I think this is a very relevant situation to this subject that I brought up on basis of his remark about social criticism because you pointed out to me that also hanging is a smaller, earlier painting which has the phrase *Yield Brother* that you said you did several years ago and this does not have, I take it, this symbol that the Russell "Ban the Bomb" people. . .

RI: Right. Quite right. The Small painting uses the direct inspiration and this refers to some of the comments about my work that you have just been reading. This is taken from a street sign which means yield, give the right of way to either pedestrian or some oncoming traffic, and it is a very much simpler symbol than the Russell but actually very much through the simple round field has only been -- the only addition necessary was the two arms or, as you like it, legs of man himself.

RB: Well, it's too bad that the tape hasn't got photographs of the two paintings as we talk about them but I think this is a very interesting illustration of this question because, can you remember back to the time that you painted the small painting? And you did it with this traffic sign and *Yield Brother*. Therefore, I would imagine that if you had a reference to a situation you were thinking perhaps in terms of traffic - yield brother, yield the right of way. Is that what it would have. . .?

RI: That was the . . . of course, that's the reference from the traffic standpoint. This is not at all what my painting is about. By adopting the Biblical language of *Yield Brother*, and it is Biblical language, I bring this up into a question of - shall we say? Christian ethics, and certainly my *Yield Brother*, my new painting, is very much addressed to a civilization which is supposed to be governed by Christian ethics.

RB: Well, I'm trying to clarify in my understanding whether your original creation, whether

there was any real emphasis in your mind on a message. I

recognize. . .of course, you know there are artistic elements to the painting, formal values and all the rest, it both these paintings, but now I am just trying to attack this one question of the social message because it happens that the larger painting *Yield Brother* does seem to fit the category of a painting with a message, you might say, or motivation behind it. The very fact that you have done it to send to a political or a philosophic movement as a contribution and that you have embodied into it a symbol, as you describe, means that this is a conscious artistic message on your part.

RI: There is, Dick; and, of course, by doing this second painting, especially for the organization, the message has picked up, it's been added to and its importance is greater than in the first painting. The political overtones in the second painting were totally missing from the first. There is a political connotation, there is the philosophic, there is the social. Whereas in the first painting it was purely a social message and that is that I am addressing people with something like - shall we say? The gold rule. And that is a personal, social message that any resistance is good to put down in a personal, psychological manner.

RB: Well, I've always had the impression from that I've read that when an artist attempts too strongly to convey a message, he's apt to ruin the artistic value of his work, but I will testify that in my personal judgment this new painting, with the conscious political intention, is a superior work of art. The formal results are very satisfactory to me. Now, speaking of formal results, I wanted to read one other critical comment that was made on your work by Sam Hunter. He says, "The paintings of Ellsworth Kelly and Robert Indiana can also be linked to the movement toward a more rigorous formality." Now you would agree with that, would you not?

RI: I would agree, and I think this is probably the more important aspect of my work. The messages that my work might contain, the verbal aspects, the use of words, certainly I never mean for it to be more than - shall we say? -fifty percent of the total and sometimes my active interest is much less than that. It is the formal aspect of my painting which fascinates me most.

RB: Mr. Hunter referred to Ellsworth Kelly, and I just will make the statement that he is a neighbor of yours in this section of New York and i believe is an old personal friend of yours. Is that correct?

RI: Ellsworth was probably my first artist friend in New York upon my arrival here - oh, almost eight, seven years ago, and he's been a neighbor ever since and we have been very close friends.

RB: And you would freely acknowledge that he represents a kind of - what do we say? - intellectual influence, or that you think in parallel lines, to a certain extent, about creative art? In other words, you both are hard-edge aspect of my work I owe very much to my admiration of Kelly's---

RB: Well, that's very interesting because your work does not really resemble his. Nobody possibly would confuse your paintings with his, I don't think. I don't suppose there's ever been an Ellsworth Kelly containing words, has there?

RI: There never has been, and I don't think anyone has ever---There's absolutely no room for confusion. As I say, it's only a matter of technique itself, not style, not content, not form, not anything.

RB: Well, we are eventually going to go into your life on a more or less chronological basis but it might not be inappropriate now to ask whether your painting before you knew Ellsworth Kelly, before you came here, was in any way hard-edge, or how it differed from your present style?

RI: The actual technique, the process of painting flat color and simple geometric edges all dates from my time here on Coenties Slip. The connecting aspect between my present work and my earlier paintings, (and there really are in existence not too many of those anymore), I was always very concerned with a rather central image and one of a very fixed quality. When I was painting portraits and - shall we say? -rather allegorical heads, which is the figurative work which immediately preceded the direction I have since gone, these images were always of a very fixed, rigid quality and, of course, my work still has this aspect.

RB: I'm not sure I fully conceive what you mean by "fixed." Can you elaborate?

RI: Yes, certainly. My work never had any element of movement, motion, compositional flux, any of those things which are associated with art since the Renaissance, shall we say? In other words, the pre-art, before the Renaissance, the Romanesque and the Byzantine, were all --- People where fixed. This is what my work would have been closer to.

RB: Is "rigid" an analogous word at all, or. . .?

RI: I use it only because of its application to hard-edge. I find that there's a play between the two.

RB: You see, I haven't ever seen these earlier pictures and portraits to which you're referring so I don't have the advantage of visualizing what you did then. And it's nevertheless my impression --- You and I met quite a few years ago --- and at that time you had not exhibited and I had never seen any of your work, in fact i don't think I saw any of your work until -- well, the last time I was here, but I'm not sure when that was. . . that was two years ago, or less than two years ago? Anyway, you already had developed this style quite characteristically, not refined it perhaps to the extent that you since have, but I mean it was definitely there as a style. And the influence, if it was such technically, that you derived from Ellsworth Kelly was already manifest in all these things. You have always been rather opposed to the very fluid kind of painting, the messy type, haven't you?

RI: Well, I haven't necessarily been opposed to it, Dick, but I certainly have never been much taken up with it and have never felt myself very comfortable in that kind of an expression.

RB: Bob, I always like to ask each artist to say his name on the tape, to pronounce it. Would you do that?

RI: Robert Indiana.

RB: Now, I always also ask them, and in this case it's a particularly fruitful question, have you ever used any other name? In your case, I think you are really not Robert Indiana by birth?

RI: Robert Indiana is definitely a "nom de brush" - shall we say? - and --- However, it is the only

name that I use now, and the only name that I care to use.

RB: But, for historical -- Well, the telephone directory still has you listed under Robert Clark. If you're not going to say Robert Clark, I'm going to say it.

RI:*You* may. *You* may.

RB: What was your father's name?

RI: Earl Clark.

RB: Earl Clark. And you spell Clark with or without an "e"?

RI: I don't. But he spelled it without.

RB: He spelled it without an "e." When were you born?

RI: September 13, 1928.

RB: Where?

RI: Newcastle, Indiana.

RB: And at that time, what was the circumstance of your parents' life, what was you father's career?

RI: My whole life, Dick, was very much affected and bound up with that phenomenon called the Depression, and at the time of my infancy, (that was a little bit before the Depression),

my father was connected with oil companies, worked for Phillips "66" a little later, and of course that Phillips "66" sign, which haunted most of my childhood, I suppose now I am just beginning to react to it. It was always an image which was very central in my whole life.

RB: Had you older brother and sisters?

RI: None.

RB: And how long had your parents been married when you were born?

RI: Oh, I really don't know offhand. . .

RB: Well, I mean, several years or only just young newlyweds?

RI: Yes. A few years - not newlyweds - a few years.

RB: Well, it's my notion that it's interesting to have some idea of the first visual experiences of an artist. In other words, what the kind of physical environment in which you emerged from being a baby into being a child, and what kind of a home that was. Was it in the country, or the city? Was it a large house. . .?

RI: Well, first of all, I think it's pertinent to say that my mother suffered from wanderlust and that before I was seventeen years old I had lived in twenty-one different houses.

RB: Ha, we'll go through each one of those. . .

RI: Yes.

RB: Now we're on the first one that you remember.

RI: The first that I remember?

RB: Yes.

RI: Of course, that's pretty much lost in infancy. I remember bits and pieces of several different houses.

RB: Well, you've already mentioned this recollection of the Phillips "66" sign and what I'm trying to discover is if you have any, if you retain any particular early sensations or memories of decoration in the home or furniture, or paintings on the walls. . .?

RI: I must have. I can --- Although I lived in all these different houses, the furniture and the paintings on the wall were consistent from the very beginning to the end, because there again the Depression figured into that, and that is that the furniture that I was for the first time I saw at the very end, because my parents, due to the way that they were affected by the Depression, were never able to afford anything else except that which we started with. So it never changed.

RB: Well, I get the impression of a not very prosperous childhood, but let me go back and ask something about -- I never asked the name of your mother before her marriage. What was her name?

RI: My mother's name was Carmen Waters.

RB: Carmen Waters.

RI: Yes. She was named for the Carmen of Bizet's opera because that was her father's favorite opera.

RB: What was his name, your maternal grandfather's name?

RI: He died before I was born, and to tell you the truth, offhand, I really couldn't say; I don't know.

RB: Do you remember your other grandfather?

RI: Yes, yes. He's already figured in one of my paintings -- the *Highball on the Redball Manifest* in the American show at the Museum of Modern Art was painted with that paternal

grandfather a little bit in mind, not really very much. He was a locomotive driver on the Pennsylvania Railroad, and that Highball painting is a locomotive painting.

RB: It's very interesting since you're about to have this dual show with Richard Stankiewicz in a short time in the Walker Art Center. Did you know that his father, who died when he was an infant, was killed while working (this was his father) on the Pennsylvania Railroad?

RI: Is that right? Maybe my grandfather ran over him.

RB: It's possible. Well, you didn't tell me your grandfather's first name?

RI: That was Fred.

RB: Fred Clark. And where did he live?

RI: Originally, and then this is a little bit lost, I'm not too sure myself, but i think my father's family had come from the West and had returned to Indiana because there were frequent references to places like Texas and Kansas and Alabama and things like that. As a youth I think that was where he spent his younger years. I know my grandmother often spoke of setting type shortly after the Civil War period for a little Kansas newspaper.

RB: Oh, really, Your grandmother had a job of this sort? Did she influence your childhood? Your grandparents, did they ever live --- Did you ever live in their home?

RI: No. There was never very much proximity. They were always the people down on the farm that we went to visit on Sunday, and big chicken dinners and a heavy table with maybe twenty-five relatives all seated around it, or eating watermelons out under the trees by the pump, or this kind of rural Hoosier. . .

RB: Good old Hoosier tradition. Well, I take it, it was a big family or your father had lots of brothers and sisters?

RI: There were lots of brothers and sisters in that department.

RB: Then, you had a lot of first cousins and things of that sort, I suppose?

RI: I did, and I've lost track of all of them.

RB: I asked you if you had older brothers and sisters. Were you an only child?

RI: An only child.

RB: An only child. But you weren't particularly close then to any of your cousins of your own generation?

RI: Not really, because of this business of moving around so much. Most of the time I didn't live very close to them.

RB: Did anybody on either your father's or mother's side of the family have any relation to the fine arts in any way?

RI: None whatsoever.

RB: You are really the first artist in the family as far as you know?

RI: The first artist, and all of my early ambitions, which started at the age of about five or six, were immensely discouraged I was told before I

RI: even started into school that if I should persist in this ambition I'd be eating bean soup and living in a garret. And that's exactly what happened.

RB: This was from both your mother and father? Neither one was sympathetic?

RI: Neither one was sympathetic to art as a career. They were very sympathetic to my actual drawing and painting and encouraged me to do this, but they discouraged it as a possible profession.

RB: Well, do you think they were influenced by their own financial difficulties in the

depression to have your material welfare in mind?

RB: Well, do you think they were influenced by their own financial difficulties in the Depression to have your material welfare in mind?

RI: I'm sure they were.

RB: I think that would really e the normal parental approach in this country to an artist and his career, wouldn't it?

RI: Of course.

RB: They had no friends I suppose who were artists?

RI: There was no connection with any cultural activity at all.

RB: Well, were either of your parents interested in music?

RI: No.

RB: Or literature?

RI: No. Very, very simple people with very simple interests.

RB: Well, you said you moved so many times. Now, how long in your birthplace? Did you remain in that town for long or did you move to other towns?

RI: Oh, towns, counties - the only common geographical distinction was the state of Indiana.

RB: So you lived over all of Indiana. Well, I would like for the record, if you could remember, to go through some of those actual moves. Did the process of moving and changing residence have any emotional effect on you as a child?

RI: I'm sure it must have. I'm sure it must have.

RB: You don't remember incidents in which you were disturbed over this?

RI: Of course. Particularly in reference to changing schools. I was always very unhappy about leaving one school and going to another school. Frequently, it would be a country school where either art wasn't taught art too, and she probably was more interested in music than she was in art, which always made me very unhappy.

RB: I would like to stick still for a moment to the pre-school period, though, and get that. . . I presume you didn't go to school till you were about age six?

RI: No, I started school when I was seven, Dick, because it turned out that ordinarily a child in Indiana would have started at six and it was decided that I had. . . was not particularly strong at that time and that I should be held back for a year. And I was. So therefore I started when I was seven, but I later made that up by skipping an elementary grade.

RB: Well, in that period before you went to school, how many homes did you have, do you think?

RI: Oh, that probably would have been something like ten or twelve.

RB: Actually that many?

RI: Yes, because the frequency tended to draw out a little bit as I got older. The more frequent moves were - took place when I was a young child.

RB: You attributed this to your mother's wanderlust?

RI: Yes, she couldn't bear to live in one house longer than a year.

RB: How did this affect your father's job-holding - whatever he was doing?

RI: Very adversely. It made for a very bad situation and therefore the whole marital aspect was probably not good.

RB: Well, I'm not sure. . . Did I ask you what jobs your father held during these first few years?

RI: He was usually connected with petroleum companies for some reason I'm not quite sure.

RB: Well, what sort of. . .?

RI: Of an administrative nature.

RB: An office worker? In other words, he didn't operate a gasoline pump?

RI: No. Only during the darkest time of the Depression I think he actually did. The original company that he worked for when I was born was one that went out of business because of the Depression and immediately after that I think he did operate a filling station. But this was a very short period and he was back in the administrative side shortly thereafter. Now, why he was always so concerned with this, when his own father had been a railroader and when in his early youth he had worked for railroads, I don't know. But he somehow got interested in gasoline and therefore some of my early paintings are gas paintings, you see.

RB: To what would you attribute this curious tendency of your mother's to want to move constantly? Was this some sort of poetic enthusiasm for change on her part, or inability to get on with the neighbors, or what sort of. . .?

RI: No. Nothing like that. My mother was of a very easy, outgoing disposition, who made friends very easily. It would have been my father who was the anti-social one. I really don't know. I almost think my mother had a kind of fetish and a fascination about architecture or about domestic structures themselves. She loved, for instance - most of my childhood I can remember we would travel miles and miles in the country just to find empty houses and explore them, you see, and as a child I couldn't have been more delighted, and my mother loved to find an empty house and go poking through it. And I think this carried into her own

RI: domestic life. She loved new houses, she loved to explore them and get acquainted with them, and then after doing so she got bored very fast and was soon looking for the next one. Now that this means psychologically i really don't know.

RB: I'm almost surprised that she didn't become a real estate agent.

RI: She should have.

RB: But that shows a kind of poetic or, I don't know that poetic is the word, but an imaginative side to her life. It's rather interesting, isn't it?

RI: Yes, but only of a limited and simple nature.

RB: You had a family car, I take it? and drove around. . .

RI: Always. The car, the car seemed to be the one... Another dominating and consistent aspect of my childhood, and that is it seemed that half my life was spent in the automobile. We were always driving some place for something. It was a very mobile childhood, that's for sure.

RB: You sound like a Steinbeck character at the moment. Were you particularly attracted toward cars, I mean did the American dream for cars, or was your father. . .?

RI: Obviously, my mother and father were. . .?

RB: Were very proud of their. . . What would they have?

RI: Well, at one time my father had his car and my mother had her car and of course this was very much going to poorhouse in an automobile because that's exactly where they both were, but they still both had their own cars, you see.

RB: Well now, to get back to these various houses. I take it they were rented, never owned?

RI: Not always. My family did purchases, oh, I think several houses, but there again, that didn't stop my mother. She went tearing right ahead.

RB: But they took the same furniture from place to place?

RI: Always it was the same furniture. It never changed, never changed. When my mother died I had the unhappy task of selling off some of whatever furniture was left and her washing machine, which she had had for twenty-one years, and which I remember all my life. It was a very wild and woolly primitive washing machine. It was auctioned off for twenty-five cents.

RB: What year was this?

RI: This was '49, I think. The year that I was discharged from the Air Force was the year of her death, the death of my stepfather and my entry into art school in Chicago. So '49 was a pretty heavy year.

RB: Crucial year. Well, we'll leave that for the future. I am interested, though, still to try and get a conception of something of this artistic, or lack of artistic, quality in your immediate environment as a child. What kind of furniture was this? Was it heavy, ugly furniture? Was this rather nice. . .?

RI: It was typical late 1920 borax, pseudo-Spanish, heavily-upholstered, heavily-gilded frames and heavily-gilded lamps with heavy lamp shades, and the whole bit. . .

RB: Well, the way you describe it, I have a feeling some of your painting is in revolt against the furniture that surrounded your youth. Your painting is certainly different from. . .

RI: It might very well be. My painting is that Phillips "66" sign which I saw all during my youth and which was the one most fascinating visual object in my entire youth because I saw that sign for years and years and years. This was a very large construction which probably was about ten stories high which towered over a phillips "66" gasoline station. And it was illuminated at night with neon. . .

RB: Where was this?

RI: In Indianapolis.

RB: In Indianapolis?

RI: Yes, because most of all these residences that I speak of were either in or near Indianapolis. I would never live too far away from the very center of Indianapolis.

RB: They were always suburban or urban, never actually real country?

RI: Yes. They even. . . It did include a farm. Of course, there was always my grandparents' farm and my aunts' and uncles' farms. All my father's people were really farm people to begin with. When my grandfather retired from the railroad, he went to a farm and, of course, he had spent his youth as a farm boy. But I had a calf and animals and a garden when I was a young boy, and it was not a working farm but it had those things that farms have.

RB: You're fond of animals. You have a cat on your lap at the moment. Did you have pets as a child, then?

RI: I always had dogs and cats and, as I say, calves and chickens and all those kind of things.

RB: Did you do any gardening?

RI: Yes, surely.

RB: As a small boy?

RI: Yes. Which is carried over now, because I still have -- I still have my garden.

RB: I'm trying to imagine whether this fascination with the Phillips "66" sign was purely in terms of its design or whether the fact that your father was in the gasoline business carried an association that interested you too. . .?

RI: Both of them.

RB: Double association.

RI: That's what fed me.

RB: And this in a way relates to your painting, doesn't it? Because they have formal value - the hard-

edge painting and then they have the extra associations of the words, and that is perhaps a connection there?

RI: It is, very vivid. That it should come out so much later is, of course, interesting, but subconsciously there it was all the time.

RB: Do you remember doing a lot of drawing as a small boy?

RI: Yes, surely.

RB: Crayon?

RI: Yes. I never had the exposure to techniques and so forth that children have today with art workshops, but I always had crayons and pencils and still have work going right back to when I was five or six years old.

RB: You kept that? Or your parents must have kept it?

RI: No. I find that I was my own curator. My parents were never really quite that interested, and everything that I kept I kept myself.

RB: Well now, you've already mentioned that in changing schools you sometimes didn't get a very good art teacher. Can we go back now to the very beginning of your first schooling. What was the first school you entered?

RI: Well, interestingly enough, and, of course, of great interest to me, my first school was this small town in central Indiana called Mooresville.

RB: How do you spell that?

RI: M o o r e s v i l l e. This is about twenty miles below Indianapolis and it was nearby that I lived on the farm that I spoke of. . .

RB: Your grandfather's?

RI: No. My mother's and father's. My grandmother and grandfather for some reason had moved to Mooresville and they lived on a very short street called Lockerbie Street and it was into their house that my own mother and father later moved -- they had moved to a different house -- nd this was from the country. It turned out that there

RI: was a very narrow, steep country road that in the wintertime my father could not navigate in his automobile. It became so dangerous and so ice-covered that they found it necessary to move into the small town. Now, we were there, first of all, for my own health, but moving into this little town didn't make any difference about that. And it just so happened that Mooresville was the home town of John Dillinger, who was Indiana's most notorious citizen.

RB: Criminal.

RI: Yes, criminal. And I lived there when he was shot in Chicago where I later went to art school and actually saw his funeral.

RB: Well, what age?

RI: I was six or seven.

RB: Oh, yes. That's a vivid recollection there, of course.

RI: Very vivid, yes. And definitely it means that there'll be a Dillinger painting one day.

RB: Do I infer that you had at the age of six or seven a kind of romantic admiration for

Dillinger, or you hated him?

RI: Oh, no, no. I didn't hate him. I didn't know anything about hating people. He was the man whose name was always at the top of the newspaper and he was the man that everybody was talking about.

RB: You don't remember your personal bias for or against?

RI: If I had one, I don't recall it now. No. I'm sure I. . . It was like cops and robbers. It was probably very exciting and that was about all.

RB: Do you recollect the first art instruction you had in school?

RI: Oh, surely, very vividly. My first grade teacher was a woman named Miss Coffin and which I am very interested in learning, finding out much later that this is the name which also appears in the first chapter of *Moby Dick.* And many, many of my paintings have come from the first chapter of *Moby Dick* - Coffin being a very famous Nantucket. . .

RB: Yes, I know.

RI: Whether she was related to that New England family I don't know: But she was a very sympathetic teacher and taught all the subjects. It was. . .

RB: She was the regular class teacher?

RI: Yes, she handled the art and music as well as arithmetic and reading and greatly encouraged me in my own art activities and at the end of that first year took some of my drawings and asked if she might keep them, that she wanted to hold these, so that one day when I became a famous artist, why she'd have them in her trunk, you see.

RB: Have you checked to find whether she has them in her trunk?

RI: That I haven't done. But it was a great -- I must say, a great incentive and a great spur.

RB: Well, it's quite clear from this that she did see in your work something superior to the rest of the students. That seems evident.

RI: I suppose so.

RB: How big a class was this, about twenty or something?

RI: Well, no, this was a large, this was a big room filled with students. Due to the fact that I was older than the regular first grade students, I was put into a wing of first grade in the second grade room, so that my first year's instruction took place in what was really the second grade room. And a year after that I skipped the second grade and went into the third grade at a different school.

RB: Did you feel any kind of humiliation at being behind the others in educational. . .?

RI: No, never. That never occurred to me.

RB: Well, it would just have been a small part of the curriculum, I suppose, to do these drawings and things like that?

RI: Oh, sure.

RB: But you particularly enjoyed this, I suppose.

RI: I drew at home, and these drawings, in fact, that she kept I suppose really were done at home and not in the classroom.

RB: She taught you to read?

RI: Yes.

RB: Was that something you took to easily, or. . .?

RI: School was always -- It came very naturally to me, Dick. I never had any difficulty in

school.

RB: I forget why you were late in starting.

RI: Health.

RB: Yes, you mentioned your health. What was the trouble?

RI: I'm not too sure myself except that I seemed to be underweight and a little scraggly, and the doctor felt it would be better if I was outside of the industrial smog of Indianapolis and move to the country and postpone going to school for a year.

RB: You don't think they saw, say, incipient tuberculosis or anything like that. . .?

RI: I think it might have been considered that it was within the realm of possibility, but nothing ever developed so I can't say for sure.

RB: Well, during most of your school years you were normally healthy and strong?

RI: Yes, yes. There was never any. . . I never had any trouble in that way.

RB: And you got. . .in your relative scholastic standing, then, you were toward the top of the class, I take it, as a boy?

RI: Yes, yes.

RB: What sort of reading did you do in your early boyhood?

RI: Well, my reading, of course, was all orientated to Americana, of anything except American authors.

RB: You mean this was all that you knew of -- you say "of course" -- I mean it doesn't seem inevitable that it should be so concentrated. Or was it inevitable. . .?

RI: It turned out to be that way. I didn't become...Literature was never one of my most active interests. I was always primarily concerned with painting and I didn't discover, shall we say? world literature until I became older and on my own.

RB: Well, this becomes of interest in view of the fact that many of your paintings do contain quotations from American authors.

RI: Yes.

RB: I'm not sure -- do any of them contain phrases from non-American authors?

RI: Not at this point, and they probably won't, because that more literary aspect of my painting is probably already over with.

RB: This is a conscious rejection on your part of the literary aspect as such in painting?

RI: Possibly it's just that I feel my more successful paintings are those which don't become quite so involved with phrases. I prefer the single word.

RB: Yes. Well, nevertheless it has been a rather unusual feature of your paintings that they did contain these readily - understandable, direct references to aspects of American literature or history, like your painting Calumet - is it? - with the Indian tribes. . .

RI: Yes.

RB: . . . and all sorts of. . . In other words, I can imagine somebody doing a little essay on the reflections in your painting of American history and culture, you see. . . the sort of thing which you couldn't imagine so much in the painting of, say, of Hans Hofmann or all sorts of other artists, I mean. So this is why I want to go into this childhood thing more.

RI: Yes. But given the whole body of my work, those paintings really are going to represent a very small aspect of it, Richard, and I'm not pursuing that aspect.

RB: Yes. Well, that's, I presume going to be the case, although you might fifteen years from

now revert even more heavily in that direction. We can't foresee. . .

RI: I doubt it, because this was the starting point, and I just don't think that's going to happen.

RB: Well, it's then established that this Hoosier childhood was not vastly absorbed in American literature and things like this. . . You didn't read Whitman on your mother's knee, or Longfellow by the fireside at the age of eight?

RI: I became acquainted with writers like Whitman and Melville and even Twain only when I got to high school, I'd say.

RB: Bob, did you have much interest in athletic events and so on as a boy?

RI: No, probably due to this scraggly condition of mine, athletics never was very much of a preoccupation.

RB: Was it compulsory or. . . You never went to private schools? You always went to public schools?

RI: Always to public schools. Always to public schools.

RB: Yes. And they varied, I gather, from what you said earlier, quite a bit in quality, as you moved from place to place?

RI: Tremendously, yes.

RB: Well now, you said you were upset over these changes. Was this because of the difference in teaching or because you were separated from friends that you made in these schools?

RI: Well, of course, there was the separation from playmates and so forth, but at this point I must admit I can't recall whether that was the main reason for my unhappiness. I suspect, and as I

RI: remember, it was really more the appalling difference in instruction and I really wanted to learn very badly and some of these schools were so bad I was aware of it, and I knew myself that I wasn't getting a very good education.

RB: Inevitably, you felt brighter than some of the other students, then, in certain of these circumstances?

RI: I suppose so.

RB: Well, when did you leave this. . . You spoke about this first teacher in this town. . . now where did you go from there? How long were you in that school?

RI: I was in the Mooresville school for my first grade, living part of the time in the town and part of the time in the country, which, the country meant long, long school bus rides over the kind of rolling - southern Indiana becomes rather hilly, and I used to have these long, beautiful rides through the country each day to school. Then the second year it was back to Indianapolis and it was back to an urban school - probably a much better school - but there were so many immediate moves on the part of my mother that my second grade was split up into about three different schools, and this was really. . .

RB: All in one year?

RI: All in one year.

RB: In the second grade, and you would only have been about eight at this time?

RI: Yes.

RB: Well, that would be very disturbing, I should think, and made your progress as a student hard.

RI: That was bad. But then from the third grade to the sixth grade was one of the few stable

times of my childhood. My mother and father did buy a house and they did settle down a little bit more than they had theretofore. And I had those four years in one school, and this was Cumberland, Indiana.

RB: Cumberland, Indiana. How big a place is Cumberland?

RI: Even smaller than Mooresville. It's practically not much more than just a widening in the road, or it was at that time. Now Indianapolis has stretched out so far that it's probably almost incorporated into the city as a suburb. But at that time it was a very small town slightly east of Indianapolis and it had an old, nineteenth-century, towered, gabled, Victorian, red brick schoolhouse with a bell in the tower, and there it was that I spent four years and had a little bit of stability for a change.

RB: Which years were those in your life? What age were you?

RI: Well, I was probably between eight and twelve, something like that.

RB: There you formed some friendships, I suppose, with some of the fellow students?

RI: Yes, yes.

RB: Do you remember any of them now as people -- I mean. . .?

RI: Not very clearly, no, no. And I've never maintained any contact with any. . . I lost contact with them years and years ago.

RB: Anticipating chronology, but since you have chosen to name yourself "Indiana," one infers that you have a very strong liking for Indiana, a very strong attachment to it. Is that correct?

RI: I think I probably do. It's home and it's the place of most all of my most pleasant memories. That's not really the reason that I chose the name. I chose it because it was my birthplace. Whether I had lived there for twenty-one years or. . . seventeen it was. . .or whether I lived there for less, it wouldn't have made any difference. But I also liked the name. . .

RB: You mean as a sound?

RI: As a sound, yes.

RB: But obviously its connotations would have to be agreeable to you?

RI: They are.

RB: I mean, you couldn't have had in summation a childhood that you so hated that anything to do with Indiana would be displeasing to you and still call yourself that?

RI: I don't think so.

RB: But one wants to discover the extent to which you have - shall we say? a sentimental attachment to Indiana as a place. And if it exists as an attachment, is it focused on the landscape or on the character of the people particularly?

RI: Not the character of the people. I have divorced myself from Hoosiers pretty completely. People from Indiana have a peculiar way of talking which I lost. . . I don't know that I ever had it. . . but I lost it years and years ago. And, generally speaking, they're like my own family -- most of them are rather simple people with uncomplicated lives and I outgrew that a long, long time ago.

RB: Well, since we're on the subject of your name - I don't know that you've really said why you chose to abandon the name under which you were born and christened?

RI: Why did I choose?

RB: Yes.

RI: I suppose for one thing I was never particularly fond of the name, and one of the

immediate reasons that I chose to make the change was that there were two or there artists practicing and exhibiting in New York with that name, and I found this very. . .

RB: Is that so? Robert Clark?

RI: Well, no, no, with the last name. I found this a very uncomfortable situation.

RB: I don't recall any named Clark myself.

RI: I remember seeing them in. . .

RB: Well, naturally you would be more aware of Clark just the way I'm aware of other people being named. . .

RI: These were not prominent people. But just seeing it upset me, that's all.

RB: Well, it's a relatively rare thing, I believe, for painters to take another name. More literary people seem to do it - or actors, or people of that sort, but I can't think of many twentieth-century painters. . .

RI: This is a. . .not twentieth-century painters. . .

RB: Well, Gorky is one.

RI: Yes. But this was a Renaissance preoccupation.

RB: As a matter of fact, now that I think of it, Larry Rivers has a different name.

RI: Yes.

RB: But his name is so very complex that for a practical man. . .

RI: Well, I went the other direction. I went from a simple name to a more complicated one.

RB: Well, it's nevertheless an easily-pronounceable and easily-recognizable name. . .

RI: By coincidence, yes.

RB: . . . which I should think would be actually helpful to you in identifying. . .I mean it's a less anonymous name than Clark.

RI: Much more individual.

RB: Yes. And that's perhaps basically the reason you wanted to have it.

RI: Exactly. I should like to be the only person with my own name and I think at this point I am. Probably won't stay that way long, though.

RB: Well, just to finish this subject off, to my mind it seems evident that your choice of the name does not imply so great an affection for the state of Indiana that you're ever likely to go back and live there.

RI: I might, I don't know.

RB: I mean you're not here suffering tortures at separation from Indiana as a state?

RI: Not at all.

RB: I think we should make an observation that it's now raining and that's what's happening - that it's leaking through the studio. Now, just to interrupt the youthful history we were discussing, would you like to say something about this studio we're in, because it's a fascinating place, and I was just made to think this by the fact that it does leak in the roof. Is this a place that is heated in winter?

RI: No, no, I provide my own heat, Dick, with a potbelly stove.

RB: So in a certain way it's not provided with all the comforts of. . .?

RI: None whatsoever. I've lived in New York for the last seven years without even so much as a shower, you see, which is very primitive for New York.

RB: You have a bathtub?

RI: I have an old country-style tub.

RB: This is a very old building which was formerly used for what?

RI: It was a ship chandlery for maybe half a century. It was at one time the marine works, which is a subject of one or two of my pieces of work actually. Before that it was probably a warehouse. It's about a hundred and fifty years old. And it was on the busiest and the largest of all of Manhattan's slips. And. . .

RB: What does the word "slip" mean? Does it mean a pier? This is a thunderstorm going on. . .

RI: A "slip" is that construction that a ship berths in, you see. It slips into place and docks, you see.

RB: Oh! The old sailing vessels then of course docked here. . .

RI: Yes.

RB: . . .because we are on Lower Manhattan on the side where ships don't come in now much, do they? You're very near a heliport. (Earlier noises were sometimes provided not by this thunder we're currently hearing but by the arrival of these helicopters.)

RI: Yes, that's right.

RB: That goes on all day long, I take it?

RI: Yes. That's a new development. They took one of the old abandoned ship piers and turned it into a heliport and it provides a taxi service to Idlewild, La Guardia and Newark airports, and on the weekends there is a small helicopter which takes people up over the island of Manhattan, which I have ridden on a couple of times myself.

RB: Have you?

RI: Yes.

RB: This in a sense is one of the most interesting sections in all New York City, I think, because of the fact that it. . .how far away are you from the Wall Street area - about four minutes' walk, or. . .?

RI: No, not that. First of all, Wall Street is uptown from me and it's just two blocks away from my. . .

RB: So it's got the center of New York finance and business a very short way away and has -- to get back to this old building, this recollection of the early life of New York City -- we have. . .is this floor made of. . .wide beams, isn't it, the old-fashioned wide beams, then you have here, is this concrete or wood?

RI: The whole floor was probably wooden planks originally but when it was turned from a warehouse into a ship chandlery the concrete floor was put in so that metal things could be manufactured on this floor. This is the top floor and it was used as a kind of shop.

RB: This was a shop? Well, now the walls are painted white, but they are brick with no plaster or anything and there are big crossbeams across the ceiling. It's very much in the - shall we say? great tradition of artists' studios, being rather picturesque. Did you find this place long ago, or. . .?

RI: I've been here for the past -- oh, close to six, going on six years, Dick. When I first came to the slip I took another building which had previously been occupied. . .

RB: YOu mean you leased the whole building?

RI: No, no, excuse me, I didn't mean to say that, but I took a top loft in a building that also had been the Marine Works. Just by coincidence both buildings on Coenties Slip where the Marine Works shops and that building was torn down in less than a year after I came. It was demolished along with three neighboring buildings, one of which was the studio of Jack Youngerman, and we were next-door neighbors for about three years -- another American painter from Kentucky.

RB: Yes, yes. Jack Youngerman is from Kentucky?

RI: Yes. We would have been neighbors originally and so now we were neighbors here.

RB: Well, this building has on the ground floor a Spanish bar, doesn't it?

RI: The Rincon d'Espana.

RB: Is it actually Spanish, or is it Puerto Rican?

RI: No, it is Spanish and it caters to the Spanish Lines, which is one of the few companies that still docks on the East River.

RB: Do those ships ply between here and Spain, or do they go to Cuba and South America?

RI: Well, I doubt if they go to Cuba now, but they certainly ply the South American route, surely.

RB: I'm asking some of these questions because this neighborhood, I think, has had its influence in a sense on your paintings like those which are named. . .or contain names that are rather picturesque, like Coenties Slip and Corlears Hook and so on. You have utilized this environment in your work, haven't you?

RI: Even more directly, say, for instance, my painting *Rebecca* comes from a Civil War slaver which certainly would have passed by Coenties Slip in its own day and this ship was captured by the British and the men were punished for their activities. The *Year of Meteors* concerns the Great Eastern, another ship which would have sailed up the East River. These historical references are a part of those literary paintings which I probably won't be doing anymore.

RB: No. But you must have read about those ships -- I'm not to imagine that you sort of met in the neighborhood old mariners, bearded old gentlemen that sailed on these vessels? You've brought in distinct historic reference through historical means, haven't you? I mean you didn't see these ships?

RI: No, no, of course not.

RB: So, but you were inspired to read up about this history, is that it?

RI: Well, they came down via American literature, Dick. The Year of Meteors is from a Whitman poem; Rebecca is strictly from historical reference; the Melville Triptych, which is a painting that includes those words you mentioned: Corlear's Hook, Coenties Slip, and Whitehall - that comes from Melville's Moby Dick, the first chapter.

RB: Yes. And your interest in Moby Dick perhaps has been stimulated by living in this particular environment. . .?

RI: No, no. Moby Dick preceded the slip.

RB: No connection?

RI: Moby Dick preceded the slip.

RB: Well, I would like to go on a little more, since we entered the subject about this neighborhood, and how it affects your thinking and your life. You wrote a piece which you showed me, a very nicely-written piece which will be published in the catalogue of the Walker Art Center show that you are about to have, which is in a sense a description of this areas -- is it?

RI: That's right. This is for the Stankiewicz-Indiana show. And in preference to writing about

my work directly I chose to write about that which has influenced my work, and the slip has both been an influence and a very formative force in my painting.

RB: Well, there must be few places in the world that have quite these combinations of -- well, you get this - the modern financial world, the very up-to-date world so close during the daytime, you get the sound of ships, whistles, and you get these helicopters coming in; you have, of course, the Square; you have - what is that building that contains sailors? it it. . .?

RI: This is what we call the doghouse, it's the Seaman's Church Institute, which is a hostel for merchant seamen run by the Episcopal Church. And on the top of it is a lighthouse which shines at night and this is a memorial to the people who lost their lives in the Titanic disaster.

RB: Oh!

RI: So there'll probably be a Titantic painting one day, too.

RB: That's an interesting remark for you to make. I take it, the conception of certain of your paintings grows up slowly in you, you make a remark like that - there's a certain edge of a notion of an idea lodged now in your mind. . .

RI: A seed. . .

RB: A seed. In a couple of years from now this will -- or months --

RI: I can visualize or imagine doing a Titanic painting. First of all, because there is a lighthouse that shines through my skylights called "Titanic" and, secondly, I like the word "Titianc;" and, thirdly, "Titanic" means many other things besides ships and sinking and paintings.

RB: It seems to me each of your paintings must be conceived prior to its being painted.

RI: Very much so. Very much so.

RB: This, of course, ties in with your - I believe - disapproval of the more free-flowing, impulsive kind of Abstract Expressionism which in certain instances came into being without preconceived ideas of the ultimate painting. The artist simply painted. You don't have this approach ever, to your work?

RI: Hardly ever.

RB: Well, you couldn't very well, and just sort of throw it together, because. . .

RI: Certain things happen while I'm in the process of painting. There is room for a certain amount of change and improvisation, but to compare it with Abstract Expressionism would be very difficult.

RB: Well, what I'm actually in my own mind trying to figure out is when you make a remark like this "that there may be a Titanic painting," it is, of course, quite simple to imagine doing a painting with the word "Titanic" on it tomorrow or next year, or twenty years from now; but do you think the eventual painting "Titanic" is going to have a particular character formally or colors or shapes or whatever it is, more or less directly or, at least, subconsciously closely allied to the history of the Titanic and its sinking?

RI: Since my work is recently taking a figurative turn, Dick, and you haven't seen any of these canvases, it's very possible that there might be a ship in my Titanic painting.

RB: Ah! Well, this, of course, I hadn't foreseen. But what I am trying to establish is that each of these cases when you have an idea - you might call this a literary idea - some people would say that you would do a Titanic painting - I don't know whether that's a literary idea or not, but it's not purely a visual idea, is it?

RI: I prefer to think of it as verbal-visual, not literary.

RB: That's an interesting phrase. Is it one you have used often, verbal-visual?

RI: It's one I think about.

RB: Can you tell us a little about what you think about it - when you're thinking about verbal-visual?

RI: Well, I think I probably - what I am thinking about is the very elementary part that language plays in man's thinking processes and this includes his identification of anything visual and that is I'm sure that the word, the object, and the idea are almost inextricably lost in the mind, and to divide them and to break them down is not really - it doesn't have to be done. The artist has usually done it in the past. I prefer not to.

RB: Certain painters recently - people that I'm sure you know - have actually incorporated sound into their paintings. This would not --- Well, this you have not done yourself, first of all, have you?

RI: It's something that I haven't come to because I'm not very much given to mechanical dexterity but it is certainly something that I wouldn't necessarily scorn.

RB: Well, I'm trying to find out whether verbal-visual would include -- suppose it was very easy to do and you had a painting that repeated a certain phrase, every three seconds or something, in a beautiful voice; let's say, a great actress says, "Corlears Hook" or something from behind the canvas. Would this be an idea that you would like?

RI: I'd love it. Sounds like great fun.

RB: But is this really quite the same thing as verbal-visual? I mean this is adding sound. . .

RI: I know. That's not what I'm thinking of. Verbal, I don't mean audio. I mean just verbal.

RB: Yes, but you. . .

RI: I don't mean vocal.

RB: But you think there's an element -- of course, part of the element could be in an art is that within the mind one hears a sound, and I look at the figure '5", a painting that hangs in front of me now. Am I supposed mentally to say to myself the figure 5 U.S.A. - things like that? Or am I just to look at it visually?

RI: You may very well do that on first confrontation, Dick, but I am very much impressed and I have always been impressed how with a little concentration and a little mental exercise, if one concentrates long enough on a word or figure, it's very easy to lose the conscious grasp of what that is, and one can look at a word, and after concentrating on it for a little while, one has almost forgotten what that word is. And I should like in a way this to be a part of my work, too.

RB: Are there words that, say, that I might suggest to you for use in a painting that you would reject out of hand, and for what sort of reasons, if you did - that they didn't interest you, or that they had qualities opposed to what you're after; or would almost any word do?

RI: Well, first of all, I prefer - my first preference is one-syllable words. I happen to prefer the verb to the noun. I use the simple command words first of all. With the literary paintings where whole phrases were lifted from poems, that's something else. But as I say, I have lost active interest in that aspect of my work, anyway. I like short, terse words, and I like words - I suppose I sometimes think of their visual pattern. I am intrigued with certain letters, and other letters I'm not very intrigued by. This is not an important aspect of my work.

RB: No, but somehow one sees your work -- I have the impression that there are phrases and words that I would not encounter in your painting. Well, I don't suppose I would encounter a phrase used by Robert Motherwell very frequently in his paintings, "Je t'aime." You, I gather, would reject it partly because it's in French?

RI: I would probably reject it, first of all, because I think Robert Motherwell has probably pretty well laid claim to that.

RB: Well, yes, that obviously would exclude your using that precise one, but I mean some other French phrase of a similar size.

RI: I would ordinarily say yes, and I would agree with you, except I have already made an exception to that. One of my paintings is called Le Premier Homme and this is a painting

which was inspired by Gargarin's space flight, and I suppose subconsciously in order not to make it too sympathetic to the Communist propaganda, I decided to call the painting by its French title. And it came directly from the cover of a French magazine, and I liked the phrase. I think most Americans, most English-speaking people, would recognize it anyway. So that it is not obscure.

RB: You saw it first on a French magazine cover? In other words, your eye, your visual reaction preceded in a sense your other comprehension of it? I don't want. . .

RI: These things come together in various ways.

RB: But I think it's one of the extremely individual features of your painting and probably important in some kind of analysis of your painting, your reaction, your verbal-visual responses, what you try to convey through them to a spectator. You really expect -- I mean if two people looked at your latest painting, let's say your latest painting is "Zip." Zip is now a new postal code number, I believe the most recent use of the word, as well as its other earlier use, so that two people might look at the painting, one would go no further than to think immediately - say, oh, of course, the new postal system, or something like this; the other person perhaps would fail even to think of that but would be looking at it in purely normal terms and say, oh, the colors in this are magnificent. Now, which of these two reactions of these two individuals would you be most gratified by?

RI: Well, I think I'd probably lean toward the person who appreciated its formal values first, Dick. However, obviously, I'm interested in the other aspect, too, and I imagine there's about ten different interpretations to "zip," and I would hope the person wouldn't get stuck on the postoffice terminology.

RB: No, well, it's because it is a new thing that they might think of it in that immediate present, and of course this is always one of those problems in using a thing like that; let's say, you did the painting three years ago before this new connotation existed. To some extent it's conceivable that the impact of the painting might be altered by a new use of this word that comes in through the postoffice a year after you finished the painting; then that might be an addition to the value of the painting, aesthetic value, or it might be a diminution in value. . .?

RI: Fortuitously, this may occur. That's out of my region altogether.

RB: Well, isn't this a problem, though, whenever you use words in a painting? I recall being told by a real estate agent that he was unable to lease a very fine apartment on the East River to a man who said, "I couldn't live here. Across the river I'd see that big Pepsi-Cola sign continuously and I lost so much money in the stock market in '29 in Pepsi-Cola, I couldn't live in this apartment." In other words, that was a purely individual, subjective reaction to the name Pepsi-Cola, which almost nobody else perhaps would have. An this is always a problem and it might arise in one of your paintings that certain words or certain individuals might have an unfortunate connotation. . .

RI: Very possibly. I can imagine that a person who is very fat and overweight wouldn't really be very interested in one of my "Eat" paintings at all, you see.

RB: This is, of course, not too serious a problem? It doesn't worry you very much?

RI: It certainly doesn't.

RB: My imagination picks on the incident of a great, important curator coming to select a painting for a museum to buy, and rejecting it because some personal reaction to the word in his own life that would make him reject it.

RI: There has been that kind of reaction, though, particularly to my "Eat and Die" paintings, and that is, of all my work they have been the last pieces that anyone seems to want to acquire.

RB: Well, I think it takes a bit of courage to buy and hang a large painting saying "Die."

RI: I should think it would be a great challenge.

RB: Yes Well, I mean to have guests come in for a nice dinner party and in the dining room

there's this huge thing saying "Die" or something. Well, not every guest would like that, you see.

RI: Probably not, probably not.

RB: So this is what you mean by that sort of. . .

RI: But I imagine nudes have offended people for centuries but that didn't stop people from hanging nudes.

RB: Well, it comes down, doesn't it, to the question of the importance of subject matter in art, because even a word is in a sense subject matter, and its connotation, just like the connotations of -- well, somebody might not like railroad trains, and an important painting of a railroad train would therefore become unpleasant to them for that reason perhaps. . .

RI: Maybe so.

RB: There is an analogy. . .

RI: This is a chance I take.

RB: Speaking of railroad trains, in your youth your grandfather was a railroad man, you said. Did you travel a lot by railroad train?

RI: No, not very much because it concurred with the Depression. I remember as a child traveling to Chicago to see the 1933 Century of Progress exposition and my mother and father and I went there by rail with some sort of half-fare pass or something from my grandfather. But because of the Depression we just didn't do much of that kind of traveling at all.

RB: Now that you mention the Century of Progress, do you recall being particularly impressed by any special type of exhibit or thing? I never saw it, but was there a big art exhibit there?

RI: I remember nothing like that. But I do remember - again I remember some of the signs, and those were the things that impressed me most.

RB: What signs?

RI: Well, there was -- again I think it was a gasoline company; there was a large thermometer which towered stories and stories into the air. Specifically, I cannot - it's just that I recall these things; their actual names I don't have in my mind.

RB: These memories of signs are always accompanied by approval in your recollection, aren't they? I mean these were not things where you thought, oh, how hideous! like certain people, for instance, that detest seeing billboards along the countryside roads. You didn't have that kind of reaction? You remember these favorably?

RI: I always, whenever riding with my parents in the car on, shall we say? Sunday drives or trips, those were the thing I was always looking for. Now, I probably went through a period in high school under the prejudice or the pressure of instructors who probably did tell me how terrible it was that your beautiful highways should be cluttered with these unsightly objects, and I may have subscribed to that in an idealistic period at one time, but I certainly have forgotten about it now.

RB: Well, I gather that you were "pro" manifestations by signs. It comes out in your painting. It would be logical that you would have liked billboards, say, frequently.

RI: Yes, I think. . .

RB: I should ask you now - now that I think of it - what recollections of seeing art do you have as you grew up. I mean, there is a museum in Indianapolis. . .

RI: Yes, but I never - I don't recall ever visiting that museum until I was in, probably, high school, Dick. I mean this was the extent, this is an indication of how indifferent my own family was regarding things like this. Probably my first exposure to art besides the chromos in my mother's house was, oh, *Life* magazine and the color. . .

RB: Photographs of. . .?

RI: Yes. The color reproductions of American regional painting which was very much in domination at that time. People like Thomas Hart Benton, Edward Hopper, Grant Wood, and works of this school.

RB: Did these please you. . .to see them?

RI: Oh, I probably thought they were great, yes.

RB: You don't remember as such?

RI: Oh, yes, sure. I thought they were marvelous.

RB: Well now, this is, of course, a very interesting fact of your childhood. Had you been living, let's say, in The Hague or in Amsterdam it's most unlikely that you would have failed, before the age of twelve or thirteen, to see a great many great works of art. Isn't that so? But there in Indiana, although there was a museum, seeing fine arts which was not part of the life of a. . .

RI: I had none of that. No, definitely not. And the museum in Indianapolis is not that strong on master works either, as far as that goes.

RB: And I presume that none of your family friends were owners of great works of art?

RI: No, of course not.

RB: So that - do you recall the age at which you decided you would like to be an artist?

RI: Oh, I decided when I was five or six years old that I wanted to be an artist.

RB: As early as that?

RI: Yes. And announced this to my parents. Now I had some alternative interest as a child, and I think in view of some of my more recent work rather interesting. First of all, I had may old relatives at that time, aunts and uncles and grandparents who were dying off, and it seems that half of my childhood was spent attending funerals, I mean, from John Dillinger's on down. And now that I should be painting "Die" paintings, it's rather peculiar.

RB: Did attending funerals upset you, or. . .?

RI: Oh, no, not at all.

RB: It was a festival?

RI: No. I was very much impressed that during the Depression there was one profession which wasn't suffering at all and that was funeral directors, and as a child I had an alternative ambition, and that was to have a funeral home, you see. But a very, very, lavish gorgeous funeral home, you see.

RB: As a matter of fact, only last weekend I was talking to an acquaintance of mine who in high school desired to be a funeral director. I was very astonished at this personally, because it's the last thing I would wish to be. And he said that it then seemed to him a very glamorous kind of career. I gather that your reaction was somewhat the same?

RI: Well, I imagine that it was certain exotic flavor to it because it was, first of all, a subject, when broached to grownups, they didn't want to talk about it, and therefore it had a kind of forbidden quality which was very glamorous.

RB: Well, that introduces an interesting possible line of approach to your character. How rebellious and impudent were you as a child?

RI: Very, very. Mischievous.

RB: The word "impudent" was used by Mr. Swenson, so. . .

RI: Yes, yes. I was always being criticized for my mischievousness. And often on my report cards there would be notations of this.

RB: Were you a practical joker?

RI: No, no, but I just didn't - I wasn't always too submissive to authority, I suppose.

RB: Deportment marks were low?

RI: That's right. That's right.

RB: But this, I suppose, was perhaps an aspect of you imagination rather than a kind of bitter rebellion?

RI: Well, not as a child, I'm sure.

RB: What do you mean "not as child?" You mean it was. . .?

RI: There was no bitter rebellion as a child, of course.

RB: No, no. There was later?

RI: More so than during that time.

RB: We'll get to that later on, but. . .We don't want to draw your childhood in terms of too great sentimentality, but let's see if we can get more of the essence of it. Were you a leader among your playmates?

RI: No, I wouldn't say that. I was a loner. I was a loner, not a leader.

RB: Were you molested particularly by them?

RI: Not particularly.

RB: And this kind of mischievousness that you were guilty of, did that win you the admiration of your contemporaries, or were you a nuisance to them as well as to adults?

RI: I don't think that I gained anything in that respect from my fellow children. I would say that was not the reason, as you suggest, that was not the reason I was mischievous at all. It was just a spirit and an independence which had nothing to do with the group at all.

RB: I would have thought since you went so often to funerals that one of the opportunities to be particularly impudent and mischievous would be by misbehaving while part of the family audience at a funeral, but I suppose this didn't happen?

RI: I don't think my mischievousness ever took exactly the pattern of misbehaving in that sense. I was not an unruly child, I was a very well-behaved child. My mischievousness manifested itself in other ways.

RB: Now, to get back to this determination to be an artist. Did you think of it in terms of being an illustrator or of fine art artist, or commercial artist, or didn't you break it down to these alternatives?

RI: Well, as far as I can remember, Dick, it had nothing to do with making it into any kind of commercial career because I probably didn't know anything about commercial art. When I was moved to desire to be an artist I was looking at reproductions of paintings, not advertisements or anything of that nature.

RB: Did you do any copying of those pictures, photographs you saw in *Life,* or things like that?

RI: I think I did. I think I did. In fact, one of the things that my first grade teacher kept was a scene from Currier and Ives of people skating on the ice. I can still vividly remember that.

RB: Do you imagine that you did this with an effort to reproduce it precisely or whether you did it freely and making your own adaptation?

RI: I imagine that my intent at that time was to make it as much like the original as possible, in that any kind of real creativity was not a part of my curriculum in those days. Education was pretty still and pretty formal, not at all inspire, and I was affected by. . .

RB: Of course, when you moved back and forth from these various schools, were the fundamental subjects more or less continuous? that is to say, you might have missed American history or Greek mythology or algebra or something through merely being shifted around. Or did all these schools have pretty much the same curriculum?

RI: All the important, or shall we say? the most important education took place in high school, Dick, and that - all of my high school, luckily, was in one school. I was not shifting around in the school, I was living in different houses but I was able to stay at the same school.

RB: Yes. Tell us where you went to high school, what city or town?

RI: This was Indianapolis. The high school was Arsenal Tech, which is essentially a tech school - technical - but it is also a very large school which offered a very wide range of subjects. In my last year - in my senior year in high school I spent, oh, between two-thirds and four-fifths of my time in painting classes, you see. And this wouldn't have been possible in the average American high school.

RB: No, that surprises me. Were you not obliged to have, say, a minimum of science, of languages, and athletics?

RI: One was obliged, but I satisfied those requirements before my senior year.

RB: Tell us, for instance, what the language obligations that you faced were?

RI: There were no language obligations. It was not a requirement, but it just so happened that I took four years of Latin. And that was my own preference.

RB: You did that voluntarily?

RI: Yes.

RB: Took Latin, but you took no modern languages?

RI: No, I didn't.

RB: Did you ever later?

RI: No, no.

RB: I'm curious. No requirement for modern languages at all. Now, what about the requirements for science?

RI: Oh, I think it was one year of one science, and that happened to be physics in my case, which I satisfied half of it, in a summer school course, just so it wouldn't interfere with my painting in the senior years.

RB: Did you do well in mathematics?

RI: I did all right in mathematics. It was one of my least-favorite subjects.

RB: Well, how did you get concentrated so early then on painting? We've sort of skipped from that first teacher. Can you remember some of your other painting teachers?

RI: Actually, it's a big gap, Dick, from that first instructor, who was very sympathetic, and a very warm, human teacher. There were a number of years in grade school when the teachers all run to gether. Their personalities were really lost. They were - particularly as far as my interest in art went - they provided almost nothing. Then there were two years in junior high when I had no art instruction at all, which made me very desperate to get to this particular high school that I mentioned.

RB: This is before you entered Arsenal?

RI: Yes, yes. This is junior high. I had no art instruction for two years.

RB: What ages would you be at that time?

RI: Junior high? Oh, I suppose that's something like twelve, eleven, twelve, something like

that. And I knew about the reputation of this school because I had relatives who were in contact with the school. And its advantages were well-known to me. I knew that i could major in art in this school and the last year was practically what you'd call pre-college.

RB: In other words, this was not a high school that you automatically, because you lived in a particular area, would have attended? This was one of city-wide scope?

RI: No. I made a personal sacrifice to attend this school, in that by that time my mother and father had been separated and divorced and remarried, and in order to attend this school i moved from a sympathetic home, which was my mother's and stepfather's to an unsympathetic home, which was my father's and stepmother's home.

RB: Do you mind, for the record, stating when they were separated, at what age, or year. . .?

RI: Back, earlier, when I was probably in about the fifth or sixth grade of school.

RB: And you were awarded to you mother, I take it?

RI: There was no awarding. It was all very informal, and there was never any court action.

RB: But you did live with your mother then more or less in that early period?

RI: I lived with my mother until I entered high school and then I moved to my father's so that I could attend. . .

RB: Yes. That you just said, but I want to go back now biographically. What was the name of your mother's new husband?

RI: His name?

RB: Yes.

RI: His name was Foster Dickey.

RB: D i c k e y?

RI: Yes. And he's dead.

RB: What was his career? What was his. . .?

RI: He was a person of very little education, Richard, and most of his life was very menial - menial kind of jobs, actually.

RB: Well, I was just trying to imagine or find out whether he and his personality or character or tastes had any direct influence on you?

RI: None at all. His profession was -- excuse me, his occupation was a baker, and before he died he and my mother operated a bakery in a small Indiana town.

RB: He had no children of his own?

RI: No, no.

RB: So that there was no change - I mean, you didn't cease to be an only child? You continued. . .?

RI: No. Same proposition.

RB: But you said this was more sympathetic, this was because you - your mother and you were mother sympathetic? or was he somebody that you got on very well with?

RI: I say this more from the "step" angle than from the mother and father angle. My father was sympathetic. However, I had a very unsympathetic stepmother. . .

RB: Oh, your father's new wife was. . .

RI: . . .and a very neutral stepfather who gave me no personal resistance such as my stepmother did.

RB: Well, may I then inquire her name, your father's second wife?

RI: I don't recall what her own name might have been. Her first name was Sylvia.

RB: And she had children of her own?

RI: Yes, she had a daughter and so for over a period of about two years I had a stepsister.

RB: So when you entered Arsenal High you went to live with this stepmother, Sylvia?

RI: Yes, that's right.

RB: With a daughter. And she was not somebody you could like? I mean, she was. . .?

RI: At the beginning I liked her very much. She was a more educated woman than my own mother, a more sophisticated woman, a woman that I could have admired more than my own mother, but in a very short time the step-relationship began to manifest itself. . .Jealously in regard to myself. My sister was not an excellent student in school, and I was, and this made for a bad situation.

RB: Was she much different in age from you? The stepsister?

RI: No, no. Very close.

RB: Very close. So that you -- she also went to this school?

RI: Yes. We were students there at the same time.

RB: I see. And this you think led to difficulties?

RI: This was part of it. This was part of it.

RB: Causing you unhappiness, I suppose?

RI: Oh, a great deal, yes.

RB: But, to what extent was this stepmother educated?

RI: Well, I'm not saying that she was well-educated, but she was, shall we say, a more intelligent woman than my mother was.

RB: But she would not introduce any enlargement of your cultural experience?

RI: Oh, none, none.

RB: Well, so you made this sacrifice then. In the summers, for instance, did you go back to live with your own mother?

RI: No, there was nothing like that. Part of the agreement -- I had always seen my father on a basis of weekends and that's how I got to know my stepmother, and on that basis my stepmother was always very friendly and I had nothing but good times with her, but when I came to live with my father and stepmother, one of the stipulations was that I would cease to ever see my mother again, you see. That was one of my stepmother's stipulations.

RB: She made that stipulation?

RI: Yes, yes. So therefore immediately a bad condition existed and as soon as my - not as soon - but my mother realized that she was never going to see me again unless she did something, and eventually she moved into the city of Indianapolis so that I might be encouraged to return to her household and after two years of this unpleasantness with my father and stepmother. I returned to my mother's house and finished my high school.

RB: Living with your own mother?

RI: Yes, living there.

RB: But I would have thought then when you first left her home, she might have been very upset to have you go to this. . .

RI: Probably was. Probably was.

RB: . . .but this didn't make an emotional impact on you? I mean, you don't remember. . .?

RI: It did. It did. But as far as I was concerned I'm afraid the schooling came first, you see.

RB: And since she didn't want you to be an artist, I don't suppose she was highly flattered by that motivation.

RI: Oh, she didn't not want me to be an artist, but it's that I was always discouraged because they didn't understand that an artist could provide for himself that was. . .

RB: Yes. Were your respective parents married almost immediately after their divorce, each of them, or was one. . .?

RI: It was within a year or two's time - I can't even remember that.

RB: Well, you don't remember living with your mother while she was a lone woman sort of. . .?

RI: Oh, of course, of course, yes, I do.

RB: Well, now tell us a little more about the high school experience itself. Who was your art teacher there?

RI: Well, I had a different instructor for the first two years each term, which meant two different instructors each year. Then the last two years were almost exclusively under the instruction of a little, marvelous old lady named Sarah Bard. . .

RB: B a r d?

RI: B a r d. And whether she is still alive I'm not really sure at this particular point. She had a fairly successful career of her own. She was a watercolorist and, oh, won all kinds of prizes and so forth, which. . .

RB: Locally?

RI: Yes, which greatly impressed her students. And we were all very much in awe of her and I was very much in awe of her, and she was a great character and a terrifically-inspiring instructor. And she alone was responsible for my decision to go to the Art Institute in Chicago.

RB: What sort of recollections do you have of Miss Bard's own painting?

RI: Well, out of her own wisdom, Dick, she didn't really let us see her own work. There was one exhibit of her watercolors in Indianapolis at a - at what would be the equivalent of Indianapolis's only gallery (it was an art supply store), and so I did see them and at that time I was very impressed by them. They were very accomplished, beautiful watercolors. . .

RB: Landscapes?

RI: Yes, of course. She came from the East, and so much of her work was the seacoast and things like that, piers and boats, and I did and I did a great deal of watercolor work myself so I was immensely concerned.

RB: What I'm trying to find out is whether Miss Bard was in any sense a disciple of any particular school of art, whether. . .?

RI: Only American realism.

RB: She would have liked Winslow Homer, say?

RI: Winslow Homer was the figure she talked of mostly. To her he represented the ultimate in watercolor technique from the American standpoint. However, Charles - or rather John Marin she held in the highest esteem. Much of my interest in art from the really serious standpoint was her discussions every day on the history of art and the current American scene at that time.

RB: Well, that's what I was wondering, what she emphasized in the history of art, what these influences at this stage in your career were?

RI: She covered the whole range.

RB: Greek art? And Renaissance art? And all these things?

RI: Yes.

RB: Well now, what predilections do you recall -- if you don't recall them, I mean -- but I was wondering if any particular school of art, or aspect of art at that early stage stood out in your affections?

RI: Well, first of all, the ancient or Renaissance didn't really interest me very much because of the remoteness of the whole period. Her special interest was from French Impressionism on up into the current scene, the modern French and the modern American.

RB: Well, let's see, what year would this be, roughly speaking?

RI: This was the early '40s.

RB: I was in high school during the war.

RB: What are your recollections of the outbreak of war? I mean, did you have any feeling of closeness to this problem, or -- you were there in the Middle West, as I as a New Englander think of it, which was certainly in 1940 believed to be strongly against participation of United States in the war. Did you get involved emotionally in any of that question of. . .?

RI: There was an isolationism, yes, yes. My family, I imagine my father and mother were probably isolationistic and therefore I wasn't.

RB: Automatically, you had a different point of view?

RI: Yes, yes.

RB: Well, were you pro-Allied or pro-German?

RI: I really don't think I could have been much else but pro-Allied at that point. I don't recall having any. . .

RB: It is reported that Mr. Philip Johnson, whom I believe you were conferring with yesterday, was a very ardent pro-German. I don't know whether this is true. Did you know that? or pro-Hitler, perhaps before the war began.

RI: Well, you see it so happened that in Indiana there was a great Fascistic organization of people called "Gray shirts" or "Black shirts" and some of these people were sent to prison during the war. This, however, all received very unfavorable press and never, never was very attractive to me.

RB: Well, I was trying to imagine whether *your* imagination was deeply affected by the world scene at that time. The world scene seemed to be in a very perilous condition indeed.

RI: I think it was. I was very much taken up with world events and i think I studied them, and in high school toward the end of my junior year, war was coming to a close and I was very much caught up with the UN, and the formation of UN, and the activities of -- I had a very - I don't remember her name - but I had a very intelligent and enlightened instructor who was very liberal and very sympathetic to all the activities of that time, and I leaned in that direction myself, I suppose.

RB: Had you at that age -- perhaps you wouldn't because the war was going on -- your generation couldn't opt to go to Europe, for instance. I mean, I was wondering if you had ambitions when you were sixteen, seventeen, to travel in Europe and things like that?

RI: There was no thought of that, because that was the war.

RB: You couldn't. Yes. But your art education at that stage, I'm wondering how much, for instance, Oriental art figured in this?

RI: None.

RB: None at all?

RI: None at all.

RB: It was -- would you say American or European art had the stronger. . .?

RI: At that time I think it was American. The American school of realism, as I said, Demuth, Grant Wood, Sheeler, Thomas Hart Benton, Curry, all these people I found very fascinating and very. . .

RB: You did like their work?

RI: . . .I thought very capable. Now I would have great reservations.

RB: Yes. But we're speaking solely of this period when you were in high school. I have a feeling, though, you did not see the originals of any of these?

RI: I doubt if I did.

RB: Do you recollect your first visit to a museum, an art gallery?

RI: Oh, my first, no, but it would have been during my high school years at Tech.

RB: You would have gone to the John Herron?

RI: Yes, yes, and I attended Saturday life drawing classes there in my last year so that I became very - I knew the museum very well.

RB: I don't know the quality or range of its collection.

RI: It's a small collection and there are some good pieces, including the French school, but my orientation, I must say, was American even then.

RB: Well, specifically of this group of then contemporary painters like Sheeler and Benton, or some of the older people like Winslow Homer and. . .

RI: Well, due to the influence of Miss Bard - yes, Winslow Homer. I never was very much exposed to his oil paintings, more just his watercolors, but other figures like Walt Kuhn and the Ashcan School and so forth, these became very familiar through reproduction and so on. Reginald Marsh. . .

RB: You liked these people, then?

RI: Oh, yes, sure.

RB: Were there any particular highly-touted artists at that time whom you did not approve of? For example, was the art of Picasso and that group called to your attention, and did you reject it?

RI: I was very familiar with the European scene, I mean as familiar as one could become through reproduction and so forth, but to tell you the truth, Dick, I can't recall now exactly what my attitude was then.

RB: Well, it's not important if you don't recall it...

RI: Probably the art was so sophisticated, the French art, that it was just a little bit beyond my ken altogether.

RB: Well, I just thought it might be interesting if you have any strong feelings that you still remember either for or against any particular artists that were well-known at that time. . .

RI: No, the whipping boy probably then, as maybe he still is, is someone like Salvador Dali and he's the person that everybody would attack and oppose, shall we say? at art school or high school. . .

RB: You mean your generation then?

RI: Yes.

RB: Was very much anti- not only Dali but the rest of the surrealists. . .

RI: Surrealists, yes.

RB: Well, it was, shall we say? probably just a little bit too sophisticated for a high school kid at that point, in Indiana, at that time.

RI: Yes, I suppose that would have been quite prominent contemporary aspect of art then.

RB: Well, it was; it was in the American scene.

RB: Yes.

RI: He was always getting a great deal of publicity.

RB: Can you say something about the character of the work you yourself were doing as a high school painter?

RI: Well, first of all, in high school at that time, (I imagine it is very different now) we were not allowed to work in oils unless it might have been the last year, and I did my first oil painting at the Art Institute in Chicago. So obviously I didn't take advantage of that freedom. Watercolor, I thought was my medium and I used to go out on weekends and paint landscapes around Indianapolis and even had a one-man show while I was still a senior in high school.

RB: How did you arrange that?

RI: Well, there again, as I said, there was this very active art department. There probably were six or eight instructors in it and they had a very, a fairly high sense of purpose, and they encouraged this sort of thing.

RB: Where was the show held - in the high school?

RI: There was a show in the high school; there was an exhibition area; and then there was a show at this local art store that I spoke of.

RB: You mean you had a show at the. . .? Well, did many other, I mean, was this a fairly unusual thing?

RI: Not unusual. Indianapolis has its cultural scene, too. There are annual art exhibits and so forth. The local department store has one and things like this, but, no, the art department at this high school was big enough in itself that there would always be five or six people who would more or less, shall we say? rise to the top, and these people were fairly professional and very interested. They were interested in exhibiting; they were interested in showing their work, and I was one of them.

RB: What, do you remember, were the themes? These were landscapes largely? Had you any particular aspect of landscape that. . .?

RI: I was very interested in - and I think I was influenced by much of the work that I mentioned just a little earlier, industrial aspects of Indianapolis were the things that fascinated me most, factories, railroad crossings, grain elevators, things like that, and this was the influence of people like Sheeler and. . .

RB: Well, I was just thinking Sheeler, of course, painted flatly. Did you. . .?

RI: No, I. . .

RB: With watercolors you wouldn't. . .

RI: No. Subject-wise I was influenced, but at that point - I - was not interested in flat pattern.

RB: These were primarily intended to be realistic and have a kind of social massage in the sense that they were industrial rather than. . .?

RI: I doubt if I though they had any social message and I doubt if I was putting any message

into them. I was merely observing those things which fascinated me most and that is industrial scenes were more complicated and more intriguing to me than, shall we say? landscape with trees, or. . .

RB: There also might have been, I don't know, but it might have been easier of access. Did you have your own car or anything at this time?

RI: No, I had a bicycle and I used to go out on my bicycle and take my kit of watercolors. However, the campus of this particular high school - this is an old Civil War arsenal in Indianapolis and it was situated on a very landscaped campus of seventy-five acres with even a little virgin forest in one corner, so that there was ample opportunity to paint trees and landscapes if I wanted to.

RB: Yes.

RI: But I didn't prefer. . .

RB: So it was actually a preference, not a convenience?

RI: No, not at all.

RB: Did other friends of yours go out with you, or did you. . .?

RI: No. This was very much a one-man - and I might say, too, that, shall we say? living on the other side of the tracks may have had something to do with my preoccupation with industrial things in that we never lived very far away from the gas works and the railroad yards. We were not miles out in some pleasant residential community.

RB: No. You were not suburban with gardens and things?

RI: No, not at that point.

RB: Well, that's interesting. Are these in existence still - these watercolors?

RI: They are and they're probably stored in somebody's attic or basement in Indiana right now.

RB: You haven't seen them recently?

RI: No.

RB: I wonder how you would evaluate them from your present point of view?

RI: I wouldn't have much evaluation of them. They'd be pretty student-wise, I would imagine.

RB: Well, what was the actual year of this exhibit, these one-man shows -- you've given the impression of two one-man - one in the school and one in an art store?

RI: Yes, I'm not too sure about that myself now, Dick. It probably would have been my last year at Tech, which would have been in the 1946, 1945-1946.

RB: Well, was this a rather exciting experience for you?

RI: Yes, I thought it was very exciting, which meant clippings in the newspaper and photographs and things like that.

RB: You did get publicity of a sort?

RI: Yes.

RB: Any sales or were there. . .?

RI: Yes, I had my first sale when I was in high school and it was a watercolor rendition of an old country - and this was Mooresville - grain elevator which was situated right across the street from my grandmother's last house.

RB: And somebody who was a stranger or a member of the family bought this?

RI: This painting was exhibited in *Scholastic*, which you know is a national society to show high school and grade school work.

RB: Is that the *Scholastic* magazine?

RI: Yes, yes, connected with that. It was exhibited in the Scholastic show and one of the ladies in charge of the activity, I think, bought it for something like ten dollars.

RB: That must have been quite a lift to your spirits.

RI: Oh, it was very exhilarating.

RB: Were you - I take it you didn't have much money during high school - did you feel rather deprived? Did you have jobs?

RI: I was. Yes, I worked in the evening after school.

RB: Doing what?

RI: I started out being - delivering poultry; then I became a Western Union telegraph messenger. I became an advertising copy boy for a local newspaper, and when I left, when I finished just before I went into the Air Force I was a dispatch boy for the morning newspaper.

RB: Oh, this opens a whole new field of inquiry.

RI: Yes, it opens an alternate interest of mine. In high school I became very interested in journalism and for a very brief period even toyed with the idea of taking up journalism. I don't quite know, I think this was mainly because of the tremendous influence of the journalism teacher. She was a marvelous teacher and, shall we say? Moulder of young people, and her manner was infectious, she could get anyone interest in journalism. And so I fell under her sway.

RB: You might have become a newspaper reporter or something of that sort?

RI: Possibly, possibly.

RB: Probably this was. . .

RI: But when things like scholarships came up I won a scholarship to John Herron and I didn't win a scholarship to a journalism school so that my preference had already set me toward that. . .

RB: This scholarship to John Herron was for an art class?

RI: I had a life drawing scholarship during my last year at Tech but this would have meant the first year of my art school which would have meant staying in Indianapolis and I was very much opposed to that idea. I wanted to get away from home and I wanted to enlist in the Air Force, which I did, and become eligible for the GI Bill of Rights, which gave me five years of free schooling.

RB: So in other words, you never took up this scholarship?

RI: No. I dropped it. It went to another person.

RB: Well, let's go back for a moment to some of those jobs. Why did you change to so many - for better wages, or. . .?

RI: Better job, better wages.

RB: When was the first one? How young were you when you had your first job?

RI: Just a freshman in high school.

RB: You didn't have a job really until you went to high school?

RI: No. And this was an idea of my stepmother's. One of the reasons why I was not very pleased with my stepmother. She felt that I shouldn't be idle so much, that I was doing a little bit too much reading and studying and that I really should be making some money,

because she remembered in her youth that that's what children did, you see.

RB: Were you allowed to keep and use this money, or did you have to contribute it to the household?

RI: Actually, I was allowed to keep and use it. I didn't have to pay -- maybe toward the end of my stay with my father and stepmother I had to pay something like board, but all the money that I saved eventually went back to her because I had deposited it in a bank and my father wanted to buy a house and I gave the money to them for that purpose.

[PAUSE]

RB: This is Richard Brown Baker resuming the interview with Robert Indiana. Today's date is September 18, 1963. Mr. Indiana has had his thirty-fifth birthday since we talked last and he is also celebrating, you might say, the publication of - I think you told me it's the first magazine reproduction in color of one of your works.

RI: That's right.

RB: The September 20, 1963 issue of Life magazine, which will be seen by hundreds of thousands of people, contains an article on successful sellout shows of last season and it features a painting - what is the name of the painting of yours that is reproduced?

RI: It's the dietary, Richard, which is actually half of a diptych, the other half is the Eateria, and the painting really wasn't meant to be separated in the way that it was, but the other half is owned by Hirshhorn and. . .

RB: This one belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Maremont of Chicago, I think?

RI: Yes.

RB: Who have a very distinguished collection, I believe. . .

RI: A very large collection.

RB: A large one. Of course, it must be small compared to Joe Hirshhorn's, so with the other half apparently lost. . .I wanted to tell you something and I'm telling you this is in connection in a sense with that bit of publicity that is just coming to you at the moment, because it has occurred to me that your former teacher, whom you spoke about, Miss Sarah Bard, would not know about you, perhaps, because you are no longer bearing the name that you had as a student, and assuming she is alive, and I think she is alive because a 1962 edition of *Who's Who in American Art* lists Sarah Foresman Bard as living at 215 West Walnut Lane, Philadelphia 44, and I think this is the same woman because she won awards at the Hoosier Salon in '29, '31, '34 and '36, which is. . .

RI: It is. . .

RB: . . .so she evidently - apparently she was born in a town in Pennsylvania and now lives in Philadelphia.

RI: It is the same woman.

RB: Curously enough, I looked for you in this same volume an you are not listed in it. I bring this up merely to point out how new your fame, which far surpasses hers, already is, in a sense. And I wondered if you have any worries or observations or remarks to make about how it has felt to be within the space of two or three years somebody in quite eminent collections like the Hirshhorn and the Maremont collections and shown in the Museum of Modern Art and publicized in a variety of magazines.

RI: Well, I think the difference there, Richard; is those are not the qualifications for being accepted in a publication like *Who's Who in American Art.*

RB: That's not so important. I think that's not a very well-edited magazine. I don't mean a magazine - I mean a reference work. One thing I've noticed in looking -- one thing they have managed to miss are most of the more eminent artists. A few years ago they didn't have Franz Kine, for instance. But on the other hand, it is sometimes said in their defense that artists have not bothered to fill in the form which has been sent to them and therefore they

haven't published them. You may have received a form, or you may not have.

RI: I haven't and I don't really expect to receive one.

RB: Well, you should in the next edition, I'm sure, but you see they operate - they have probably twenty or thirty thousand artists listed in this volume and it's very little use, I'll tell you, as a reference work, except for people who have won prizes like your former teacher, Miss Bard.

RI: Yes.

RB: That kind of people is very abundantly documented.

RI: That I haven't done, you see.

RB: Well, but in the future, I'm sure, the next edition - unless the editor is completely asleep - Robert Indiana will be invited to contribute the biographical facts. There's no doubt of that. I only mention this to show you, if one were looking you up, I mean in a way, according to the editor o this book, she - Miss Bard - is a more established artist than you are, but actually as of today I think I could say without ever knowing her work that her reputation presumably was a very limited one, and yours is in the category of a national reputation, I think, at the moment. And I just wondered how these feelings might have come up in you as you respond to this recognition.

RI: Well, probably I'm not - I don't feel very much about it because the publication doesn't mean anything to me at all, Richard.

RB: In *Life* magazine?

RI: No, no, the - *Who's Who in America.*

RB: Well, you're not in there. I'm talking about the other side of it - the fact that you are somebody who is receiving publicity. I'm trying to find out how *this* has reacted upon you.

RI: I guess it hasn't really, I haven't thought very much about it.

RB: Well, that's probably true but it seems rather deadpan, if I may say so, in the face of rather exciting developments.

RI: I would say my enthusiasm would be qualified by the article itself and, you probably saw it, you can see what else was reproduced and therefore. . .

RB: Well, I'm not speaking only of one specific article. I'm speaking of the combination of facts that I've already mentioned to you a moment ago that has changed you from being somebody known in 1960 only to your personal circle, I think, whereas today I presume one could go to the art faculty of some art school out in New Mexico or Vermont, and presumably they would have some knowledge of your existence and the type of work you do.

RI: Yes, via the art publications.

RB: And the exhibits you participated in. This is what I'm trying to drive at, whether this has had any effect on you. . .

RI: Hasn't; hasn't really.

RB: Well, so far fame has not become a burden, as I fear it sometimes does in America. I mean you haven't yet been put on the spot, shall we say, too much?

RI: No. This is probably the most burdensome thing that has happened yet.

RB: Thank you, Sir; well, I'll turn the machine off. No, but it is a thing in American life, as you must be aware, that we over-publicize some of our public figures, and this, I think, could have happened to the detriment of certain painter in the last six or eight years, who have preceded you, and exceeded you so far in publicity and fame. I am speaking now of the generation of Kline and de Kooning who suddenly within a matter of two or there years emerged from poverty and of reputation confined, I think, to art circles into a kind of national celebrity and very large income. And certain burdens are probably attached to this. I don't

know, I've never been a public figure so I don't know quite what this does, and I don't suppose you've reached this stage yet, and you may never do so, but you might imagine, I'm sure, that as a result of having this painting of yours in Life, you're going to be known; your name, when you're introduced to people, is going to be more widely known than it hitherto has been. . .?

RI: Sure. Well, I think it's a matter of conjecture, Richard, as to how much that possible over-publicity that you suggest, say, affected Mr. Pollock or Mr. de Kooning, or these people if that's your implication.

RB: Well, I'm wondering, I'm asking not about them because I don't suppose you know, but one sometimes is led to believe that certain of them have taken to the bottle and various other things as a result of feeling a kind of burden put upon them by this new situation?

RI: Well, possibly. I can't say. It hasn't happened to me, that's all.

RB: You refuse to disclose any emotions whatsoever concerning your, shall we say, rise to fame?

RI: It's not concealing them, because they just don't exist, that's all.

RB: To return, Bob, to certain matters of your childhood, I find I neglected to ask you whether as a boy you were interested in religion, whether you went to Sunday school, whether religion played any particular part in your upbringing?

RI: My parents, Richard, I would say, were a rather typical, non-religious American family. However, at. . .

RB: Could I ask what denomination they formerly belonged to, if any?

RI: I couldn't really tell you that at all.

RB: They just didn't go to church?

RI: They didn't go to church. However, for some reason or another I was put into Sunday school at about the same time I started to school and. . .

RB: What church, what denomination?

RI: Well, that's the peculiar thing, it was the Christian Science church and for a few years of my life I fell under some influence of this particular church.

RB: What sort of influence do you think it was?

RI: Well, it wasn't of any tremendous scope; I suppose it's probably more - was more in the area of just, shall we say? moral living than anything else, I mean, nothing of a spectacularly religious aspect at all.

RB: Yes. You mean simply that you attribute probably some part of your conception of what is right and wrong to that church training, you might say? It's not solely to parents and regular school?

RI: It's the kind of teaching that all churches present, of course.

RB: Well, the point really is to find out whether you ever, as some young people are, are moved immensely by religion and feel very strongly about it. I take it, this did not occur in your case?

RI: It only occurred late in my life when I was in the Army and I actually for a very brief period became a member of the church. But somehow or another this seemed very much to be filling an emptiness or need which probably, being in the Army, brought about in itself.

RB: Well, since you brought that up, we might as well cover it now. What - was it some particular chaplain or something whom you met that got to you, shall we say?

RI: No, it wasn't. If anything, it was probably more due to the fact that I had two or three chaplain's assistants as friends in the service, people that I somehow found more of an

empathy with than most other of my Army associates.

RB: So it was partly through friendliness with them that you conformed, as it were?

RI: Probably.

RB: Well, what particular church was it that you became connected with?

RI: The Christian Science church.

RB: The Christian Science once again? These were all Christian Science. . .?

RI: No, they weren't. No, that wasn't the point. It's just that they aroused an interest in that area of life in me one more. My activities were more off-base than on-base.

RB: Well, are you a Christian Scientist now?

RI: No, no.

RB: In other words, you would not. . .?

RI: I would profess to no religious affiliation.

RB: You are not hampered from, shall we say, seeking medical assistance in a crisis by conceptions instilled into you by Christian Science?

RI: No, I am not. I no longer adhere to any of those rules and rigors of the church.

RB: I wonder if you have any special anecdotes or recollections of your childhood pets. You tell me you always had dogs and cats. Did any of them have much personality? Were you very fond of them?

RI: I had one dog throughout most of my childhood, Richard. This was a Boston bull and it's name was Muggsy. This was a childhood pet but I don't particularly recall that I had any fantastic rapport with the animal. It was just a nice dog.

RB: Did you ever draw Muggsy?

RI: On one occasion or two, yes, I remember drawing...

RB: But you've never particularly done much animal drawing?

RI: No, not at all. She's buried under an apple tree in Indiana now.

RB: I suppose Muggsy was with you when you lived with your mother before you moved to your stepmother's home?

RI: The dog goes way back into my childhood and mainly when my mother and father were living still together.

RB: Well, I think we have got pretty much through your high school, though I would like to have you say a little more about that interest in journalism that developed at that time.

RI: Yes, there again, it was due to the influence of a strong teacher.

RB: I believe you mentioned that and I forget whether you said the name.

RI: I didn't. Her name is Ella Sengenberger, and she was one of those extremely dedicated teachers who instilled and imbued in their students all kinds of extra-special enthusiasms and I fell under her influence. She was a teacher very much recommended to me by people who had recommended this particular high school. And I myself, I had always enjoyed writing. I had once -- one of the few prizes I ever won was a composition prize in English literature when I was in high school. So that I did have this interest in writing besides. . .

RB: What was her actual role? Was she your English teacher?

RI: No, no. This was a large enough school that her sole domain was journalism. In fact, she only had one or two journalism classes. Her real role was director of publications. She was

responsible for putting out the school paper and the school yearbook.

RB: You had a sort or school magazine then? Were you one of the editors or contributors?

RI: I was on the staff. The publication was called the "Arsenal Cannon" because of the fact that the school had once been a Civil War arsenal. I contributed, I was a reporter, and I wrote feature articles and I also was photography editor for the yearbook.

RB: I'm not familiar with the concept of teaching journalism in high school. I don't know what it consists in, as a course. What is it designed to prepare you for?

RI: It's designed, with this school, in that it was such a technical school, to prepare those students who really wanted to pursue a journalistic education, in other words, going to a school of journalism at some college later, you see.

RB: Do you think some of those students in your class did become newspaper or magazine people?

RI: Oh, I know they did. Yes.

RB: Well, it seems to me slightly early to be concentrating on that aspect, however. . .

RI: It was no more intensive than my, than the concentration on my art program, because the last year at high school I spent something like six hours in the painting and drawing department, you see.

RB: Do you think some of those students in your class did become newspaper or magazine people?

RI: Oh, I know they did. Yes.

RB: Well, it seems to me slightly early to be concentrating on that aspect, however. . .

RI: It was no more intensive than my, than the concentration on my art program, because the last year at high school I spent something like six hours in the painting and drawing department, you see.

RB: But the teaching of English in the traditional way, which means of course writing compositions and also reading select works of literature, possible classics or perhaps superior contemporary books - did you also have this kind of training?

RI: Yes, sure.

RB: But that was a separate course, was it?

RI: Yes, that was. Journalism was only one course in the English program that you might take. As i suggested, this was a very complex school, Richard, and all those other courses were available.

RB: Well, I'm thinking of what the requirements are for the College Board entrance examinations in English and so on. This journalism, of course, wouldn't have been designed presumably to prepare one for that kind of an examination. I suppose most of you were not preparing to enter regular college, were you, like Harvard, Yale, Williams, and this sort of thing?

RI: A college preparatory program could very well have included the journalism course just as an elective, and this was not an exceptional situation. Some of my fellow journalism students did go on to places like Harvard.

RB: They did? Well, I wanted to ask if you wrote poetry at any time in your childhood?

RI: I did. I wrote poetry particularly in high school. One of those poems, as I remember, called "October" was published on the front page of one of the issues of the school paper, and, of course, I did a great deal of writing subsequently. During my four years in Chicago, not so, but when I went to England, much more writing than painting, and then upon my return to New York or to America, when I lived in New York I continued to write a great deal.

RB: Let's go in to that when we get to that advanced stage. Actually at the moment I didn't even know you had gone to England. So tell me a little more about this poem "October." Was it in any particular traditional from like a sonnet or. . .?

RI: No. More in the form - probably more under the influence of Carl Sandburg's "Fog," a very short poem probably only six or seven lines.

RB: Your activity on the school magazine was principally reporting?

RI: Not principally. That's as, shall we say, an apprentice or beginner, that's how one started. Also proofreading, chores like that, but my main contribution to the paper was certain - I was particularly interested in architecture at this time and I remember writing two articles on famous old houses in Indianapolis. And one of them I illustrated myself with pen and ink sketches.

RB: What was the character of the article? Was it historical or an account of the house, a description of it architecturally, or a plea to preserve it from destruction?

RI: No, there was none of that because at that time neither one were due (one has been demolished) but neither one were due for demolition. Just a descriptive article probably written to interest other students in the architectural gems that existed in the city more than anything else.

RB: You chose these topics yourself, or were you assigned. . .?

RI: I chose them myself.

RB: That represents your personal taste, then, doesn't it, I mean, your interest?

RI: I've always been interested in architecture and probably at one point in my life would have seriously considered taking it up, but I was under the impression that to be an architect one should be very strong in mathematics and be a little bit more scientifically inclined than I was and therefore I saw this as a detriment to a career in architecture.

RB: You mentioned to me that you had had quite a variety of jobs while you were at Arsenal High. I don't think I asked -- these were evening jobs you indicated?

RI: After school.

RB: After school. But I realized I had never asked whether you had summer jobs as such, vacation-time, full-time jobs?

RI: The jobs that I had, Richard, tended to extend over into the summer on a full-time basis. When I was a Western Union messenger, that became a full-time job during the summer. And when I worked for the *Indianapolis Star* in the advertising department that, too, became a full-time job.

RB: Have you any recollections of anything unusual or interesting in connection with being a Western Union messenger? You went around by bicycle or...?

RI: Yes, I rode a bicycle and probably learned Indianapolis very much like the back of my hand. I knew about every street that existed in the city. And I did enjoy the job because -- in the bad weather it wasn't a very good job, but I certainly enjoyed it otherwise.

RB: I have an impression that Western Union boys don't exist the way they used to, I don't know, but I mean now they seem to telephone messages more. But my recollection as a child, there was an office of Western Union with a group of boys in uniform with bicycles that sort of waited around until assigned to carry the typed-out messages. Is this the way it operated?

RI: That's the way it was then and I suspect it still may be in smaller cities, Richard. Here in New York it seems to be a much different pattern. Also when I first became a messenger there were two telegraph companies and Postal Dispatch has gone out of business or went out of business when I was with Western Union. But it was very much as you describe except I did have one unusual assignment at one or another, and that was taking train messages which meant going to the Union Station and delivering, or trying to deliver the telegram right to the addressee on the train itself.

RB: Oh, you walked through the train, then, calling out the name of the person? Oh, I remember seeing that. I haven't seen that done for years either.

RI: But it was probably very good because if I had any shyness or any timidity about speaking out, why that job probably ended it right there.

RB: Do you think that the general cost of services, human services, having gone up so much, has perhaps cut down this kind of personal delivery that used to take place at Western Union, because one just doesn't see the Western Union boy as much as one did before World War II.

RI: Well, I imagine, Richard, part of this is people just don't send telegrams like they used to. People rely more on long-distance calls, and I think business has, except for a commercial aspect of Western Union, the whole business has gone into a kind of decline.

RB: On what basis were you paid? By the hour?

RI: As I remember, it was by the hour and it was a very low wage, something like seventy-five cents an hour?

RB: Were you given tips by people that received the telegram?

RI: Oh, surely.

RB: Regularly or infrequently?

RI: More infrequently than regularly.

RB: And you did wear a uniform?

RI: Yes. Very much like a First World War soldier's uniform.

RB: How long do you think you had this job?

RI: Oh, that was for a year or two, Richard.

RB: And then after that you took over what job?

RI: Then I went to work for the *Indianapolis Star* as copy boy and, of course, the reason I was eager to work for the newspaper was I saw in it a possible connection with my journalism.

RB: Well now, I worked once on a newspaper and my recollection is that the copy boy was available in the news city room, as we called it, to take from the reporter to the city editor's desk copy as it was finished, and that sort of thing. Is that -- could you describe some of your experiences?

RI: That's what I would like to have done, Richard, but unfortunately when I went to work for *The Star* the only -- those city room and news room jobs were, of course, much in demand and often went to, possibly, college journalism students. The job that I got and answered was for advertising copy boy which had much less glamor and very little connection with journalism, and unfortunately I stayed in that department during my whole tenure there and never did get to the news room. And probably it's just as well because if I had, I could very well have gotten switched into a much bigger interest in journalism.

RB: You might have gotten reporting in the blood and. . .

RI: Yes.

RB: Exactly what were your duties, then? I don't quite know how it takes places. . .

RI: As I started out it was a runner on foot between the various advertising agencies and and the advertising departments of department stores and the composing rooms of the other newspapers in the city. At that time there were three major newspapers in Indianapolis. That is no longer the case. And it meant sometimes searching down cuts for the various ads that might be deposited in some other newspaper's forms or type drawers, you see.

RB: Did you go about on foot for this or on bicycle?

RI: Sure, on foot.

RB: This was all on the downtown streets?

RI: Yes. Indianapolis is a small city and the three newspapers were very much within walking distance of one another.

RB: Is The Star an evening paper? I forget.

RI: The Star is a morning newspaper. And the Sunday newspaper.

RB: But since you weren't connected with the news department, your particular hours of work weren't affected?

RI: I had nothing to do. . .I merely worked within the working day of the advertising department, and extended over into the evening from the standpoint of going to the newspaper's composing rooms.

RB: And you also had this job for quite some while?

RI: Yes, I had that for a couple of years.

RB: How old would you have been when you had this job?

RI: Well, since I graduated from high school when I was seventeen, I probably started at fifteen, something like that.

RB: You did this until you finished high school?

RI: I continued on this job until after I finished high school.

RB: During the summer taking. . .?

RI: Yes. I had received a scholarship through the - as we mentioned. . .

RB: You mentioned the scholarship to the John Herron, which you did not take up because. . .

RI: I didn't take it up, and as it was I went into the Army instead and turned back the scholarship.

RB: Yes. You said that. I just want to wind up your high school life, then. You naturally graduated with a diploma and finished in the regular way?

RI: That's right.

RB: And when would this have been?

RI: '46.

RB: In May or June of '46?

RI: June, I imagine.

RB: The ceremonies - lots of social events?

RI: Yes, I graduated second in my class and having received the scholarship and a kind of membership in an honorary society for being scholastically high. . .

RB: Was that Cum Laude Society, by any chance?

RI: Kind of, something like it. It's called "The Tech Legion." I was a captain.

RB: A local. . .

RI: Yes, the organization within the high school. I was a captain in "The Tech Legion." Then I also received the Latin medal for that particular year. And i received the Riley medal for

excellence in English - this is for James Whitcomb Riley, the Hoosier poet.

RB: To win that, had you written a particular, special paper or was this just based on your standing. . .?

RI: This was based on four years' performance.

RB: As a student in English?

RI: That's right.

RB: This would be English rather than journalism?

RI: It had nothing to do with the journalism.

RB: Well, that sounds very good and I doubt if too many painters are that close to the top of a large class of purely scholastic rating. I don't know. This was a large class, wasn't it?

RI: It was a large class, probably five or six hundred students.

RB: As many as that!

RI: Yes. It's a big school. At one time the school had seven thousand students, until the city had gained another high school and drained some of those away. So that it really was very much more like a college than it was a typical American high school.

RB: Bigger than a college in a way. . .

RI: Many, many.

RB: Yes. Well, in the summer following your graduation you continued this job, and continued - you had gone back to live with your mother at this point, had you?

RI: Oh, yes. I had been back a year.

RB: Because she moved in to live in Indianapolis, as I remember, with her husband.

RI: That's right. She was now Mrs. Dickey.

RB: Yes. Now let us find out - you chose to volunteer for military service at this time?

RI: Yes. It required the signature of my mother because I was under age.

RB: Now, your generation would have been prospectively drafted for this, anyway, would it not?

RI: No. The war was over and. . .

RB: This is before the draft was reinstated?

RI: This was before Korea so that there was no immediate threat of military service. Still that whole thing was hanging in the air. But the real deciding factor was the GI Bill of Rights which was going to be discontinued within just a period of weeks or days and I enlisted in order to receive. . .

RB: Qualify -- yes, you said that earlier. But when you enlisted weren't you committing yourself for quite a few years? How long a period of time did you. . .?

RI: Three years in the Army Air Force, which during my enlistment became the United States Air Force.

RB: Did your mother raise any objection to. . .?

RI: She wasn't terribly happy but she saw the wisdom of my decision because she and her husband were economically unable to see me through college, or art school rather. I would have had to have worked my way through. As it was, I did anyway. But she saw the reason that I made this decision and certainly went along with it.

RB: Had you taken up that scholarship, though, you could have continued to live at home and you wouldn't have had to work so very much harder, would you, to do art school in Indianapolis?

RI: Probably not.

RB: But you wanted to leave. . .?

RI: Yes, I wanted to leave, I wanted to get away from home, shall we say? I wanted to get away from Indianapolis, I wanted to. . .I probably wanted to go to a school which had a little bit more appeal to me than John Herron did.

RB: Well, that's interesting; and since, I think you have mentioned in passing that Sarah Bard was responsible for your going to the Chicago Art Institute - is that correct?

RI: That's right.

RB: . . .would it have been your feeling at this time, while still in Arsenal Tech, that the Chicago Art Institute was considerably superior as a school to the John Herron school?

RI: Oh, certainly, certainly.

RB: So that you were very ambitious to go to such a place?

RI: I wanted to go to the. . .

RB: I don't know anything about their relative qualifications. . .

RI: Well, John Herron is a small, is a relatively very small art school, and of course Chicago represented to me the large, the big city, and it represented all the things that I had not yet experienced in my life.

RB: The one thing that puzzles me slightly is that you were letting yourself in for a three year delay by this course. This didn't trouble you too much?

RI: It didn't. It seemed the only course to take, Richard, because the advantage of five years of free schooling was a little too great and I was willing to make that sacrifice.

RB: This is what the GI Bill of Rights provided - five years of free schooling?

RI: Yes. Five years.

RB: Well, I suspect also that an ingredient of your move was wanderlust, in a sense, since your mother had a kind of restlessness herself, and didn't you probably want to see the world and go around to places, quite apart from wanting to get away from home, say, but as a positive factor. . .?

RI: No, no. That wasn't my motive. I would have been much more eager to get to art school than to see the world. But I just had to go through this thing.

RB: Well, now could we take up your steps in entering the Air Force.

RI: Surely.

RB: What - when it happened, what happened?

RI: Well, the last thing I did - I had grave misgivings about joining the Army from a psychological standpoint, and I didn't quit my job at *The Star* until i knew absolutely sure that I had passed the physical and had been accepted by the Army. Then when I did I took a week's - a few days' vacation in Kentucky, I went to Mammoth Cave and then that ended my life in Indiana.

RB: Excuse me for interrupting, but when you took this vacation did you go with some other friends or something. . .?

RI: No, I went alone.

RB: You went alone? By train or by car?

RI: No. Probably by bus. It was more just a thinking kind of trip. I wanted to make sure that I had done the right thing, I suppose.

RB: Was this the first sort of travel you had undertaken in your life as a tourist, shall we say, as a traveler?

RI: No, no. My family were great, as I indicated, particularly my mother, they were great travelers and I had been all through the South and Southwest of America with them.

RB: Then I think we've skipped this. I don't recall. . .

RI: Didn't mention it. Didn't mention it.

RB: Well, let us go back then a moment because I don't want to leave the impression on the tape that I received myself that you had remained pretty much within Indiana during your youth. So could you go back there into some of these trips that you took out of the state and through the South mentioning when and where?

RI: This was when my father was just recovering from, shall we say? recovering from the Depression and the family was getting back on its feet again. We took trips to the South, to Alabama and Texas. . .

RB: This was while your mother and father still lived together?

RI: That's right.

RB: And you were at this age only seven or eight or something?

RI: That's right. And we went with my grandmother and grandfather on my father's side because what we were doing was visiting their relatives that they hadn't seen for years and which we had never seen at all.

RB: What were they like when you got to see them?

RI: I can't even remember. There are no -- except that they were just simple, farm kind of people I have no recollections whatsoever.

RB: What do you remember of great America as a child as you saw it?

RI: The South in those years was just like the photographs make it out, bleak and barren and miserable and both trips weren't very pleasant as far as I was concerned.

RB: Were you surprised by the quantity of Negroes? I mean, I presume. . .

RI: I have no memory of that at all.

RB: My own first recollections of being in, say, Savannah, Georgia, I was older than that, but, you know, I remember - not exactly being unprepared for it - but visually one was impressed by the fact that there were so many dark faces around in proportion to what I was used to in the North. And I wondered if there were recollections of this kind?

RI: I have no recollections of the Negro except seeing him picking cotton in the fields in Alabama and possibly I do remember the shacks and the sharecroppers' houses that I saw them in, but this made no great impression.

RB: These several trips that you took are not then particularly to be differentiated one from another. . .?

RI: I know that there was a trip to Alabama and there was a trip to Texas and they probably took place in consecutive summers. I don't even recall which came first except that one was to go to the kind of national fair which was taking place in Fort Worth, Texas.

RB: Well, then to go ahead now once more into your post-high school period, this trip to the Mammoth Cave nevertheless does remain a first trip taken perhaps with a tourist objective in mind, to see some natural wonder, some special place?

RI: Well, of course, that wasn't the reason that I went really. As I said, I took it to be away

from home and to think about the kind of heavy decisions that I was making. As a child I had been to many caves in Indiana and I always had a kind of fondness for spelunking on a very tourist kind of level. But, no, it wasn't so much that, Richard, as it was just an objective, a place to go.

RB: I just wondered how you happened to have chosen that objective, but it may be a very logical one for that location?

RI: It wasn't far away.

RB: So during this little excursion which lasted only a few days. . .?

RI: That's right.

RB: You came to the decision to enter the Air Force?

RI: That's right.

RB: You overcame your dread, shall we say?

RI: Oh, fears and doubts, I should say.

RB: Now could you describe the process - I don't know how rapid it is. I mean once you went up and enlisted, did you almost immediately go into service, or were you. . .?

RI: Just about. It was very quick. You enlist and you're taken to a preliminary examination and you're put in a bus and that evening I was at camp Atterbury.

RB: Atterbury is situated where?

RI: Near Columbus, Indiana. I think it's no longer in existence. But it was a coincidence because Columbus was to be the scene actually of my mother's death three years hence and it was there that the induction center was located at that time.

RB: What month was this?

RI: September.

RB: So you had had the whole summer then. . .?

RI: Yes.

RB: So this was when normally you would be, say, entering art school as far as. . .?

RI: A little prior.

RB: Well, I'd like you to say something about your experiences in the Air Force as you went. . .

RI: Well, it was the Army at the beginning.

RB: Yes, the Army, because the Air Force wasn't independently established. . .

RI: And there was really very little difference at the, shall we say, in the first week or two. . .

RB: You had basic training, I presume?

RI: I went to San Antonio, Texas for Air Force basic, which would have been a relatively short time, something like six weeks, but during the course of my training I became ill and was set back and went into a different so-called flight, putting me out of contact with the servicemen of my own region nd throwing me into a barracks of men from the South, from Georgia, which proved to be a very unpleasant experience and made ny basic training end with a very bad taste actually.

RB: Let's take this a little more slowly. You fell ill of what - what occasioned this?

RI: I had what was called - I'm not sure - it was an infection of the throat and there was an epidemic of this at the base at the particular time.

RB: How long had you been part of the camp when you fell ill?

RI: Oh, just a few weeks.

RB: A few weeks. And your original group contained Indianapolis boys, or Indiana boys?

RI: Yes. Actually one or two people that I even vaguely knew, but I lost contact with them due to this illness.

RB: Yes. That I gather, but to start with then, you had some sort of buddies, you might say, that you sort of felt at home with. And then this other group seemed very different?

RI: I felt very alien and removed from them.

RB: In what way were they different?

RI: Well, just their general attitude toward Army life was different. They were much more undisciplined. It was a much rowdier, more boisterous barracks, and just a kind of - constantly characterized by horseplay which I wasn't very happy with. The other barracks had been much more quiet.

RB: They were a bunch of nasty toughs, is that it?

RI: A little bit in that direction, yes.

RB: They came from any particular portion of the South?

RI: Georgia.

RB: Oh, they were all Georgia boys? Georgia country boys?

RI: Yes. More or less.

RB: With difficult accent?

RI: No.

RB: Did they pick on you as a sort of foreigner in their midst?

RI: They never quite got in their minds that a person from Indiana was from Indiana was from the North. I take it they took Indiana was a border state, but they had great fun trying to seize upon what they called really Yankees and giving them a rough time. But I escaped that due to their ignorance of the geographical position of Indiana.

RB: There were, in other words, several other chaps like, say, possibly a boy from Boston or something. . .?

RI: Only one or two, but they gave them a particularly rough time.

RB: They gave them hell?

RI: Yes. It was all kind of. . .

RB: I gather this is characteristic of human behavior. I talked once years ago with a chap who had done a lot of sailing, an Englishman who gave me the impression that sailors from Liverpool would beat up Tyne-side sailors if they got one in their midst, you know, it's just so completely a geographical basis of antagonism. And you found the same thing?

RI: Yes.

RB: Well, you nevertheless -- I think this basic training course only lasts about. . .?

RI: It was about six weeks but mine got stretched out a little bit longer because of my illness.

RB: But at the end of this course were you separated from this particular group or did you have to stay with this group longer?

RI: As it turned out, it was a matter of separated from this particular group or did you have to stay with this group longer?

RB: To what school?

RI: Tech school, technical training at. . .school for further training at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, Colorado.

RB: Sent with a group. . .?

RI: No, no, just. . .

RB: Individually sent?

RI: Individually.

RB: Did you in these early months of service feel a great loneliness in these strange places that you were placed in? One is always reading about, hearing about the USO and the lonely serviceman in strange communities. Do you recall? You must have been unhappy because of the nature of these other kids that were there?

RI: I was. I suppose I was lonely but at the same time San Antonio was a fairly interesting city.

RB: Well, I was wondering what you did with your leisure time? Not that you had much. . .

RI: Mainly exploring San Antonio and when I got to Denver that was even a more compatible city. Although it was the middle of a very cold Rocky mountain winter I still enjoyed going into the city and that was the main escape from the humdrum. . .

RB: I've always understood San Antonio is quite an interesting place. However, I don't know to what extent its museum, if it has one, contains fine examples of art.

RI: It doesn't.

RB: In Denver I think there is quite a reasonably good museum, isn't there?

RI: Yes, and I found that, not that it contained anything very exciting, but at the time it had a number of regional American artists represented whose work at that point I was interested in.

RB: Who were they?

RI: Oh, Western artists, people whose names I've lost now.

RB: Their own collections are not particularly strong, I take it?

RI: I don't remember them but there were. . .

RB: If you were on the trail, shall we say, of your personal exposure to great art, because as far as I know, except in the John Herron you spoke at bit about, you still haven't encountered -- I presume you did when you reached Chicago you came there in the Institute, I suppose. . .?

RI: That was the first. That was the first.

RB: So up until then really you didn't have too much direct experience of fine examples of art or. . .?

RI: Only on a trip to New York City while I was still in the Air Force. During my second year I was stationed at Rome, New York and I came down to New York City on a visit and I visited the Metropolitan and the Museum of Modern Art and that would have been my first contact with - that came probably even before Chicago Institute.

RI: Only on a trip to New York City while I was still in the Air Force. During my second year I was stationed at Rome, New York and I came down the New York City on a visit and I visited the Metropolitan and the Museum of Modern Art and that would have been my first contact with - that came probably even before Chicago Institute.

RB: Well, I think we might go through just for the record your transfers. You went, and you stayed, doing what sort of work, I mean what sort of military. . .?

RI: I was sent to Lowry Air Force Base. Having qualified myself for any tech school, I was supposed to have choice I had been photography editor of the high school annual and I did have this interest in photography, and that seemed as glamorous and interesting an assignment as I could think of in the Air Force. But upon arrival there, there was such an overflow of applicants waiting for admission to that school that I was refused admission and I went into a clerk-typist course, something like ten weeks, which was a great blow and a disappointment but which later I came to value because I learned to type and that's always been an asset ever since.

RB: Had you not learned to type before this?

RI: No, no. I took no commercial courses in high school.

RB: So this was absolutely from scratch, so you got that experience and learned quite well. I mean so that you could presumably, had you not had other abilities, been hired, shall we say, as a male secretary or something like that, or. . .?

RI: I did have typing jobs here in New York City so that it proved very valuable, but more for my own purposes in that I - for my own writing and so forth - I valued it.

RB: Yes, I understand that. Now I was just trying to discover the quality of the instruction and the thoroughness with which they trained you. I'm not sure what they had in mind to use you for in the Army. If war had broken out and you had remained in the Army for eight or ten years you might have become in some advanced base in some foreign country a general's secretary or something, do you think, or. . .?

RI: That's very hard to say, Richard, I mean the Army is primarily an administrative situation and they employ thousands and thousands of clerk, so I probably would have been just lost in that general shuffle.

RB: At which point did you begin to hate the Army? I'm assuming, without knowing, that you hated it. Maybe you didn't?

RI: I never hated it. I didn't like it. But actually I made the best of a bad situation. Upon graduating from the tech school in Colorado I went to a terrible, desert-bound, lost Air Force base in New Mexico at Hobbs.

RB: Hobbs?

RI: Hobbs, New Mexico. This was a base that was being discontinued and the problem was to repair - it was not my problem - but it was the problem of my unit that I was attached to, to put these old World War II airplanes into flying condition and fly them off to another storage depot. And, of course, I would have had nothing to do with this operation, but that was the basic mission of the unit that I was attached to. And the first day that I was there, in clearing through the processing I asked if there was a base newspaper, and upon being told that there wasn't, and asking if they thought it might be a good idea, I laid the foundation for the rest of my activity in the Air Force and that was editing Army newspapers, you see.

RB: This seems to be a case of your taking the initiative, which sounds very commendable. In other words, you thought up the idea of their having on this moribund base a daily paper and they authorized, an officer permitted this. . .?

RI: They did. It was a very -- the first was a simple mimeographed paper which didn't actually see very many issues because the operation there ended fairly quickly but upon leaving Hobbs my outfit was sent to Rome, New York on a very temporary basis awaiting a permanent assignment. And by that time my service time had got to the point of two years and if I didn't immediately have some service transfer, I would have no foreign service whatsoever. So in my impatience I volunteered for Alaska and left Rome, left my outfit, and went to Alaska. And two weeks later the outfit that I had been with received orders to go to England. Well, that was a great disappointment and a jolt, but due to the lack of time that I had remaining in the service, for me to have been eligible to go to England, I would have had to extend my enlistment to four years. So it's probably very good that I didn't even have that temptation, you see. And as it was, I went to Alaska and there became attached again to a

PIO or an INE outfit. . .

RB: Where were you in Alaska?

RI: Anchorage.

RB: That is fairly far north, isn't it?

RI: No, it's on the bottom of the mainland of Alaska. It's above Juneau, of course, but it is on the southern coast of Alaska, and it's the largest city in Alaska. At that time it had one paved street and one theater and about a hundred bars and saloons. It was still a kind of frontier city. Now, I understand it's greatly changed. But there I again became associated with a base newspaper and this was the *Sourdough Sentinel*. And for most of my time in Alaska I worked on that.

RB: I want to hear more what you did on the *Sourdough Sentine*l, but I think I'd like to go back a little further. At Hobbs you created this paper more or less yourself. Does that mean you were the principal editor of it, this temporary sheet that you put out? Did you write most of the. . .?

RI: It was mostly a one-man staff, yes. I did acquire a sports writer, and one or two other assistants but pretty much I was everything from writer, editor, to production and distribution.

RB: What other duties were you obliged to have at the same time? Or was that your principal assignment?

RI: That was the principal job. I still had to do things like pulling KP and, oh, doing the menial things that Army people have to do. But otherwise that was my principal job.

RB: Yes. Then you went to Rome, New York where you -- Is Rome a very large city, or town, or what? I don't know. . .

RI: It's just a medium-size. . .

RB: What's it near?

RI: Rome is in the triangle of cities - Utica is a neighboring city, Syracuse is a neighboring city. And it is while I was at Rome - remember this attachment was a temporary one and the outfit had really very little to do except wait for this transfer. . .

RB: How big was this outfit?

RI: Oh, I couldn't say - a thousand or two people. . .

RB: Oh, it was. Yes. And you would have been holding something in rank as a private, or corporal, or...?

RI: At that time I was a corporal.

RB: So you were under the command of a - what. . .?

RI: A colonel.

RB: Directly responsible to the colonel because of this specialized function. . .?

RI: Due to my function on this paper, in a way, yes. He almost sponsored it himself and actually it was almost a fairly personal relationship.

RB: What was the colonel's name?

RI: Densford. Colonel Densford. And I became a friend of his family.

RB: A regular army officer?

RI: That I don't really recall, Richard.

RB: I haven't heard you mention getting any particular friends. I mean some people have

met fascinating people, I suppose, in military service. You didn't. . .?

RI: That never occurred in my three years of service.

RB: Appolinaire was not in the next bunk, or anybody. . .?

RI: Certainly wasn't.

RB: Nobody that contributed to your intellectual stimulation was there?

RI: Not very much.

RB: And very few people to talk or think about art with, I presume?

RI: Almost none.

RB: When you were at Rome this was when you came down to New York City?

RI: That's right.

RB: But you also perhaps went to Utica, Rochester to see some of the museums and things there? Or were you not interested much at that stage?

RI: I didn't have very much opportunity to do that, Richard, and the main reason was it was in the middle of a very cold winter so that I didn't get much traveling done. One thing I did do, though, this is when I went to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in Utica and I enrolled for off-duty classes there and at the Utica branch of Syracuse University I began formal study of Russian. So that my time was really pretty much taken up with that activity.

RB: You were taking a beginner's course in Russian, is that it?

RI: It was a first-year college. . .?

RB: Have you kept up Russian? Did you go on with this later?

RI: I kept up with it when I went to Alaska, but I dropped any formal study.

RB: This was your first study of a modern language?

RI: That's right.

RB: You specialized only in Latin, which I think you did very well in, I gather, because you won a prize in Latin.

RI: Yes.

RB: I should have asked you, how far did you get in Latin - through Cicero and that sort of thing, or. . .?

RI: The third year was Cicero and the fourth year was Virgil's Aeneid and that was about all. However, there was another aspect to the Latin in that I became rather immersed in its study. I became an officer in the Latin club which was an after-school social study kind of club, and I also did some art work for the Latin department, I took the second chapter of Luke and made, oh, probably six parchment illustrations in the medieval manner in Latin illustrated, illuminated manuscript.

RB: This, of course, was while you were at Arsenal Tech in Indianapolis?

RI: Yes, that's right.

RB: Well, to return now to Rome, you mentioned this class at Munson-Williams-Proctor. Was that a class, did you say. . .?

RI: I was an evening class and it was conducted by a man whose name I've forgotten now, but he was, shall we say, a disciple of Hans Hofmann, and it was my first - Weisbuck was his name, I remember now. And it was my first contact with the School of New York activity, but premature and much too early. It had no real influence, I'm sure.

RB: What was he attempting to do, teach beginner's art or teach what -- What was the course called?

RI: This was a rather advanced course and it was for students at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute.

RB: Yes. Did you come in uniform as a GI, or. . .?

RI: By that time I imagine I probably dressed as a civilian. I don't even recall.

RB: Well, I'm trying to find out, to clarify it for myself - you came as an evening pupil in an evening class in which the other students would be, possibly, housewives, or were they all you students?

RI: They were younger students.

RB: And you worked in what medium?

RI: Oil.

RB: You did have space to do regular canvases?

RI: Of course. It's a regular art school.

RB: I see, yes. Well, I wasn't quite clear, because I didn't know the Munson-Williams did have an art school.

RI: Oh, sure, yes. Very nice studios in the former stable of an old mansion that has probably been torn down now for the new Institute that's there. I haven't seen the new building, but Mr. Palmer was the director then, as he is now.

RB: Actually, the old mansion may be the building - I have been to the Institute since the new museum, designed by Philip Johnson, I think, was opened, and unless it's a different building they have restored the old mansion.

RI: There were two in those days.

RB: I see.

RI: And there were two stables in the back, one for each of the mansions and I'm sure one of those mansions had to go down in the expansion.

RB: Yes. Well, one is preserved and restored to its full nineteenth century glory as a nineteenth century residence. At that time it was not this way. I think it's quite recent that they've done. . .

RI: Both of the mansions were used and when they were restored is hard to say.

RB: Well, I mean these are rooms completely set out as a well-to-do Utica family would have had them in the nineteenth century, I think. They were used then more for galleries, were they?

RI: They were used for galleries and they were used for meeting rooms and things like that.

RB: I think at this time Edward Root, who left his quite notable collection of contemporary American art to the Munson-Williams-Proctor, was still living and possibly therefore his collection was not yet in the possession of the museum. Do you remember. . .?

RI: I don't recall that name.

RB: Well, Edward Root, who was a son of Elihu Root, Secretary of State, was an art - I think he bought, for instance, paintings by the very youthful Stamos, Pollock, all sorts of people. He was already in his sixties or seventies, but he was one of the earliest collectors of the New York School artists when they were very young - Baziotes, all those people. And when I visited Utica this collection happened to be on display, which he left to them. It really was -- but once I saw it on exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum in New York while he was still living -- Joe Glasco, very young he had bought. He was really quite a pioneer in buying people.

RI: I didn't see that collection.

RB: This was before -- well, I don't know what the museum. . . So, in other words, you didn't have, except at secondhand, through Mr. Weisbuch - you didn't have direct visual experience of the new movement?

RI: No.

RB: And what year was this? This was 19--?

RI: That would have been 1948, I think.

RB: '48. Well, of course, if I'm not mistaken, this was just the time when de Kooning and Hofmann and so on were first exhibiting.

RI: That's right.

RB: So that it would have been pretty early to have. . .

RI: Yes, very little to. . .

RB: You would have been probably catching up with Picasso and Braque and that generation as new artists at that time, wouldn't you?

RI: More like that, yes.

RB: Do you remember any reactions at that time to Picasso, to modern art in the post-Cubist phase?

RI: Well, I probably considered my self very sophisticated at the time, and these people were people I had grown quite accustomed to long before then.

RB: Picasso you had grown accustomed to through seeing reproductions or originals?

RI: Well, possibly some originals at the museum in Indianapolis.

RB: But relatively few originals compared to just reading about or hearing them?

RI: Yes. Few.

RB: You had to pay for this instruction?

RI: No, this was a part of an off-duty educational program conducted at Griffis Air Force Base in Rome and I don't think I did have to pay. I was provided by the Army.

RB: Did this class meet more than once a week?

RI: That I can't recall. I think it was probably about twice a week. And the language was a third night, so I think that would have been the extent of it.

RB: You remained at Rome, then, for. . .?

RI: Just a short time. Probably three months or so. And then I volunteered for what is called non-continental overseas duty, and this turned out to be Alaska - was the only place open.

RB: I think I should just ask a few more questions, Sir, about your journalistic job there in Rome when you said you were quite personal friends with your commanding officer, Colonel Densford.

RI: I was attached to the -- but due to the temporary nature of our attachment to Rome, as I said, the outfit had very little to do -- I was attached to the P.I.O. office, Public Information, and my trip to New York City was to cover some boxing matches that boxers from my outfit were taking part in, in the base out on Long Island, which has since been closed down. And it was then that I had my first visit to New York.

RB: Under Army auspices then?

RI: Yes.

RB: Now I was wondering whether you ever got home during this period at all, perhaps you weren't eager to, but you were rather remote geographically from Indianapolis most of this time you were in the service. . .

RI: No, I went back but. . .

RB: On weekends occasionally?

RI: No, no. Just infrequently.

RB: At Christmas and so on?

RI: Something like that. I really don't recall.

RB: To visit, stay with your mother, I suppose?

RI: Well, for brief times. My father had since moved to California.

RB: Oh, your father moved to California. After you left high school?

RI: No, probably while I was still in high school, because he did not attend my graduation. He had already left.

RB: What took him to California?

RI: He was primarily escaping Indiana. He had become, I imagine, sort of fed up with the local scene and decided that he'd like a change of horizon.

RB: Did your stepsister go with your father and stepmother?

RI: I think so, yes.

RB: Are you in touch with her at all, or you have no. . .?

RI: No, no.

RB: Let us go then to Alaska. How did you get up there, as an individual or as part of a unit?

RI: I traveled as an individual by train to the West Coast and I took the opportunity to make a detour. I stopped off in Los Angeles to see my father whom I hadn't seen for several years, and that's the last time I've seen him - it's about fifteen years ago.

RB: Oh, he's still living?

RI: Yes. And from there I went by train to San Francisco. I was in San Francisco for about two weeks awaiting processing.

RB: Let's have a word or two about that experience. That might have been quite stimulating and interesting.

RI: Yes, it was. I enjoyed San Francisco very much and got into town almost every day while I was there.

RB: Oh, you were in a military unit at where. . .?

RI: Of course.

RB: Residing where then physically?

RI: I don't really recall the name of the base, Richard, but it was across the Golden Gate Bridge not far away from San Francisco.

RB: Not in the Presidio, which is. . .?

RI: No, no.

RB: Well, you had no duties, you were just in a state of transit?

RI: In transit.

RB: KP and things like that?

RI: Yes.

RB: So am I to presume that you visited the various San Francisco museums there?

RI: I did. And the only one that I particularly remember at this point was the Palace of the Legion of Fine Arts, I think it's called.

RB: Legion of Honor, I think. Palace of the Legion of Honor, I think. Well, there's the de Young Memorial Museum and there's the San Francisco Museum, which in recent years, at least, has, I think, been the most avant-garde in relation to contemporary modern art; and then this Palace of the Legion of Honor.

RI: I may have visited and seen more but it has been a long time and, if I did, I just don't recall.

RB: What did you think of San Francisco as a place?

RI: Loved it very much.

RB: Any other things to report about being there?

RI: No. It. . .

RB: You didn't meet -- there was at this time, you see, I think, historically speaking - I'm sure you didn't encounter it - but I think this is possibly within the time when the California School of Fine Arts, or whatever, was fairly active with, possibly, even Clyfford Still teaching there and various people. . .

RI: I imagine so, but I had absolutely no contact. . .

RB: You wouldn't have been aware. . .

RI: I was there too brief a time to make any contacts like that.

RB: So from San Franciso you traveled by. . .?

RI: By ship to Anchorage?

RB: As a member of a military unit now?

RI: No, I still wasn't a member of a unit. It was just a large ship full of servicemen. By the way. . .

RB: You were traveling with an Air Force group then?

RI: No, not necessarily. There were Army personnel. But it wasn't direct to Anchorage. It was from San Francisco to Seattle and there was more processing in Seattle and I was in Seattle for probably a couple of weeks, too. Now why that was necessary, I'm not sure but such was the case.

RB: Did you also experience some acquaintance with the art world of Seattle and its museum, or. . .?

RI: I don't particularly recall visiting the museum in Seattle and certainly had no contact with the art world. Again, I was taken up with processing, and most of my time in Seattle was spent on the. . .

RB: Well, I wouldn't really expect you at this stage to have, but I just thought I'd ask in case you had. Military life always seems sort of cumbersome, wasteful of time when you hear about it, doesn't it?

RI: It certainly is.

RB: It doesn't seem as if you were really accomplishing anything during all this going around except that it did add to your personal knowledge of America, your visual experience of this country. . .

RI: Quite a bit.

RB: . . .and cities which. . .

RI: I crisscrossed the country several times.

RB: I'm not sure whether you went by train on all these trips, or by air?

RI: Never by air.

RB: Never by air! Incidentally, your training in this unit in the Air Force never involved or prospectively involved your flying?

RI: As an enlisted mann I never had anything to do with airplanes whatsoever.

RB: You were not anxious to? You didn't want to. . .?

RI: It was no part of my career at all.

RB: Yes, but I imagine if you had been tremendously eager and instead of wanting to be an artist you'd wanted to be a flier or something, you would have somehow managed, or tried to get into the flying part of it.

RI: I would have but I wasn't interested.

RB: But you weren't. So it just didn't come about.

RI: I was just killing three years' time. That's all.

RB: In Anchorage then you dwelt in a barracks in some. . .?

RI: My first barracks was a very primitive Quonset hut, but that lasted only for a night or two and then I was transferred to the kind of barracks, the wooden, temporary barracks that were built during the second World War, and lived in those exclusively throughout my three years in the service. I never really ever was quartered in a permanent, brick army barracks that the permanent bases do have.

RB: In Anchorage did you resume this journalistic activity?

RI: Only at a later date. My first attachment, due to my various military occupational specialties, was with Information and Education, and I worked in the I.N.E. office or helping the educational programs.

RB: "I.N.E." stands for. . .?

RI: Information and Education. And helped conduct classes. I was continuing my study of Russian there. And I taught typing classes while I was attached to that unit.

RB: Was this your first teaching experience?

RI: Probably, yes.

RB: You must have become quite proficient by this time, or maybe it doesn't follow logically?

RI: It doesn't.

RB: Just because you've had. . .

RI: It has nothing to do with it. No.

RB: And you taught classes to other servicemen, and you had the rank at this stage of what. . .?

RI: I was probably at that point still corporal. I became sergeant only at the very, very end of my three years.

RB: In terms of pay and the kind of life you were leading, were you able to make -- would you have been able to make savings, or did you make savings in terms of money?

RI: I had - during my three years I saved probably about a thousand dollars from my pay.

RB: You did. Well, that's something to start with. I presume certain aspects of life in Alaska at the time might have been rather expensive. I mean, I'm thinking of you now in terms of going to a bar or something, drinking, or something of that sort, (maybe you didn't do this), but I just imagine it might have been more expensive for this kind of recreation and so on than in some other parts of the world. Am I wrong?

RI: Probably one of the highest, yes, Richard. But during my three years in the Army, due to my, oh, my concern about the church and so forth, I didn't drink and never really encountered this problem at all.

RB: Could you elaborate further on that "my concern about the church?"

RI: As a Christian Scientist one, of course, it not supposed to drink, Richard, and since I had never acquired the habit in the first place, why this was no problem.

RB: I am to infer that you lived a good, clean life as a fine young American soldier. Is that right?

RI: Pretty clean. Pretty clean.

RB: Yes. How would you evaluate this three years in its relation to your main life as an artist? Was it damaging, or was it just neutral, or did it in some way contribute something?

RI: A neutral blank.

RB: Just a blank? So we perhaps shouldn't waste too much time on it, except that I think it's inevitably part of your life, I mean, living in Alaska and going to all these places is a -- To me it's rather romantic to be in Alaska, because I've never been there. It may have been just about as dull as to be in Brooklyn for three years, perhaps. Well, let us take you out of Alaska. Or did you finish up what you were doing in your journalistic work there?

RI: I was very close to the end of my Army career in Alaska, Richard, when I was called home on an emergency basis. My mother was dying, and I returned to Indiana, and therefore my overseas service was abruptly terminated, and I finished the last month or two that I had remaining at a base in Dayton, Ohio.

RB: Your mother was stricken with some prolonged illness?

RI: Yes, my mother had been dying of cancer and she did expire at the very end of my Air Force career.

RB: Well, that must have been a very sad occasion naturally in your life, but I am a little puzzled by your saying you moved to this Dayton base. You mean you were technically attached to it but allowed to be where you could visit your mother? Where was she?

RI: No, that wasn't necessary. I returned home on emergency leave to attend my mother and she died about one hour after I got back to see her.

RB: Really! Was she conscious?

RI: Yes, she had been living only - had only been waiting to see me and then she expired. But. . .

RB: This was in Columbus?

RI: Columbus, Indiana, yes.

RB: Indiana! Where she then lived, or had she been sent there to a hospital or something?

RI: No, she had been living there with my stepfather for, oh, a couple of years. They had moved there while I was in the Air Force, you see.

RB: This must have been a very wrenching and terrible experience. You sort of flew back hastily and you had very short notice of this, or had you known that she was extremely ill?

RI: I knew that she was ill but it didn't reach -- you see, the difficulty was I was trying to postpone returning until my service was over, but it just didn't work out that way, so that when I did go back it was a great, great emergency.

RB: Who initiated the move to return you - your stepfather, or you, yourself, or, I mean. . .?

RI: Oh, relatives, my stepfather. It was all done through the Red Cross.

RB: Yes. In other words, you were brought home by the family's initiative? They arranged this?

RI: Yes.

RB: Well, then. . .

RI: Then, once back in the country, and due to the fact that it would have been nonsense to go back to Alaska, I was assigned on a temporary basis to a - oh, what is it called? the center where one is discharged, in Dayton, and just killed time there until my formal discharge. And during the course of that time my stepfather died, too.

RB: He also died! Had be been seriously ill?

RI: No. This rather happened after my mother's death.

RB: And then you mentioned previously, you had to sell the family furniture. Is this. . .?

RI: I had to liquidate. . .

RB: You had to do this. . .?

RI: There was a business and a house and furniture and so on.

RB: And your stepsister collaborated in this, or. . .?

RI: No, no, the stepsister was on my stepmother's side, had nothing to do with my stepfather's.. .

RB: Oh, that's right. Yes. I beg your pardon. Of course, that was the other side of the family. So you were completely. . .

RI: No, there were no. . .

RB: Well, you had to be in Columbus then for some while in connection with this?

RI: A few days, just a few days. Maybe a week or two.

RB: You must have been thinking already during this period about your release from the military service. I take it, this was all of course prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, wasn't it?

RI: It was.

RB: That came in '50 so that there was no likelihood hanging over you of being kept in longer than. . .?

RI: No, by a beautiful coincidence I avoided the second World War and I avoided Korea, and gained the advantage of the GI Bill of Rights, so I was rather fortunate.

RB: I hope *Yield Brother* that you are contributing to Russell's movement will somehow, not in itself, but be associated with the fact that you are not involved in World War III, either, if there ever is one. Well. . .

RI: I'll be too old for that.

RB: I don't know. That's a nice thought. I wanted to find out about how you came to go to the Art Institute of Chicago and to go back there for, presumably through Miss Bard. Did you see her after. . .?

RI: No, no, I've never seen her since.

RB: Since you left school? Then she had planted in your mind the ambition to go to the Art Institute of Chicago school while you were at Arsenal Tech in Indianapolis?

RI: That's right.

RB: That I didn't realize. I thought perhaps -- So all along, all through these three years this was your goal?

RI: It was a goal, but I did explore the possibility of other schools, Richard, and. . .

RB: What other ones did you consider?

RI: Oh, I considered -- another thought was going to a university that would have a strong art department, and I wrote to, oh, many, many - too many to name - but in the end I did come back to the Art Institute.

RB: You never thought of going to the Hans Hofmann School of Art?

RI: I'm not even sure that I was very much aware of the existence of it.

RB: Well, you mentioned that man at Utica having been a pupil. . . Therefore you entered the Art Institute School at what date?

RI: 1949, the fall of 1949.

RB: The fall of 1949. Backed, I presume, by GI Bill of Rights income?

RI: That's right.

RB: How substantial were those payments?

RI: It was good. My tuition, of course, was paid for, and I had a monthly allotment. But I found upon arriving in Chicago and discovering the cost of living that it was not sufficient to meet everything, so even during my first year I got a part-time job in the evening and subsequently every year that I was in Chicago, except for the last I did work at night in addition to school.

RB: I don't know how the Art Institute is set up. I imagine that a great percentage of the students live in Chicago at home. Therefore I infer, perhaps incorrectly, that there's no dormitory system, like a college?

RI: At one time there had been a house donated to the school where male students lived, and female students lived in another building, but when I arrived there that had been discontinued, and one's residence was strictly up to the individual.

RB: So what did you do? You went around and found just a room in a rooming house?

RI: No, I didn't do that. I took, shared an apartment that was advertised in the paper, and for the first year lived in Austin, the last suburb next to Oak Park, which was a great mistake, but due to my inexperience, I didn't know any better.

RB: You mean you saw an advertisement from a complete stranger requesting a roommate, or something?

RI: Something like that, yes.

RB: That's the way it worked? I mean, this was not a fellow-student at the Art Institute?

RI: No, no. However, during the course of that year when one of the other roommates moved, one of my fellow classmates did take his place so that I had that companionship at least during that first year.

RB: This was a sort of fairly large apartment or house where there were several young men living together?

RI: Yes. That's right.

RB: Did you have your meals there, or. . .?

RI: No, everything was on our own.

RB: Just a sort of a place to lay your head at night sort of thing?

RI: That's right.

RB: And most of your life centered on the studios of the Art Institute?

RI: Certainly did.

RB: I hope you will be able to give some sort of a picture of what the atmosphere was like at the Art Institute, and what kind of instruction you had.

RI: Well, I think my first impression or reaction was a kind of being overwhelmed by the immensity and the complexity of the place, Richard, I didn't really know what I was getting my self into when I enrolled. It's really an art student factory, and they have hundreds and hundreds of students there, and I would say that it wasn't really what I thought it was going to be at all.

RB: Is it a fixed curriculum? That is to say, did you enter and follow a course that would have lasted one, two, three, or four years with a particular progression of. . .?

RI: There is. There is. And the first year is very rigid. Every first-year student regardless of his future desire or commitment, takes a basic first-year course which included still-life painting, figure drawing, things like that.

RB: How big a group would this have been?

RI: Each class was probably forty to fifty students, and there were probably six classes.

RB: Mostly boys, or largely girls, or. . .?

RI: No, very much half and half.

RB: Were any very talented people in your year?

RI: The first year there were very bright people, and it seemed that during the course of the four years those people tended to drop out.

RB: I thought it might be interesting to know if you arrived in a sort of green state fresh from army life, not too much in tough with the art world, whether there were some fellow students whom you felt were more sophisticated than you were and to whom you looked up at that stage as being sort of leaders?

RI: During the first year, Richard, one had almost no exposure to the upper classmen at all. One was very much thrown constantly with one's own classmates. Now, upon the second year, one began to have contact with older students. But still the progress, the plan of advancement and so forth was so rigid that there was very little opportunity for the kind of thing unless one joined the student activities, the organizations. Which I did do, and therefore I did have contact with older students. But the whole program was very rigid and very unsatisfactory, and really I became very disillusioned very soon with the whole organization of the school.

RB: In that first year, I take it that outstanding individual talent or originality would not have had any real opportunity of becoming manifest?

RI: Very little. Very little.

RB: Who were the teachers in that first year? Anybody of distinction?

RI: No one of any national note, Richard. I mean their names would not mean anything to you.

RB: I didn't think solely of names. I was thinking of personalities. You see, you have mentioned in your entire education, I think, only two teachers that really, as people,

apparently had a role in your life - Miss Bard and the journalism teacher.

RI: Well, the first grade instructor, Miss Coffin.

RB: Yes, those three, then. But now I want to find out if there were similar personalities - whether they are famous or not is not so important - whether similar personalities had influenced you at the Art Institute.

RI: This is one of the aspects about the Art Institute which is part of the whole gray reaction that I have toward it. Actually, there was no one single instructor who really provided the inspiration or the enthusiasm that I encountered in those two instructors in high school.

RB: In other words, as you said, it was a sort of factory with sort of foremen supervising the work of a bunch of people, most of whom, I presume, have not become fine arts artists?

RI: Pretty much that way, Richard. Considering the great number of years the Art Institute has been in operation and the thousands and thousands of students that have gone through the doors, the number of illustrious graduates has been very small.

RB: Who were some of the fellow students who might be considered practicing artists of more than minimal fame?

RI: Of my own experience?

RB: Of your own period there. Now you can go through the whole -- you were there three years?

RI: Four.

RB: Four years. Yes. Well, obviously you weren't there with somebody quite as notable as Jackson Pollock, who was earlier; but I mean, was there anybody at all that you remember?

RI: People that I might name that you would know their work or their artistic activity her in New York, Richard - the first I can think of would be the Goto brothers. They were still there when I was a student.

RB: Is this the sculptor?

RI: Byron, the painter, and Joseph, the sculptor.

RB: I only know of the sculptor. Joseph Goto is of Japanese descent?

RI: That's right.

RB: And was then -- was he your age, more or less? Or was he. . .?

RI: No, older, older, but you see he was there probably as a veteran from the. . .

RB: But as a student still?

RI: Yes.

RB: And did you have. . .?

RI: I never knew him.

RB: Oh, you didn't know him at all? Well, actually I don't care too much about people that might have been there. I mean Leonardo da Vinci might have been there, but as long as you never met him or saw him it wouldn't make much difference. But on the other hand, I'm thinking of any people that. . .

RI: Since there are so few, I mention those because those were the first that I knew about. Then, the first that I actually knew personally as a friend would have been Robert Andrew Parker, who has been showing for several years in New York and is now associated with World House [Gallery].

RB: Yes, I know of his work. I have seen it. He was the same year as you, or. . .?

RI: No. I think one year earlier.

RB: His kind of work, of course, is very different from yours. At that time, as fellow students, how close was your. . .?

RI: We weren't. We weren't.

RB: Oh, you just barely knew him?

RI: I knew him, but we were not close. There were no students with whom I could say I was affiliated or close to as far as painting was concerned.

RB: Well, in what way -- was your own painting so different from everybody else's? Or was everything such a gray blanket of mediocrity, or lack of individuality that you all sort of did more or less the same sort of thing, or. . .?

RI: Due to the way I remember it, it probably falls under the kind of description you describe, Richard, and that is a sort of gray mediocrity. Yes.

RB: It doesn't sound at all stimulating. I take it, people who were at the Hofmann School in New York around 1948 and '49, and even at the Art Students League - GI's coming back - it was a very exciting and stimulating time. There were lots of personalities, there was lots of talent and ideas exchanged. Now this sounds quite the opposite, although this would be roughly the same period in which these New York schools were finding a lot of talented people. . .

RI: Probably the difference between Chicago and New York, Richard. The only excitement at the Art Institute was a group called "Momentum" and they sponsored exhibits in defiance of the Art Institute. First of all, when I was a student there, there was a ruling that no students could enter the annual Chicago Artists Show, and "Momentum" was set up to combat and to offset this particular crippling of the possibilities of students to exhibit their work. And some of my friends were members of this group. However, I never became closely affiliated with it my self because it was very much an after-school activity and I worked after school.

RB: So you were not a leader or in this thing?

[PAUSE]

RB: Our conversation was interrupted and we resume now on October 2. Bob, you were speaking of the "Momentum" group. I don't know whether you want to give us more information. I had never heard of it.

RI: Well, I went back to Chicago this spring, Richard, and found that it had expired since my departure from Chicago in '53, but that a group of students were attempting to revive it and bring it back. I think, of course, the change of policy of the Art Institute that students of the school could exhibit in the Chicago Annual, more or less made it an unnecessary organization, and students still may enter the shows, but I think it's just come to the minds of the young students there that they still need their own organization, their own exhibiting organization, because the Institute doesn't provide enough opportunity for student shows.

RB: Did you mention who the individuals were who were leaders of this "Momentum" group during you time there?

RI: Well, I would have to scrape pretty hard to remember those people and just offhand I can't remember them. That's been ten, fourteen years ago, and I can't remember them now.

RB: In our discussion I think we were concentrating on your first year there. We haven't listened to all of it. Do you recall any special change in curriculum or in your own activities in the second year in Chicago?

RI: The program at the Art Institute was a rather formal one. The first year was standardized. Everyone entering the school, whether they were going to become painters, or ceramicists, or dress designers, or architectural designers, they all took the same first-year course, which is a little bit of a kind of soupy idea. And then the following three years, with each succeeding year you had more opportunity to choose the particular instructor that you wanted, and during my last two I had a former faculty member, or student - I really don't know which - at the Bauhaus, Mr. Weigar, and. . .

RB: I think you mentioned him before.

RI: Yes. And he is still - I think this is due to be his last year at the Art Institute. He was still teaching when I was there this spring, but I think he is due to retire this year. And he taught there for years and years and probably was one of the little more inspiring instructors, certainly one of those whose ideas were a little more contemporary that the average instructor. The most illustrious instructor in my time was Boris Anisfeld who had come over with the Russian Ballet with Diaghilev and had been one of his stage designers. And in fact did, for instance, *The Love of Three Oranges* - the Chicago Opera production. He did the costumes and the stage designs for that, and came with a great splash to Chicago, at that time being as well known as Chagall, and, of course. . .

RB: He was!

RI: In his later years that was his great grief, was the fact that both he and Chagall were invited to become faculty members of the Art Institute and he accepted and stayed on as an instructor, and Chagall went on to great heights of fame, you see, and I think he always rued that decision, but he did stay for his lifetime.

RB: Well, it would have been extremely interesting to know whether the mere fact of his taking this position in Chicago ruined his potentialities or whether in the first place he was not as original and powerful and artist as Chagall.

RI: He was an original painter at the time and could be compared with Chagall at the time, but if one gets himself stuck in Chicago for a number of years, why then I think that automatically precludes any kind of activity that befell Chagall.

RB: Well, there are two possibilities: If we assume that this was ruinous to him, one was that Chicago as a place and an environment was damaging. Secondly, that the post of a teacher of art in the United States in itself is damaging to a painter's career. Which of these two. . .?

RI: I would think the first, because his role as teacher -- he occupied a chair and had great freedom and had a very open schedule, so that if it was anything, it would be the first, not the second. Chicago was just not a good place for a painter to be.

RB: Well, what was -- in other words, you tend to believe that just the mere fact of living in Chicago might cut off the growth of an artist's career?

RI: It did for Boris Anisfeld.

RB: I don't see how we can prove this. I never heard of the man, frankly, and so I am not able to discuss it very well, but it seems possible that the seeds of his artistic extinction might have been in his character or in his potentialities, and Chicago had nothing to do with it, but you feel. . .?

RI: How many internationally-known painters can you name from Chicago? Chicago is a very populous city, one of the largest cities in the world. Can you rattle off any names?

RB: No. Nor can I from Melbourne and various other large cities. This is interesting enough. You feel -- I would suppose - that an artist needs to have surrounding him a kind of audience or participating world responsive to creativity?

RI: Positively.

RB: If I were to bundle you into an airplane tonight and take you off to some city in the worst cultural environment, and forcibly keep you there for the next ten years, do you mean to say that you think your artistic career would then wither on the vine?

RI: Probably pine away and die.

RB: That's interesting. It may be true. It's one of those things that. . .It's not susceptible to proof, is it?

RI: It's part of a kind of spiritual nourishment, I think, Richard. A backwoods town in some pine forest just doesn't give you enough spiritual nourishment. I'm not sure, I've confirmed the pine tree thing. . .

RB: Unfortunately, I can's remember to what extent we discussed what you saw in the way of art, for example, on exhibit in Chicago while you were a student. I think we did discuss what may have been your reactions to the contents of the Art Institute itself.

RI: There were three or four major exhibitions, not each one of which influenced me equally by any means, but I was tremendously impressed by them. First of all, there was a large Leger exhibit. The whole top floor of the Art Institute was filled with Leger paintings, including his largest and biggest canvases, and of course now I feel very influenced by Leger. There were many, many years when I felt no particular influence at all. As time has passed, I've grown more and more fond of his work. Another show was a large retrospective Edvard Munch, and this had a fantastic impact on the general, the whole decade of students at the Art Institute. That influence seemed to linger on just for years, and I think this is partly due to the fact that the people in Chicago were susceptible perhaps to that kind of Expressionism, whereas Leger had absolutely no effect on the student body at all. You can go to Chicago to day and still find painters, students from my time who are still working as if they were influenced by Munch and his style of Expressionism.

RB: What year, do you recall, when the Much show was. . .?

RI: Well, it couldn't have been -- I entered in 1949. It must have been '50 or something like that.

RB: Well, I've always had the impression that the Chicago School, insofar as it exists, is a group of painters concerned somewhat with the grotesquerie of the human figure. This, or course, was not the kind of art that you are particularly attached to. Is that what you mean? Is it this group of painters who were influenced by Munch?

RI: Not those particularly if you're referring to Golub and in the sculpture who deals with -- Cosmo Compoli. No, but there is a wider circle of younger, lesser-known painters who were, and who I find are still so influenced. The third was, and who immediately influenced me at the time - as Leger did not influence me at the time, and as Munch did not - was the first Chicago exhibit, and it was not at the Art Institute, it was at Evanston, the campus of Northwestern University, and this was an early exhibit of Dubuffet. A large, beautiful show of Dubuffet, and it was he who was really my most active influence, not while I was at the Art Institute, really, because I never felt free to develop in that direction, but as soon as I left the Institute, during the time that I was in England, and my first year or two in New York I was actively under Dubuffet's influence.

RB: Frankly, I can't see on the spur of the moment any relation between Dubuffet's work as I know it, and your current production.

RI: No, it's not there now. That was cut off abruptly and very cleanly and there's a definite terminal date for that. And it had a definite beginning date for my work as it began.

RB: You still respect Dubuffet as an artist?

RI: Oh, sure.

RB: Your change, your cutoff of his influence, occurred prior, I should imagine, to the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art of Dubuffet?

RI: A long time before that. And then I would never go back to that expression again.

RB: Your reference to these exhibitions featuring Leger, Munch and Dubuffet makes me curious to know whether you feel that these big one-man shows are the best means of making an artist's work understood and perhaps influential upon student artists?

RI: There's no doubt. These shows just bowl the students over.

RB: In my own experience with contemporary art I tend to think of certain shows that I've seen either in commercial galleries or in museums that are big presentations and that's, say, in a certain year was when I first got to know the work of such and such a now dead painter or a contemporary, and I suppose this might be the same with you?

RI: I think so.

RB: Well, wasn't Chicago a pretty good place, of course, better than Indianapolis, for this

sort of experience, but not comparable to New York for the opportunity to see big presentations of outstanding artists?

RI: Not comparable. However, those large shows like the Munch show, and the Dubuffet and the other that I spoke of, I'm sure they were seen in New York, too. The biggest shows which come to New York usually go on the road, Richard, and if they don't go to Chicago they go to Detroit, which is within traveling distance of Chicago, or they might go to Minneapolis, and sometimes students would make pilgrimages to see those shows. I don't remember that I ever did, but it was done.

RB: Well, you see I'm still thinking of your recently-stated view that being in Chicago is death to the creative talent because I imagine that one has he opportunity there to see a great deal of outstanding contemporary or traditional art. Therefore, I wonder why an art student or teacher having these opportunities there couldn't be sufficiently a world unto himself to survive whatever defects there are in this environment.

RI: Well, there is that aspect. The Institute is a marvelous museum and they mount beautiful shows, and there's the Art Club, and there are the universities which have shows, but that, unfortunately, isn't enough to nourish a painter. There is no active audience in Chicago for painting and particularly from the standpoint of a buying audience, Richard. One could starve very easily in Chicago.

RB: Well, the economic end is something a little difficult. I think, but we were speaking originally of the decline in potentiality of this particular artist that you mentioned who went there as a teacher. I don't think you could maintain that solely because no Chicago people bought his work he failed to become as good as Chagall. You didn't mean solely in economic terms?

RI: He had, I think, very little buying audience in that respect. No, of course, that's not the reason. The reason is probably he didn't maintain or establish any kind of professional outlet for himself in New York and therefore he cut himself off from professional livelihood. I mean the chair at the Art Institute probably maintained him very adequately, but from the other standpoint, for an established painter who has ---who is in his own particular stride, you could have all the beautiful shows in the world, and that isn't spiritual nourishment for an artist, for a creative person in itself. That's fine for a student, but not for an artist.

RB: Well, what is then the necessary ingredient that Chicago lacks and that New York has? This sort of market, or this free play of ideas. . .?

RI: From the background standpoint, yes, the market, but certainly -- and when I say audience I don't mean a group of anonymous people who like your work. I mean friends and people that you can associate with and feel compatible with. Chicago is a -- that kind of person in Chicago is a very small island.

RB: Yes, I quite believe that. I'm just interested personally to try and ascertain what degree of social intercourse among fellow artists is necessary to nourish the creative talent of an artist, because you definitely seem to believe that this is essential, a kind of exchange of sympathy between painters, and yet my impression is that the older the artists get, the less direct exchange there is between them in the way of visiting each other's studios and frankly criticizing each other's work.

RI: Probably so, but still there is that other indefinable thing, Richard, and that's that electricity, or that spirit, or whatever is in the air, in itself. . .

RB: The spirit of competition. . .

RI: No, no. . .

RB: . . .that stimulates further effort.

RI: Just the energy that is probably released in a place like New York is in the air and can be felt by an artist and this seems to help charge one, that's all. Because most painters when they get out -- right here in New York I haven't left the city myself for the country, but those who do always express a tremendous satisfaction upon getting back in the city and out of the country and where they can really get back to work again. This is an atmosphere which I don't know how to describe it, but it certainly prevails.

RB: But it is one of the features of the age that is of interest historically speaking, if it's true, I mean, we can't count on New York retaining for more than five, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty years this atmosphere. Maybe it will for a hundred, or five hundred, but we can't count on it. So it becomes of interest to ascertain that it exists now and its value. That's why I'm going into this so exhaustively.

RI: Well, I'm sure it has existed now for something close to forty or fifty years, given the various schools of art that New York has bred.

RB: Well, were you conscious as a student of the barrenness of this atmosphere in Chicago? You have already spoken of it in terms that make it seem rather gray and uninteresting. Were you aware while you were there. . .?

RI: Sure, sure.

RB: You were? So you were all this time rather hoping to move elsewhere, I take it?

RI: Well, that was happening all the time, Richard. Many of my classmates and people that I knew at the Institute were leaving continually for either California or New York. They went to California and usually didn't stay too long. Usually it was New York. And it's New York where they are now. They're not in Chicago.

RB: Yes, I believe that. Well, let's consider for a moment a supplementary side of your existence, then. You mentioned certain jobs and frankly I don't remember how much you described the kind of work you were doing outside of the art school. You started, say, with the second or third year? What were you doing?

RI: No, I started in the first year, actually.

RB: Well, yes, but I think you probably have already told us what you did in the first year.

RI: No, I don't think so. I had just a very menial clerking job for Ryerson Steel, which is one of the big steel industries in Chicago, and then from there I. . .

RB: Well, let me find out a little more about that. Was that a regular sort of nine to five kind of office job, or. . .?

RI: Night job.

RB: A night job, in which your duties were accounting, or typing. . .?

RI: Stock inventory, Richard

RB: You were a sort of stock clerk, in other words?

RI: Well, I was taking inventory in stock.

RB: At night? And the stock would have been what - steel beams. . .?

RI: Beams, girders, rails.

RB: Could you describe a typical day on the job, what you. . .?

RI: I've forgotten, and it's too painful.

RB: It's too painful?

RI: Too painful, yes.

RB: May I inquire why it was too painful?

RI: It was a pure drudgery kind of job and very dull and. . .

RB: Yes, I'm sure it wasn't very stimulating but in a way it sounds rather romantic, in a sense.

RI: It wasn't. It's too painful to even talk about.

RB: That's discouraging to the interviewer. However, let us go on to another job. How longer were you doing it?

RI: They all fall in that category. I was a stock clerk, not a clerk, but I suppose you'd call it a stock boy, in the third sub-basement of Marshall Field's department store in Chicago.

RB: This was also in sort of evening hours, or. . .?

RI: Oh, sure. Everything was, everything was after school, sometimes working up until midnight. Things like that.

RB: You went directly after a rather exhausting day at school, I suppose, to these jobs. . .?

RI: That's right. Maybe half an hour for dinner or something like that.

RB: In some sort of place like a drugstore, or automat, or something?

RI: Probably, I don't even remember.

RB: Well, I'm trying to build the Theodore Dreiser details of your existence in. . .

RI: It's so common an experience in this country, I don't think it needs to be even elaborated upon. Practically every student goes through that, I would say. Every student who has to pay his own way goes through the same ordeal.

RB: Well, after Marshall Field, what other one of these jobs?

RI: Well, the only commercial art job I ever had was during a summer vacation when I worked for R. R. Donnelley, the big printer, and I didn't think very much about it at the time. It did seem about as bad as any of the other jobs, but interestingly enough, I was doing little pop drawings for the classified telephone directory of Chicago.

RB: These would be figurative drawings, or. . .?

RI: Yes. Little men pushing lawn mowers, and the signs on the sides of the trucks and telephone buildings, and things like that.

RB: These were pictures conceived in your own imagination, or assigned to you as subjects?

RI: Assigned, and usually copied from some previous design, just pure repetitive commercial _ack illustration. But very pop.

RB: That I suppose -- I don't know whether that makes it important or. . .

RI: It isn't, it isn't. It's just a funny irony, that's all.

RB: How did you get this job? Because you were a student? Does the Art Institute school have a sort of bureau that helps students get jobs, or. . .?

RI: Sure, sure. But I think this was just an answer to an ad in the papers, Richard, nothing more than that.

RB: I think you told me where you lived when you first went to the school. Did you stay there?

RI: The first year I lived in Austing on the west side of Chicago. I was a great mistake because I didn't know any better. It was much too far away from where the Institute was located; and after that I lived on the south side of Chicago near the University, or the near north, which is just a few blocks above the school.

RB: What were the addresses?

RI: I can't remember. I wouldn't be able to tell you.

RB: A committee with a bronze plaque to put on the door would have trouble.

RI: Considering how houses are town down in this country, I don't think there would e much problem.

RB: We are about to end this tape, but have you any recollections of shows in ordinary galleries?

[PAUSE]

RB: This is Richard Brown Baker talking with Robert Indiana on October 2, 1963. I had just asked you at the end of the last tape if you had seen in regular commercial galleries in Chicago any particularly interest art. You described the Museum's retrospective, but. . .

RI: Well, in '53 and '54 when I was in Chicago, Richard, there were really only one or two or three commercial galleries that could even be considered to be representative, and to tell you the truth I don't remember a single show at any one of these galleries.

RB: In other words, students did not - as occasionally students do in New York - go around (I don't know how many students do her), but it's possible certainly for them to go roaming around to see contemporary art in scores of galleries. This didn't. . .?

RI: Didn't exist in Chicago?

RB: Didn't exist in Chicago at all.

RI: If they were showing any contemporary work it would be of a pretty conservative representational nature, like watercolors and street scenes and things like that.

RB: Well, by now, as a matter of fact, I think certain of those Chicago galleries have Monday night openings, sort of open house. I just got a notice --

RI: It's different now.

RB: Then it must be, in 1963, quite different.

RI: Yes. There are several galleries in Chicago now that regularly show both local people and a large roster of international - I mean New York and European. . .

RB: Did you ever go back in the summers to Indianapolis, or did you stay in Chicago?

RI: I stayed in Chicago.

RB: You stayed in Chicago. Did you ever have vacations during this period, or go anywhere interesting, or were you using the summertimes in jobs exclusively?

RI: Yes, I was.

RB: You were working all the time?

RI: I was working.

RB: You think it would have been better for you if you had had a few weeks in the Canadian Rockies canoeing, or going to Paris on a jaunt or something? I'm speaking in terms of your artistic career.

RI: Not necessarily. What I needed in Chicago is probably what people find much faster in New York and that is a working milieu, a studio and the kind of conditions and the inducements which pull one into an active painting life much quicker that in Chicago. For instance, the loft, which is the saving grace of New York, that does not exist really in Chicago. Painters, if they want to set up a studio, it usually has to be in a bedroom of an apartment or, at best, a small store frontage.

RB: Well, you certainly wouldn't be likely to find quite as fascinating a spot as this which we have already described in an earlier reel. I believe I was told that you were the leader of a student group while you were at the Art Institute, a club of some sort. Is that true?

RI: There were two student organizations active within the walls of the school, within the walls of the Art Institute itself, Richard, apart from "Momentum" whose activities were always on the outside of the Institute. There was were always on the outside of the Institute. There was the "Art Students League," which was called ASL, and which was primarily painters in the painting department, and there was Delta Phi Delta, which is a kind of

national art fraternity whose activity takes place mostly on academic college campuses where there is some art activity going on.

RB: I've never heard of Delta Phi Delta. You mean it really exists in many chapters throughout the country?

RI: It exists in many chapters throughout the country, and it has things like national conventions and it has rings, and it has procedures just like any scholastic fraternity.

RB: Largely social in its character?

RI: Half and half. Its goal obviously is to promote even a greater interest in painting and exhibiting and professional activities among art students.

RB: Were you a member of that?

RI: I was a member of that and I became (probably in my third year) president of that particular -- that's how you -- that's probably what you've heard about.

RB: I had rather thought you were president of the Art Student League. It was the other. . .?

RI: No. I was an officer in the Art Students League, but it was the other way around Not particularly by choice, but just by fluke and circumstance it worked out that way.

RB: Well, what influence, if any, does the job of president of this organization carry, I mean how did this -- what did this signify?

RI: The thing hat interested me in both organizations primarily was the opportunity to promote and take part in student exhibits. And at that time that was the only way for a student's work to be publicly seen.

RB: Were these exhibits organized by the student members themselves, or did faculty members have a. . .?

RI: They were organized under the auspices of the Art Institute but it was almost completely a student -- There was always a faculty sponsor who really didn't do very much. The students took over the whole operation usually.

RB: Well, tell me something about some of these exhibitions then in which you participated. The were group show sort of things?

RI: They were usually group shows and, of course, as happens in every situation like this, a certain number of people usually end up doing the work in the exhibition. In other words, those who were actively concerned were usually on the scene. The shows didn't really mean very much. The work was for sale and I would say during the course of my four years there I probably sold maybe half a dozen to a dozen pieces of work. But it meant something to me at the time.

RB: Well, I should think it might have. What were these pieces, what character did they have? Were they oil paintings or wooden sculptures, or constructions, or clay. . .?

RI: These were probably drawings or watercolors. I don't recall that I ever sold an oil painting in my. . .

RB: These would have been sold to strangers who wandered in or to fellow students?

RI: No. Yes. Usually to the public, because they were not exhibited in a regular gallery in the Art Institute, but they were exhibited in a gallery which had complete public access and so anyone who came to visit the collections of the Institute could see these student shows.

RB: What sort of prices did these works by students bring?

RI: Very low.

RB: Very low. Well, you made certain sales. Did this money amount to enough to be a factor in your existence?

RI: No, not really.

RB: Wasn't it an encouragement?

RI: It was an encouragement, yes, and it was great fun.

RB: And was it exceptional for students to sell as much, or did other students sell as much, or more?

RI: As I suggested, a certain group of students usually were doing both all the work on these exhibits and they were doing the exhibiting and they were active. The majority of the student body wasn't.

RB: When these exhibits took place, you were the officer or president of this organization. Did you exercise powers of excision, I mean were student's works refused as being inferior? Did you officers do that sort of thing, or did everybody have the right to put up what he wanted?

RI: I don't recall any open shows, Richard. Space didn't permit open shows. They were juried and the policy of the Institute was always to select usually three faculty members.

RB: To be the jurors?

RI: Yes, and the members of the organization voted each time as to who those jurors would be.

RB: Was there usually quite an issue made over who would be the jurors?

RI: Sometimes. This is so long ago I don't remember those little things.

RB: Well, sometimes -- one hears about art politics, and I don't know much about art politics, but this all sounds like the sort of situation in which art politics might, or might not flourish.

RI: On a small scale I suppose it's a reproduction of what happens with big national shows, Richard, and that is, there's always one group who would like one type of juror and another faction that would like another type.

RB: Yes. Sure. I mean if you were, for instance, concentrating on painting heads exclusively you probably wouldn't welcome Ellsworth Kelly as a juror as much as you would to day painting in a vein that is more closely allied to his work. Well, in your role as an officer, did you participate in hanging the shows? Did the students hang the shows?

RI: There was always a hanging committee. As an officer, I probably wasn't on that. But I was at other times.

RB: You did some of this hanging?

RI: Oh, sure, sure.

RB: You found that interesting?

RI: Oh, great fun.

RB: Did that produce squabbles, or. . .?

RI: Sometimes, yes. Things -- people's feelings were hurt. People didn't speak to me, but that didn't last very long.

RB: Were there any particular social events that you participated in, in connection with these organizations?

RI: Well, the organizations, particularly Delta Phi Delta, and maybe back in the Twenties and Thirties when things were livelier than they were when I was there, Richard, these organizations were ---Part of their role was to sponsor student recreation and social activities. The time I was there, about the only thing that ever happened was a yearly art students ball, and the first two that I saw, or knew about, were pretty drab affairs. But in my

third year, when I was president and when I was responsible for promoting this particular activity, a kind of windfall came down on us, and that is, someone learned that the old Cyrus McCormick mansion, which had been standing deserted for several years, could be available for such a party. And by just somehow coming in contact with the right people we rented that mansion.

RB: You had to pay for the use of it?

RI: Oh, yes. It was something like four hundred dollars rent for one night, which seemed exorbitant, but considering the impact that this had on people, it was more than worth it. We made a large amount of money from this dance. But it turned out to be a tremendous ball and from all the people who had been in Chicago for years it was one of the best that had ever been thrown in Chicago. This was called "Death of a Mansion." That was the theme. And one of the requirements was that everyone had to come in costume. It was a costume ball. And that costume had to be either black or white. There could be no color at all. And it was faithfully observed. That's how it turned out.

RB: Were you one of the people who had decided on the theme and the rules?

RI: I chose the theme myself>

RB: You chose that. Well, this house had been unoccupied for some while, I suppose? Was it furnished, or. . .?

RI: It was a glorious mid-Victorian, I imagine, say, post-Civil War, brown red stone - brownstone Gothic mansion on the near north of Chicago, at that time pretty much surrounded by commercial structures. It is torn down now. And the mansion of Cyrus McCormick's daughter, which used to be connected to the old house by an underground tunnel, that's been torn down, too. But at that particular time a Woolworth store and a whole block of commercial structures had cut the property in half so the house was more or less standing within just a small area of its former park. His stable, or his workshop, where he actually worked on his things - like reapers and so forth - had been demolished by this time - no longer existed. But the house - no. The furnishings were gone. There were still architectural artifacts. The tapestries were still on the walls in the dining room, and the library had silver inlay, and these things suffered, of course, during the ball, but, no, it was bare, and. . .

RB: Did you decorate it, I mean. . .?

RI: No, that was the whole idea. There was no decorating to do. It was the theme itself. All that we did was: there were two orchestras that night, one on each of the main floors. There was a ballroom in the house, by the way, and the ballroom was rather austere. I don't know whether its former decoration had been removed or what. But some of the art students, including Robert Andrew Parker, by the way, came one day and did some wall decorations for that. But otherwise the house was everything and it wasn't touched. What we tried to do was to eliminate illumination. One of those large spotlights that is used for Hollywood premieres and the opening of supermarkets and so forth, we got one of those and had it parked outside the house at the corner of the grounds and had it revolving in an arc so that it would cast its beam through the windows and by doing this rather fast that meant that at intervals of three or four seconds there'd be a sudden flash of light in the room, then there would be darkness, then light, then darkness, and that went on all evening.

RB: I've never had the good fortune to attend an art students ball. It just occurred to me that this is a European tradition. We were speaking earlier about the rather drab artistic environment of Chicago. I wonder whether the art students ball in Chicago, no matter how fascinatingly you got it up, was anything more than a kind of invitation to the real spirit of Bohemia reign. I mean, what is an art students ball in Chicago like? Who comes to it? I mean, is it solely art students? Or is money raised and people like pharmacists and their wives by tickets and come, or. . .?

RI: I don't think we got the pharmacists, Richard, but of course there is a Bohemia in Chicago. There is the Bohemia which is similar to the remnants that exist in New York in Greenwich Village. You know in the Twenties and Thirties there was a great writers' colony in Chicago and that created a Bohemia which still exists. But mainly it was for the students, I mean this was a students' ball.

RB: In other words, it didn't cost too much to come. There are all sorts of balls given in New York for charity which aren't anything else. . .

RI: Tickets to the public were more than for the student's tickets.

RB: The public could attend by paying more?

RI: The public did attend. I don't think it was the Chicago steelworkers or the pharmacists.

RB: No, but anybody who could just see an unusual spectacle, I suppose? These costumes were quite interesting, were they?

RI: Yes. I was well crowded. We rented a hearse and the elected queen and king of the ball spent part of the evening riding around the block and down Michigan Avenue in this. I don't remember whether it was a horse-driven hearse, but, if not, it was pulled by art students themselves, you see. So this attracted a great amount of people and the streets around the mansion were just jammed with people, and there was a whole contingent of policemen and firemen out. And in my zeal I had oversold tickets for the ball, and too many people came. At one point there were two thousand people in that house. You know, this was just a medium-sized mansion.

RB: It sounds like a marvelous brawl. How many orchestras did you have, just one?

RI: No, two.

RB: Two orchestras!

RI: Yes, but very little dancing got accomplished because people were so packed and jammed into this place that to get from the door up to the dance floor took some people two hours that evening. That's how packed it was.

RB: How dreadful! Were there refreshments, drinking?

RI: There was. But I can't remember how they ever got to them.

RB: What basis was used to choose the king and queen? Were they supposed to be the best art students, or the prettiest girl and handsomest boy, or most popular people, or what?

RI: That would be very dull to me, and I can't say that I remember at all, Richard.

RB: You were not the king, anyway?

RI: No, I was not.

RB: You were the organizing spirit behind the whole. . .?

RI: I was co-organizer. The officer of the other organization cooperated. This was a southern boy from Georgia, I think, and at one point during the ball when the doors were ordered shut by the police because there were too many people and there were still hundreds clamoring with their tickets to get in, the mob on the outside picked up a huge beam, and broke down the side door under the porte-cochere and my co-sponsor was standing guard at that door and this knocked him right to the floor. As soon as the doors were open they just rushed right in on top of him right up the stairs.

RB: Heavens! Did he survive the night!

RI: He's still alive. He's still alive.

RB: Where were you during the ball? I hope you got in early and were upstairs near the music.

RI: I had all kinds of fantastic responsibilities, Richard. The ball itself was just sheer hell for me. It was a mess, but I mean the great fun of the ball was the creative aspect of organizing it, getting it going, and so forth. But I had money responsibilities that night and a lot of cash was coming in from. . .

RB: People paid at the door?

RI: I guess that was it. I can't recall now why, but I had to have money right at the spot to pay the orchestras. They demanded to be paid right at the time. So that I had the problem of storing this cash in the glove compartment of an automobile parked outside. There just seemed to be no place to control things like this and, due to the fact that the corridors and the stairways were so crowded I was climbing outside the windows of this building out on ledges and dropping myself down the face of the building in order to maneuver this. . .

RB: What kind of costume were you wearing? I hope it was a flexible one?

RI: I had a very simple cloak or something which didn't complicate things.

RB: Which you made yourself?

RI: I don't recall.

RB: I never asked you, I think, whether you took dancing lessons, went to dancing school as a boy?

RI: No, never had anything like that.

RB: I asked this of one other artist and he said I made him feel like a hillbilly for asking - so I'm rather reluctant. . . When did you learn to dance, then, or didn't you? Of course at this ball. . .

RB: There was no dancing at this ball.

RI: It seems sort of odd to get involved so much in organizing a ball if you aren't a dancer, but. . .

RB: It seems sort of odd to get involved so much in organizing a ball if you aren't a dancer, but. . .

RI: Oh, no, no. An art students ball doesn't have very much to do with dancing. The main thing of the evening was the costumes. There was a costume contest and there was judging and prizes. And everything went wrong because the loudspeaker system failed and you could imagine in a house with two thousand people in it, it was just pure panic.

RB: How did you first personally feel about this? Were you embarrassed, upset by all these difficulties?

RI: Oh, no, of course not.

RB: Well, weren't they to some extent blamed upon you?

RI: No, the ball was so successful financially, and everybody had such a terrific time, that no one was -- the only people that were upset was the tax people because I didn't realize that proceeds from something like this had to be reported immediately, and I was fined for being a few days late, or something. That's the only thing that happened.

RB: You personally were fined?

RI: No, the organization was fined.

RB: It doesn't sound altogether hilariously delightful to me to be wedged into a corridor for two hours trying to get up, possibly having created a magnificent costume which one never got to the place of the judging, so that one wasn't judged. It sounds to me as if some of the people would never have had a chance to be judged.

RI: Somehow the claustrophobia just took over and gave the evening a stimulation which -- well, very few people ever experienced otherwise. It was just a unique experience. Common sense would ordinarily keep you out of such a place. There everyone was stuck so they made the best of it.

RB: Have you ever been, since you left Chicago, to an art students ball?

RI: No. They're given here. . .

RB: I think they have one in New York every year.

RI: Yes, the Art Students League gives a ball, but I think it becomes a much more commercial, ordinary ballroom, sort of big name band and balloons and Gypsy Rose Lee, or, you know, things like that. Which ends up not being very exciting at all.

RB: Well, I think you had an exceptionally interesting setting and I'm sure that made it unique, I suppose.

RI: Well, I've even done a painting just from the memory of all that, Richard. It's *The Great Reap*, which is my Cyrus McCormick painting. I've done two just out of memory of that night actually. And it was a wonderful house, a beautiful house.

RB: The Great Reap as a painting referes then, not so much to McCormick as a person, as to this experience of the ball?

RI: No, it doesn't refer to the ball at all. *The Great Reap* has references to other things, but certainly it does refer specifically to Crus McCormick and his reaping machine. *The Great Reap* refers to America - not to the ball or Chicago or anything else; the Reap is what has happened in this country. It's been a *Great Reap*. That's all.

RB: Did you being to plan for a future career as an artist while you were there? I think you have intimated you got a scholarship and went abroad?

RI: Yes. The last year of. . .

RB: How did that come about? Did you think of applying for this yourself or was this given to you without warning, or. . .?

RI: It's a program at the Art Institute, the last year for the painting department is dominated by the competition for the traveling fellowships, Richard, and each year about six or seven fellowships ranging from, oh, a thousand to twenty-five hundred dollars are given in open competitions.

RB: Is there a name to the fellowship you received?

RI: Yes, there is, and offhand I cannot remember that. I'm sorry.

RB: What stipend did yours carry?

RI: Mine was not the smallest, and it was not the largest. It was one in the middle, about fifteen hundred dollars.

RB: Who got the other fellowships that year?

RI: The top fellowship went to a student who for several years has been in Europe. He got his fellowship and more or less went and never came back. A chap named Dante Leonelli who came from an Italian family in Chicago. The others, I mean Mel Silverman who shows here in New York and lives in New York now, was a winner that particular year. The others were won by people who dropped out of the scene completely.

RB: I'm not quite sure I understand how you go about getting this. You said it was a major factor to compete for this.

RI: It's in open competition.

RB: What does open competition mean?

RI: All the final year students who are eligible submit drawings, or submit paintings, I don't recall. Each year the qualifications change a little bit.

RB: I wondered if there was a theme set that you had to produce a painting of a certain subject?

RI: Sometimes there is a theme, and sometimes a certain composition is required. I know that in the *final* competition a set picture was a figure competition with at least three figures, or something like that, and then sometimes in the preliminaries there's a theme. The

year that I was there I don't recall that there was a theme. It was judged on the basis of classroom work that was submitted probably to a faculty jury. I don't remember.

RB: You don't remember who the people were that. . .?

RI: No. The final winning goes before a board of trustees, and examining group, Richard. And always, of course, almost inevitably the wrong people get the fellowships. The really deserving, he really talented painters almost inevitably fail. My dean was so convinced that I wasn't going to get a fellowship that he had more or less arranged that I might get a kind of sop, a summer scholarship to Skowhegan, which I was given, and then I did win a fellowship, despite his fears. So that actually I had two prizes at the end of the four years.

RB: You did go to Skowhegan?

RI: I went to Skowhegan the summer after the Art Institute.

RB: Oh, well, that 's interesting. Have you before--?

RI: We haven't mentioned that.

RB: Before we go to Skowhegan, have you more things that you can think about to say about your Chicago experience?

RI: Oh, yes. The fellowship competition itself: One of my first-year instructors at the Art Institute - still-life, general painting instructor - a Rumanian painter by the name of Ersalascu, who I think is now dead, warned his little first-year students that the fellowship was a deadly thing, and that it was a terrible waste of time and you exhaust your energies for this and then you go to Europe and it takes you five years to recover after you come back from Europe, and for me it pretty much turned out that way.

RB: I don't quite know what he means by this?

RI: He means that the attention that was given to this competition and the energies expended on it would have been much better spent otherwise, Richard, that's about it. Just to go ahead and paint and find yourself and forget about travel in Europe because, as I found out, travel in Europe meant very little to my own artistic development. It was a nice vacation, but, you know, those frescos and those cathedrals just aren't important in the way that they used to be.

RB: Well, I've heard Morris Kantor say to students at the Art Students League here in New York that foreign travel is not helpful to a painter, at least in the present generation, because New York has so much to offer to a painter that just going abroad does not really add to his painterly experience.

RI: It's no longer useful.

RB: It may help his personal expansion as an individual as an experience of life. You feel this way?

RI: I enjoyed my year abroad immensely, but, considering that I exhausted my self, -what Ersalascu (?) meant was that if you had access to a thousand dollars, it would be better to use it and get yourself a studio and stay right in, (well, I don't know whether he meant in Chicago) but stay right in the country and just get to painting instead of going traveling around the circuit in Italy and Spain and France and so forth.

RB: Did you disagree with his view at the time?

RI: Well, I probably didn't. I certainly didn't heed it because, sure enough, I did the same thing that all the other fellowship winners did; I took off for. . .You see, the lovely story that floated around Chicago was that one year, one of the leading fellowship winners who won two or three thousand dollars bought a barbershop after winning it and settled himself down into a good profitable business, you see. So, well, that's another way. . .

RB: Well, he sounds practical. But I'm not entirely clear, I infer that as a student you were extremely ambitious and anxious to obtain this scholarship?

RI: It seemed a real -- Due to the, shall we say? poverty of my childhood and all the other

aspects of the Depression and so forth, this kind of a sudden financial gain probably was a great incentive, Richard. It certainly took me out of Chicago, and it certainly. . .

RB: Well, I would have thought you would have wanted to have it, naturally. I just wanted to make sure that it wasn't one of those things that merely happened to you because you were there and were eligible when you really wouldn't have cared whether you did or didn't. . .

RI: No, I. . .

RB: You think you really wanted it?

RI: I think I wanted it and, of course, everybody else who took part in the exhibit - or in the competition - regardless of however cool they appeared, they were all pretty intent about it.

RB: Before we go abroad with you, let us go to Skowhegan.

RI: Oh, surely.

RB: I don't know much about the Skowhegan School. It's situated in Maine?

RI: Skowhegan, Maine, which is in the heart of Maine. It is not near the sea. Next to a lovely lake called Wesserunsett.

RB: Had you been in Maine before this?

RI: No, it was my first visit to New England, in fact.

RB: You went almost immediately after getting a -- Does one get a certificate or something at the conclusion of the Art Institute course?

RI: Well, I was working on a degree program, Richard. The reason that I went to the University of Edinburgh on my fellowship was to finish academic work for a B.F.B. from the Art Institute of Chicago. So that I received actually nothing at the end of my four years. My degree came at the completion of my academic year in Edinburgh.

RB: That's a Bachelor of Fine Arts, is it?

RI: Yes.

RB: And this is useful in the academic world?

RI: Probably, but I've never made use of it.

RB: Well, obviously it wouldn't help you, let's say, get taken on the roster of the Janis Gallery or something of that sort Just by virtue of having a degree, so I presume it's useful if one wants to be a teacher. . .

RI: That's its practical use, yes.

RB: And you thought of it at the time in connection with a career in teaching?

RI: No. I didn't think of it in connection with a career of teaching. First of all, it represented a certain kind of goal and an attainment. Shall we say? I would be the first member of my family who had ever received a degree. This may have meant something to me at the time. But the real reason for pursuing the program was that it enabled me to have the fifth and final year of my GI Bill. If I had been taking merely a four-year certificate course. I would have automatically lost my fifth year. And after sacrificing three years of my life for the Air Force, I felt I wanted my money, my reward in return.

RB: Well, I see there was definitely a practical consideration, then.

RI: Yes. And it did give me a fuller and more interesting year abroad.

RB: Yes, because on fifteen hundred dollars I don't think you could have managed very luxuriously.

RI: No.

RB: We were about to go to Skowhegan, though. You flew there? You took a train?

RI: Oh, I probably took a train.

RB: Tell me more about Skowhegan. Who taught? And what fellow students. . .?

RI: It has been in existence ever since the war. A group of Army artists who were thrown together in Alaska - Henry Varnum Poor and Willard Cummings, who actually owns the School. It's his family's farm that the school is located on. And I think Sidney Simon was one of those people. They started this -- the faculty changes each year, although a certain few people tend to come back periodically, like Jack Levine and his wife, and Poor's daughter.

RB: Is that Ann Poor?

RI: Yes, yes. But the summer that I was there, Jack Levine was the painting instructor. I didn't take his class. I became very intrigued with fresco so that I worked with Henry Varnum Poor and did one of the large frescos in the old barn that for several years had stood there. Now that barn has since burned down, and all the student frescos, including my own, were destroyed in about five minutes. But I think two or three prizes were given that summer for the frescos. And I won one of those.

RB: Could you describe the fresco that you did?

RI: Oh, yes, I could but it's a little embarrassing now. This was during, I think, the Korean War and I did a kind of, I don't know whether you call it a -- it was in memoriam, I suppose, to the men who were losing their lives in the Korean War. And then a smaller one of a religious nature, a small panel under a tier of windows, which was Pilate washing his hands.

RB: The last time we spoke of religion, as I recall, you were not particularly involved with it. Had you experienced some sort of. . .?

RI: No, it just seemed a theme which was pictorially possible.

RB: It was not something very close to your personal life?

RI: No, I don't think so.

RB: Wasn't it a privilege to be allowed to do this fresco, I mean the barn must have had limitations of size? Every student every year couldn't do frescos?

RI: The fresco section was certainly not the largest at all. . Only a few students really ever had -- fresco is hard work and very few students had the ambition or the desire to work in fresco, so that there were only a few done each year, Richard. And part of the activity was directed toward the rehabilitated church at Old Solon which Mrs. Tiffany Blake, a wealthy Chicago woman interested in art - she was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Art Institute of Chicago - and she had summered in Skowhegan and had become very interested in the work that Cummings and his people were doing. And she, I think, provided the funds for the restoration of this church. And restoration, plus the addition - every wall was covered with frescos. And while I was there I didn't compete, but former students of Skowhegan did compete to win walls in the church, and it was in the process of being finished when I was there.

RB: That still survives, I suppose?

RI: The church I hope is still standing. An extremely, a very odd idea to cover the walls of a New England church with frescos, but still very interesting.

RB: The name of Henry Varnum Poor is familiar to me. I don't have too great familiarity with his work. How did he strike you as an artist and as a teacher?

RI: Well, he's a kind of -- he could possibly, if I'd had greater and earlier exposure to a man of this character, could have possibly been a great influence. He's that kind of person who would have tremendous impact on younger people. He's a fine teacher. He's sometimes called the dean of American painters because he's an elderly figure now.

RB: He's a strong personality?

RI: Oh, yes. Very the kind of -- the real rugged American - oh. . .

RB: Is he a social realist or a landscape painter, or. . .?

RI: Well, he's very interested in nature, Richard. He did murals for the WPA during the war which. I think, had something to do with society, I'm not sure. But his later work has been very much inspired by nature. And, of course, Skowhegan is a wonderful place to be in communion with nature.

RB: I suspect his reputation, relatively, was more eminent in 1951, say, than in '52 or '53, than it is today.

RI: No, it was probably more eminent in the '30s than it was even in the '50s. . .

RB: Yes.

RI: He has, I think, written books and he's a ceramicist, but he is of the academic world, really. He's a teacher. . .

RB: I think he's a member of the Rehn Gallery group - associated with Burchfield and. . .

RI: I think so.

RB: . . .and who else am I thinking of, that group of painters. . .?

RI: I don't know their names. And his own work and his own inclinations had very little influence on me. As I said, if I had had contact with him as a younger student, they may well have.

RB: What age were you at this point?

RI: Oh, Richard, I was well into my twenties, you see, some place, twenty-four, something like that.

RB: Yes. But still within the realm of being impressionable to some extent, I hope?

RI: Yes, but by this time I. . .

RB: You had so many teachers. . .

RI: I'd had so many teachers and, as I say, I had seen a great deal of art, and American regionalism of American realism was of no particular interest to me.

RB: I think I'm accurate in saying, though, that he is the biggest name, had the biggest name as an artist, of any of the teachers you have yet mentioned that you've had?

RI: Oh, probably so, yes. Well, Jack Levine. . .

RB: Well, but you said you didn't study with Jack Levine.

RI: I didn't study under Levine but I did go to his discussions and I saw him every day, and I knew what he was teaching and so forth. His particular style of American realism definitely did not appeal to me, and he demanded - at least I thought he demanded, a kind of allegiance from his students. And I didn't care to begin that kind of painting.

RB: He has a strong anti-abstract point of view, I think?

RI: Oh my, yes, yes.

RB: Rather bitterly held, perhaps. Is the character of the student group at Skowhegan largely anti-abstract?

RI: The general, the prevailing philosophy is very conservative, Richard, and it's the one thing that rather marred what was otherwise probably one of the most beautiful summers of my life. It's a beautiful place; it's a well-run school; on the whole you have freedom of choice; you may do what you want; you can work abstractly if you like; you're not going to be exactly encouraged but they're really very liberal. But the prevailing mood is, here we are in the heart of nature and artists have always drawn from nature, therefore, let's experience

nature, and so on. And to a certain extent I did, I enjoyed this, but it's very conservative.

RB: Did you say this is in a wooded, mountainous area, or. . .?

RI: Wooded, hilly area near a lake with a great expanse, a great vista all around. It's rather located on high ground. You look out over miles and miles of the Maine landscape.

RB: Were there pleasant recreational possibilities? You could go swimming and things like that?

RI: Swimming - the dormitories -- there were separate dormitories for men and women, and a lunch building located immediately on the bank of this lake; there were boats; one could swim; there was a volley ball net; and of course you could go tramping through the woods.

RB: And students at various ages, or mostly young students?

RI: The student students were usually people just finishing up art school, as I was doing. However, the school did admit adults who weren't necessarily art students, but who were interested, and I think this is from a financial standpoint. Most of the student students were there on scholarships. I was there on scholarship. Whereas the adults helped to contribute to the financial program.

RB: Well, this is apparently characteristic of most art schools, that there are a lot of relatively elderly ladies and gentlemen who are eager but not greatly qualified, perhaps. Did you feel any resentment at their presence?

RI: I think Skowhegan screened these people fairly well, and those - they weren't exactly elderly - but the older people who were there were really pretty interested and weren't too obnoxious.

Who were some of the friends you made there, who were your associates that summer?

RI: Well, one painter who is known in New York - he didn't exactly become a friend but I mean I saw him, he was working in the church doing frescos - was Al Blaustein.

RB: He has an exhibit on now I believe in New York. I just saw his name.

RI: I think he shows at the Nordness, or something like that.

RB: I saw his name this afternoon on Madison Avenue.

RI: Yes. And then another painter who shows in New York - Twardowitz was there.

RB: Stanley Twardowitz?

RI: Yes. He was there while I was.

RB: I've never met either of these men. Are they somewhat of your generation?

RI: No, a little older than myself. But Katz was there. . .

RB: Alex Katz?

RI: Yes. And, oh, people whose names I don't even remember now.

RB: Well, who were your own more close associates?

RI: Actually, the people that I chummed with -- one was a former student friend from Chicago, himself a classmate at the Art Institute - Jack Curtis - who came to Skowhegan on my recommendation. And he stayed the remainder of the summer. And another was a young Boston girl from the Boston School, Ilah Hirshhon, who later has spent most of her years in Europe, particularly in Germany, and I think is going to show this year at the Bodley Gallery. She's become primarily a graphic artist and does a great deal of print work and drawings.

RB: Was the atmosphere at Skowhegan somewhat more stimulating than that at the Art Institute School in Chicago?

RI: Well, stimulating probably because of Maine and being in the countryside and the open

kind of life, Richard, and maybe even faculty-wise, yes, the classes were small and more intimate and maybe more stimulating even if it was based on nature and so on.

RB: I don't know that I've found out whether up to this point you were very much aware of painters like de Kooning, Pollock, Newman, Gorky, all these?

RI: I wasn't.

RB: I mean were these people discussed and known in either the Art Institute or the Skowhegan School?

RI: Well, I don't really recall now exactly what was discussed in Skowhegan. First of all, a lot of the Students at Skowhegan were from the Boston area, and in Boston the -- Boston has its own group of painters and a lot of discussion was about these artists who - this includes Levine and his associates, Human Bloom and so on - names which meant something to me then, which mean very little now. And in Chicago I don't think that the New York School had made too much of a dent at that time. Chicago is of that provincial nature, the faculty is very large and they have to, in some way, preserve their own integrity, and there was always a kind of guardedness about what was going on in New York and what wasn't going on in Chicago.

RB: They may not have known, possibly?

RI: I don't know. I don't know. I go back now to Chicago -- I returned this spring and it seems that Abstract Expressionism has finally arrived, and half the work that was submitted for the Chicago Annual was in the Abstract Expressionist vein, and you could see Tworkovs and you could see de Koonings and you could see all kinds of New York people represented.

RB: You mean works influenced by them? Yes, I can well believe that.

RI: Which was not the case when I was there.

RB: Well, as far back as -- this was the summer of 1953 that you were at Skowhegan. This was a bit early, I think, for any wide influence of the School of New York painters, outside of New York. Jack Levine was better known, I would think, than, say, Jack Tworkov, at that time.

RI: He was.

RB: You say, and I can believe from your own style of painting that you are not very partial to Jack Levine's painting. I suppose he was considered quite a big fellow, an important artist by many in Skowhegan.

RI: Oh, I was awed by him at the time. He was a big reputation and as far as I knew at the time, a major American painter.

RB: You would have seen in Chicago, I think, quite a few of his works, wouldn't you, or. . .?

RI: A few. Not quite a few.

RB: I thought the Institute had some. Perhaps later.

RI: Well, not very many.

RB: What is your evaluation of him as an artist today, or don't you ever think about it?

RI: I certainly don't think about him in relation to my own work.

RB: No, you couldn't very well.

RI: During my youth I was intrigued by his work and, as I said, he seemed to be a major American figure. His whole period in this era seems to be a little eclipsed now, that's all.

There are other things standing in front of his particular school.

RB: Well, certainly as of 1963 he is neither a novelty nor riding the crest of a new boom or the most recent boom or anything else like that, but he is in certain quarters considered a much more important artist than many that you and I might prefer.

RI: Probably. Probably. He's in major collections.

RB: Most museums I think have him. I was wondering what the impact of such a man on a summer art school would be.

RI: I think his impact on the bulk of the student body was at that time very great. His class was the most populous and most well attended, and people were right at his feet.

RB: In you study of fresco were you learning the techniques of traditional Italian Renaissance fresco?

RI: The traditional fresco, yea, via Henry Varnum Poor.

RB: Did you ever do work in frescos after that summer?

RI: Never since.

RB: You still possess the technique, presumably?

RI: I do, and I could even see working again in fresco in my prevailing style because given certain slight innovations, it could be translated immediately to the wall.

RB: Yes. If I were your dealer, it suddenly occurs to me, I could do you, shall we say? financial benefit by getting commissions for you to do whole walls of buildings.

RI: Well, of course, there it depends upon reputation, Richard. Doing a fresco is a *tremendous* amount of work and the return for that much labor would have to be pretty great to be worth it.

RB: I have the impression without really knowing that architectural commissions frequently are highly paid. That may not be true; I mean in terms of the effort the artist makes, it may not pay off in the long run.

RI: I don't really know. I would say that depends upon the architect and all kinds of factors. I don't think. . .

RB: It partly depends on who is paying for the building and how much is allocated to artistic embellishment.

RI: Sure. And then if you're doing an office building foyer which is going to be torn down in twenty-five years, the inducement isn't really so great to expend so much energy.

RB: No. Did you explain earlier why you close this fresco technique and Henry Varnum Poor as a teacher?

RI: Well, I went, as I said, I went to Skowhegan almost by accident. This was. . .

RB: Did this develop late in the season that year?

RI: Yes, of course. And I knew very little about it. I knew nothing of the staff there. I received the scholarship very much at the end of the whole program. I didn't mind going because it provided a very good fill in for the summer, and my scholarship would not begin in Europe until the fall, at least I could not enroll. . .

RB: If I understood you correctly, Bob, in the previous summers you spent most of your time working at jobs. . .

RI: Yes, yes, sure.

RB: . . .So Skowhegan should have been the pleasantest sort of vacation, a kind of summer. . .

RI: It was a lovely reward, and I enjoyed it from that standpoint. However, I didn't go there by design. I didn't go there because Jack Levine was teaching. So when I did get there and found that Jack Levine was the principal teacher, I gravitated to Henry Varnum Poor because under him probably the instruction was less arbitrary and there the medium dominated the course, not the instructor's personality.

RB: Or his ideas.

RI: Yes, yes.

RB: You did not want at this time, I take it, having imposed upon you a teacher's ideas and point of view?

RI: Well, at least not Jack Levine's.

RB: Yes. You might have been willing somebody else's ideas?

RI: Possibly. Possibly. But the challenge of a new medium like fresco really was the primary reason.

RB: Did you do any outdoor sketching or this sort of thing?

RI: Surely. Painting, too.

RB: Of course you used to do a lot of that back in your adolescence?

RI: I had a horse stall in an old barn and painted right from there, you see.

RB: A horse stall as your individual studio unit, you mean?

RI: Yes. And one of my stall-mates, by the way, was James McGarrell, who now has made quite a name for himself.

RB: Oh, you haven't mentioned him.

RI: Yes. We were not friends. Another common thing was that he had come from Indiana, too, but. . .

RB: Had he? I associate him with California.

RI: Yes. Well, that's where he went to teach. But he had been teaching at Indiana University. But we were not personal friends at Skowhegan. We were three stalls away from each other and, you know, you would. . .

RB; Oh, I thought you said he was a stall-mate.

RI: No, no.

RB: You mean you had your own personal stall?

RI: That's right. And he happened to be about three away.

RB: That's interesting. That's the way it's set up - so that each person has a little --What did Mr. Poor do? Come to visit your stall. . .?

RI: No. I didn't take fresco exclusively. I think my painting---One's day was divided up into several different activities. One department that I didn't get into at all was sculpture. But I did have painting and that was, I think, under Sidney Simon, and I had figure drawing and ---

RB: From the model?

RI: Yes. And fresco, and I think the figure drawing was Simon, I'm not really too sure now.

RB: I don't know who Sidney Simon is. Is he a painter?

RI: He's a New York painter who is now. . .

RB: Is he the man that writes for *The Times*?

RI: No.

RB: Oh, that's John Simon. That's somebody else.

RI: I don't know very much about his career either, Richard, but I did draw from the figure and I did paint. I did paint landscape.

RB: The day must have been quite a busy one?

RI: Filled with all sorts of activity.

RB: Well now, one breakfasted and then went immediately to the studio and worked, or something like that?

RI: Yes.

RB: Were there -- you said you participated or listened in, shall we say? to some of Jack Levine's criticisms? Is that how it worked?

RI: Yes.

RB: He would gather his students once a week and discuss their. . .?

RI: Yes, periodically there would be that, but then also there were seminars in the fresco barn, assemblies of all the students, and there'd be faculty discussion, visiting artists, film programs, music. This was once a week, I think, during the summer.

RB: Do you remember any of the visiting artists?

RI: Not -- I think Joe Jones was one and he did a fresco while he was there. I think he's died since.

RB: He recently died, yes.

RI: And there was, oh, a member of the faculty of a girls' school, I can't. . .

RB: Well, nobody that made any particular impression on you?

RI: No. No great impression.

RB: I only asked because it might have. . . This lasted through August?

RI: Yes.

RB: And then. . .?

RI: At the beginning of September I came down to New York via Boston. . .

RB: By train, or. . .?

RI: No, by car this time. My friend, Jack Curtis, came down to New York, and a whole group of us - Ilah Hirshhon, the girl from Boston. We stopped off in Boston, visited the museum there.

RB: Was this your first Boston visit?

RI: Yes, my first visit to Boston.

RB: So you went to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts?

RI: Yes. And then I came to New York and was here just a few days, and caught the United States for. . .

RB: Now had you been in New York before?

RI: Yes, once during the Army.

RB: We probably covered that.

RI: We did, yes.

RB: So nothing specially happened in the way of seeing things on this visit to New York?

RI: Oh, probably went to museums, Richard, but I don't particularly remember anything - nothing stands out. Only the heat, that was all, it was about a hundred and five in the shade that particular summer and it was unbearable. I was very glad to get on that boat and sail for

England.

RB: What boat did you go on?

RI: The *United States*.

RB: The *United States*, which sailed directly to England?

RI: Yes, to Southampton.

RB: And you were already entered in the University of Edinburgh, is that correct?

RI: I think so. I had originally applied for London. The quota was filled. My second choice was Edinburgh, and I was accepted in Edinburgh. But I don't recall - I'm not sure whether that acceptance came in -- it was very late - I might even have been in England before I knew just where I was going.

RB: Who handled this placing of you? Was it some person in the Art Institute of Chicago?

RI: I took care of it myself. I took care of it myself.

RB: This money that you earned, I mean that you won, you could have gone to Italy? You could have gone to Peru?

RI: I could have used the money in any way except buying a barbershop in Chicago, you see.

RB: Well, you had to go abroad?

RI: After the student's buying the barbershop, I think they made -- in fact they broke the fellowship up, you received half of it upon leaving Chicago but you did not get the other half until you were there some place, you see. And the idea was travel abroad.

RB: Yes. But there were no restrictions or detailed arrangements?

RI: Not really, no - it was very liberal and. . .

RB: You didn't apply for a Fulbright? You could have had a Fulbright at this time, too?

RI: I didn't happen to. . .

RB: You never -- but there were -- I think that program probably was functioning then?

RI: The one fellowship and my GI Bill of Rights was adequate.

RB: Oh, yes, yes, certainly. But I didn't know whether you. . . So you went from the steamer to London on arriving in England?

RI: No. Train from Southampton.

RB: No. But I said from the steamer you went to London?

RI: Yes. Yes.

RB: Yes. What impression did London. . .?

RI: Well, on the boat, on the ship going to England I met a young poet who had just spent the summer in my home town of Indianapolis, which was a peculiar coincidence. His mother had remained in Indianapolis and he was going back to return to his home where his father was batching it. We struck up a friendship and for about ten days upon arriving in London I did nothing but follow him around town. He too great delight in showing me his city and so I saw all the tourist things.

RB: What was his name?

RI: Well, his name was Phillips and he later, I think, abandoned poetry and went to the Courtauld and took up art history. Now he's married and has a family and I think he's teaching - I'm not quite sure. We've remained in a slight correspondence, but over a period

of years it's dwindled.

RB: But he showed you London, and knowing it at first hand. . .

RI: This was his home. Sure.

RB: Yes, well, but people can live in a city without knowing it too well.

RI: No, no, he took great delight in showing me. . .

RB: What impressed you most of these things you visited in London?

RI: Probably the one thing that impressed me more than anything else was the National Gallery. I loved the National Gallery very much more than the Tate. It's a beautiful museum and a beautiful collection. Upon my return to London following that year I visited the National Gallery many times.

RB: I've always felt the National Gallery was a little dark and the paintings at that time many of them had not been cleaned I'm sure. . .

RI: They were in a program then of -- there was one room which had been re. . . . . .True, it had physical liabilities. . .

RB: Of course, you were used to the Art Institute of Chicago collection.

RI: Which was not so spruce even then. All that redecorating at the Institute has taken place since I left, you see.

RB: Yes. What I was going to say, you were used to oil paintings behind glass in Chicago. I think there are also quite a few in London behind glass.

RI: They were all behind glass except for this one room which had been air-conditioned, which had the gems of the collection, of course.

RB: This gave you really, I suppose, the first opportunity to see certain artists of major -- examples. . .

RI: London was the first, yes.

RB: Well, you had seen the Metropolitan in New York, I take it, and . . .

RI: Oh, but other European museums came after London is what I meant.

RB: Yes., but I mean certain artists, you would really be seeing better examples there than you had seen in the United States, i suppose?

RI: Mmhmm.

RB: Do you recall any particular artists who especially intrigued you?

RI: Well, probably the school that I learned to appreciate more in Europe than ever in America was the Flemish school.

RB: The Flemish school?

RI: Yes. Because it just seemed that I had not seen very much good examples of this in America. But certainly there was in the National Gallery, and in trips to the continent.

RB: Where did you stay in London? In a hotel? What part of London?

RI: No. I stayed with Phillips at his home in Richmond.

RB: Oh, Richmond? Richmond is a suburb. . .?

RI: Yes.

RB: That was very nice then to have this welcome. . .

RI: Oh, it was a wonderful -- it was what I didn't really expect at all, and the cordiality and the welcome was marvelous. And then that gave me a nice send off to Edinburgh. I arrived in Edinburgh on a cold, damp, drizzly, Edingurgh fall day. . .

RB: Having taken the train up, I suppose, overnight or something?

RI: Yes. The school was not yet open. I arrived on a weekend and the school would not open until Monday, and my first impression of Edinburgh was just dismal. It was after cheerfulness of London and having such a marvelous time there. . .

RB: Still, Princes Street is a very handsome street it seems to me.

RI: Not that first day it wasn't.

RB: It seems to me Edinburgh is a much more beautiful and more capital-like place with interesting-looking people around than, say, Glasgow.

RI: I never saw Glasgow.

RB: You never went to Glasgow?

RI: No, no, I didn't go to Glasgow.

RB: Where did you -- you arrived up there without a place to live, or was there provision for students. . .?

RI: No, I found my own digs, probably through a newspaper. My first night or two was spent at the local YMCA, and then through a newspaper I found digs. I lived in two different places during that nine months that I was in Edinburgh.

RB: Where were those places?

RI: One - the first was under Calton Hill, I think the name of the street was London Terrace. And the other was very close to the, on the other side of the city, in back of the Castle very close to the Art College. I can't remember the name of the street.

RB: What is the Art College? Is it independent of the University?

RI: Oh, yes, very separate. It's like the Art Institute in Chicago in relation to the University of Chicago. No relationship whatsoever. It's very similar to the Art Institute. It is not a museum itself. It is just a school. The museum is down the hill on the other side of the Castle. But it's a fine old school with gorgeous nineteenth-century facilities, big classrooms and. . .

RB: When does it go back to -- the eighteenth century, or. . .?

RI: No, I'd say the nineteenth century.

RB: Had there been very famous British painters associated with this school?

RI: Not that I know of, no. And there again the faculty was largely a conservative faculty. The advantage was just the facilities that were at hand. I went there at night, I was at the University during the day, and I had just about one or two terms there actually.

RB: Oh, I see. You were taking your academic work. . .?

RI: Academic sessions. . .

RB: What sort of academic work were you taking to continue your degree?

RI: Just three subjects: I took English literature, botany, (I needed a science credit) - and botany, by the way, was my favorite course. I had a great instructor in botany. This was at the Queens Botanical Gardens away from the University. And I had a course in philosophy.

RB: Had you studied botany previously, or was this your first science?

RI: No, this was my first -- well, in high school I had physics, but this was my first university. . .

RB: First approach to this particular subject?

RI: Mmhmm.

RB: And the personality of this instructor was. . .?

RI: Yes, this was Jack Roberts and he was a real, a real instructor. One of the best teachers I ever saw in my life.

RB: Have you kept up your interest in botany? Are you an authority on wild flowers?

RI: No, I would, Richard. . .

RB: Well, it's difficult in a city. I don't see how. . .

RI: . . .it's probably just laziness. But it's a fascinating subject and some future time I hope to re-study it.

RB: It's a subject that one could imagine a painter being interested in. I suppose the great diversity of nature would provide all sorts of suggestions of subject.

RI: Some of my recent paintings have contained botanical forms.

RB: Philosophy was what sort of course?

RI: Well, the instructor - and I can't remember his name - (he was a very difficult man), was influenced by Existentialism and it was a fairly, for me, a rather complicated course.

RB: You had not studied philosophy before?

RI: No. I don't remember doing particularly well in it.

RB: Philosophy is difficult, I think. I studied some philosophy myself at Oxford and there we specialized on certain famous British philosophers, and a Scottish one, David Hume, but yours was perhaps a survey course?

RI: This was more survey and more fundamental; there was no concentration on any particular philosopher. In fact, I don't think there was -- we went into any particular man's philosophy. This was very much a basic philosophy course. I still found it rather. . .

RB: Going back to Greek philosophy?

RI: No, not really going back to Greek at all.

RB: Well, starting with Descartes, or modern philosophy, or just the twentieth century?

RI: Twentieth century.

RB: Twentieth century philosophy?

RI: Yes. I've lost even the outline of the course. As I say, it was difficult and, again, this is ten years, Richard; I don't really remember.

RB: It was something imposed upon your mind that it suffered through, I take it, without really being attracted to it.

RI: The English literature course was a great survey of literature from Chaucer, Beowulf, on up to the -- you know, T.S. Eliot. But there I had a gray, gray don who, I am sure, was very close to his retirement and that was not a great experience either.

RB: I don't quite grasp how these courses were integrated into your program of studies to fit this degree. You got the degree eventually from Chicago? Or from. . .?

RI: That's right. These were academic credits needed to fulfil the state requirements for a degree.

RB: Yes. But you got no degree or anything from the University of Edinburgh?

RI: No, just a certificate.

RB: You got a certificate that you had satisfactorily completed these there courses of study?

RI: That's right.

RB: Were these lecture courses, is that it? Except the botany, I suppose was. . .?

RI: No, it was very laboratory. The philosophy was lecture. The English was primarily lecture; still one had to write three or four papers during the course of the year.

RB: Your interest in literature is quite strong, I believe, now, isn't it?

RI: Yes.

RB: But when we discussed your childhood it hadn't been developed too much, had it?

RI: Not really, no.

RB: When did you really become a reader in a serious way?

RI: Probably more in England and at the University than at any other period of my life. I was orientated toward books and literature more then than during any other period.

RB: In other words, in Chicago you had not really put your mind to literature much?

RI: With a full day at art school and working at night, there wasn't very much time.

RB: You didn't have -- This survey course that you had, despite the rather dull instructor, did considerably widen your literary horizon?

RI: Yes, yes. I widened but didn't exactly stimulate it.

RB: No. Well, it sounds like a very comprehensive thing to go back to Beowulf and come up to where. . . where did . . .?

RI: The University of Edinburgh, in a way, Richard, is run very much on the American plan and a comprehensive literature course there would be very similar to one given in America, at an American college, which made a very easy transition for me. Oxford or Cambridge would have been a leap which I probably would not have been prepared to make given the fact that my orientation was. . .

RB: I don't believe that you could have fitted in credits. Maybe I'm wrong. . .

RI: No, I don't think so either.

RB: I don't quite know how this works really.

RI: At the University of London it would have been possible.

RB: Yes. But how far up did this literature come? To the twentieth century?

RI: Yes. Contemporary. With very little given to that. Mainly it was 18th and 19th century.

RB: Which of these authors that you read would you think appealed to you most at the time?

RI: I couldn't say now, Richard. That would be very hard to say. I mean Eliot as a poet probably interested me more than anyone else.

RB: Well, we've just established that in a sense this was the foundation or the beginning of your interest in literature, and yet at the time then it seems that it was pretty dull and was really drudgery, it wasn't a stimulating. . .

RI: It gave me background but, as I said, it was no spur to the enjoyment of literature whatsoever.

RB: So you went to those during the day.

RI: That's right.

RB: Where did you have your meals while at Edinburgh? In any student's hostel, or. . .?

RI: Well, there was a student union, which I joined, where I usually had lunch during, shall we say? The first weeks at the University. But then as I made friends I found that it was more fun to eat out in, say, there was a Chinese restaurant near the University, and there were Indian restaurants and that was much more fun. . .

RB: Most of the students were Scottish. Or is this fairly international, or. . .?

RI: No. Probably most were Scottish, but the University does draw students from the whole Empire, of course, from the Commonwealth. And there were a lot of Americans at the University. I made no friends among the Americans at the University. There was one chap at the Art College, an American, that I became acquainted with, but no one at the University. Most of the Americans at the University were, I think, at the medical school or something like that. I'm not sure. I had no real contact with them.

RB: Edinburgh contains a national gallery too, doesn't it?

RI: Yes, it does.

RB: Does it have pictures. . .?

RI: No, it's not a very good gallery.

RB: As far as your life as an art appreciator might be concerned, I'm not quite clear that Edinburgh would contribute very much.

RI: Very little. Very little. I met a contemporary collector through one of my friends at the University - a Miss Walker of the whiskey family, actually, and she collected contemporary sculpture and so forth, and had it installed in the garden of her house, but other than that in Scotland almost no contact with any. . .

RB: You didn't meet any of the British sculptors or painters, I suppose, because they're not most of them situated there?

RI: I didn't. I didn't.

RB: And you were there nine months from. . .?

RI: In Edinburgh.

RB: Yes, but starting in September. . .

RI: Until spring.

RB: Until spring. . .

RI: With a month's vacation a Christmas, which I spent in France.

RB: Oh, you went to France!

RI: And Belgium. And then the spring vacation a month in Italy, going through Holland, and Germany and Switzerland.

RB: Well, how did these experiences affect you?

RI: They were just great vacations, that's all.

RB: Well, I like to think Paris for the first time might have had some more impressions?

RI: Didn't. Didn't. I arrived in the middle of winter, on the day before Christmas, cold, bleak, miserable hotel, a very grim experience. I didn't enjoy Paris at all.

RB: It's an interesting fact, I think it's a fact, that your generation, or those a few years older than you, too, have frequently - I'm speaking of Americans - American artists - Have frequently not liked Paris at all, and yet, you know, Paris for Americans in the 1920's was

supposed to be sort of heaven on earth and everybody wanted to be in Paris and loved Paris. But I've talked with New York artists, as I say, of more or less your generation, some of whom studied in Paris -- you didn't have any inclination to study art in Paris?

RI: Not at all. Either the generations have changed, or Paris changed. I really. . .

RB: Well, partly Paris has changed, I think. And Paris in the winter can be a little grim. You went to a hotel that you'd heard about or something. . .?

RI: No, no.

RB: You just went? And of course you didn't speak French.

RI: No. Another great reason why I didn't -- I didn't speak Italian but I enjoyed Italy, so that doesn't make much difference.

RB: But in this Christmas vacation you were in Paris and you presumably went zooming around sightseeing and went to Notre Dame, the Louvre, and everything?

RI: Yes.

RB: But you didn't find the visual beauty of Paris stimulating?

RI: Oh, sure. It's gorgeous, but. . .

RB: Subjectively speaking, you just were depressed probably?

RI: I was mainly depressed, not stimulated.

RB: Of course, you didn't -- you went alone, you didn't have. . .

RI: I was alone. I found an American friend and actually had Christmas Day with him. This was. . .

RB: Somebody you had known before, you mean? Or you made an American. . .?

RI: No. He was a person who was in Chicago, and it's been so long now I don't really know whether - I think I went there on a recommendation - I don't know that I really knew this person. This was Bates Lowry and he. . .

RB: I've met him. He writes. . .he's written a book on. . .

RI: Yes. He's an art historian and he was on the faculty here in New York for a time, and I think he's in California now, and he was studying the original foundations of the Louvre. But I spent Christmas Day at his house and just that kind of cordiality and welcome was of tremendous importance, because my visit to Paris was otherwise so demoralizing, but then I got. . .

RB: Had you gone there with great expectations? I mean, did you -- of course, it's sort of a normal thing for anyone to go to Paris, but I was just wondering whether you had looked forward to it with keenness, or had just sort of gone because it was inevitable that. . .?

RI: I think it was inevitable. I think that was it. And if I could have had better-laid plans it probably would have been better. But I did fall into a -- Bates and some of his friends were taking Dick Carrott and another art historian. . . Dick is. . .

RB: Richard Carrott?

RI: Yes, he's been up at Yale.

RB: Yes.

RI: Yes, he's some place else now, too. But we took an automobile trip, made a journey to the cathedrals of northern France leaving out Rheims, because they had been there before, and going up into Belgium to Ghent and Brussells and Antwerp.

RB: You went to Beauvais, I suppose, and Chartres?

RI: Yes, but Chartres on my own. Now this made my trip to Paris worthwhile. This was marvelous but it again was miserably cold and most frightful hotels and experience and bad restaurants.

RB: Well, at least you had companionship. And that made it. . .

RI: Yes. Sure.

RB: It is rather dismal, I think, going to Paris and eating alone. It seems to take so long to have those big meals - or used to - and all this sort of thing. Without friends I don't think Paris is very satisfactory. Well, that trip couldn't have -- well, how long did that last, just five or six days, you mean - the motor trip?

RI: Yes, the motor trip was three or four days.

RB: But you must have been several weeks in Paris?

RI: No, not several; I was in Paris maybe three or four weeks.

RB: Enabling you to see it quite thoroughly, if you had been interested from a tourist point of view. . .

RI: I did. I did.

RB: . . .most of the museums and. . .

RI: Sure. Sure.

RB: Did you go to the cafes, the night life or anything like that?

RI: A little bit.

RB: Well, in some ways it ought to have seemed rather exciting and warm and brilliant compared to Edinburgh, I would have thought, but. . .?

RI: Well, yes, of course. But I didn't have the -- by that time I had made friends in Edinburgh and the camaraderie that I had in Edinburgh didn't exist in Paris.

RB: Yes. So then you went back, I suppose, in January to Edinburgh?

RI: Yes, yes.

RB: Taking the steamer across. . .?

RI: Yes.

RB: Up from London. . .

RI: The boat and the night train from London. I always looked forward to every visit and every passage through London. London has become my favorite city. I still feel that London is my favorite city. And Just stopping off in London was always a delight.

RB: "Favorite" means that you prefer it to New York?

RI: Probably.

RB: You would accept, shall we say? A brilliant offer to have some sort of a life in London, taking you away from New York then?

RI: Very possible.

RB: But you would not, I presume, accept one for Paris? Or have you changed your views on Paris since?

RI: There's no reason to, Richard. I've never been back since.

RB: You've never been back!

RI: No. And considering what's going on in Paris now artistically, I would have even less inducement.

RB: I don't think I asked you whether you really saw any of the sort of postwar generation art of the French, or the School of Paris?

RI: I tried to visit as many galleries in Paris as I could find. It seems that I didn't find nearly as many as there are. But I didn't see a single exhibit which either stimulated or interested me in the commercial galleries. And there were no conspicuous museum shows at that time.

RB: [Mr. Indiana's cat meowed vigorously at this point.] General De Gaulle must be speaking through the cat in protest at this slighting of French culture.

RI: Parcheesi is agreeing, yes. She says France is hell.

RB: In the spring, on your next vacation you went to Italy, you said. Is that right?

RI: Yes. Yes.

RB: You flew or something?

RI: No, by train.

RB: I should have thought you'd have gone through Paris?

RI: By train, via Holland, Germany and Switzerland. And that was just a quick train passage through those countries. I didn't get off and visit them.

RB: Where did you go in Italy?

RI: Well, my first city was Milan and. . .

RB: You got off there and then. . .?

RI: Well, I went from Edinburgh -- I came to Italy with the nephew of this Miss Walker, this art collector outside Edinburgh, he was a friend of a friend of mine in Edinburgh, and she helped us in our travel to Italy. . .

RB: What was his name -- Walker, too?

RI: Yes. Yes. Offhand I can't remember his first name now. But he was bound for Positano; he had been to Italy before.

RB: He was a painter?

RI: He was a painter and he was very anxious to get to, I think it's Curt Kramer, a German artist who resides in Positano, and be his guest there. I was not so anxious to get to Positano, so in Milan we split company. He went directly to the south of Italy and I wanted to make the circuit. So from Milan I want to Genoa and Pisa and Rome, and then down to Positano.

RB: Assiduously visiting the great cathedrals, museums and other cultural monuments?

RI: Well, not assiduously, but hitting the highlights, Richard. I must say that rather shortly in Italy all the churches began to run together. I mean, it's -- they were just -- in fact, I never got to Venice. There were just too many things to see.

RB: You don't have a strong passion for the baroque, I take it?

RI: No. No, I don't.

RB: No, I should imagine not from your art. But you did enjoy Italy so much more than France. What do you think was the reason?

RI: First of all was the weather. It was spring; the trees were in bloom, the organge groves were gorgeous. One could stroll around and enjoy the sun. Paris was just absolutely frigid. I

lived in a hotel where the stairwell was open to the elements and the snow actually came right up to my door, my room, you see.

RB: I forget what part of Paris you lived in?

RI: This was the Left Bank. I moved to a hotel on the Right Bank. But the first one was Left Bank. And, as I say, somehow the people were just friendlier in Italy. Just the contact with merchants and people in the street was more pleasant in Italy than it was in France.

RB: So many people say this, that the French of this generation seem to have become sort of sour in their relations with visitors, Americans. Did you find they were anti-American?

RI: It seems that way.

RB: Well, this is an experience that so many people seem to have had, that the Italians are so much more friendly and easier. . .

RI: The French seemed sour about things. I don't quite understand it.

RB: Do you remember any particular incident of rudeness on the part of the French?

RI: Oh, no, Richard, just that inability to really meet any French or to make any real contact with them. In Italy it seemed so much easier to get acquainted with people.

RB: Did you stay in Rome most of the time when you were -- I mean longer there than anywhere else. . .?

RI: Yes, I stayed in Rome for something close to a week. I fell in love with Rome, and I would say that next to London it was my favorite city - European. Then I went on to Positano and spent a few days there. I went to Paestum, which was as far south. . .

RB: I was just going to say, I hope you went to Paestum. I have been there twice and it's a magnificent. . .

RI: But, strangely enough, the father south I got, the worse the weather got, instead of better, and I ran into kind of unpleasant weather in Positano, whereas most of my trip in Italy was just beautiful.

RB: But this was spring. This was April, was it?

RI: Yes, but it just was rainy and not very pleasant in Positano.

RB: Positano I take to be an artists' colony. Were any particular artists there whom you met?

RI: Well, I probably met Curt Kramer, this German. . .

RB: I've never heard of Him.

RI: Well, he's become sort of the patron of Positano. He's been responsible for thousands of Germans coming to Positano, so that there are as many German tourists in Positano as there are Americans. And I met a London resident in Positano, a young girl, Milein Cosman*, who was formerly from Germany and she knew Kramer, of course, and was staying there. And it was through her that I later got staying there. And it was through her that I later got my digs in London in Hampstead when I went there during the following summer. But I didn't meet any other artists there. Walker was staying with Kramer. I stayed in a pension. However, Fred Mitchell, the painter here from Coenties Slip, used to teach at Positano. *Mr. Indiana (January 1965) in providing the correct spelling of this name, states that Miss Cosman is now Mrs. Keller.

RB: He wasn't there then?

RI: No, and if he was I wouldn't have known. . .

RB: Well lots of American painters I know live there.

RI: This was not the summer, this was the spring. And that art school activity wasn't going on at that time.

RB: What special memories have you of Rome, say architectural, artistic, social, cultural?

RI: Well, first of all, I stayed in Trastevere, which was a nice place to stay.

RB: Oh, that's the St. Peters side, isn't it?

RI: Yes. And it's sort of tucked away. . .

RB: Oh, is one of those rather old, narrow streets?

RI: Yes. Very dilapidated, very run-down.

RB: You were in a private apartment of something?

RI: No, I wasn't. I was in a funny little pension called something like the "Pension California" and it was like an American motel, strangely enough. And while I was there a whole busload of French farmers arrived on the scene, tourists. But across the street - and I don't really remember how I got acquainted with these people - it was through meeting someone, was a studio and artists and a Frenchman who had worked for the UN in New York, and a Brazilian sculptor who was in Rome on a fellowship. So that somehow in Rome I began getting acquainted with people, as it just didn't happen in France or in Paris at all. And Frenchmen, too, strangely enough. I knew more Frenchmen in Rome than I knew in Paris.

RB: That's not really unusual, I think.

RI: No, I don't think so.

RB: People away from home tend to meet other people away from home all over the world, I think.

RI: Yes.

RB: Well, of course, your visit to Italy was only a matter of a month, perhaps?

RI: Yes. Less.

RB: Probably was nothing really unusual about it in your development?

RI: I don't think so. I saw a big Rembrandt exhibit in Milan in the Palazzo Reale. As I say, Rome stands out in my mind most of all. I didn't care for Florence.

RB: You did go there, though?

RI: I went to Florence. I didn't care for Florence. I didn't go to Venice. I went to Sienna and Arezzo, but the other artistic sites I didn't visit.

RB: How long did you stay in Florence?

RI: Oh, just a couple or three days, Richard.

RB: I wonder why you say you didn't care for it. As a matter of fact. I my self recollect not caring for Florence in my first impressions out of several. But I've been there quite a few times now and I really think I still - I understand, in a way, what you mean by not caring for it and yet in a sense it's a very superficial reaction that both of us had, because there is so much to be found in Florence that I am sure both of us would admire if we. . .

RI: I suppose. But my experience was too brief and too superficial. I didn't like the medieval quality of the antique part of the city, and otherwise it was just too big and bustling and modern, and I was really, I think, expecting something else.

RB: It's got very little contemporary spirit about it, I think. Well, then you returned for a final third term, is that it? In Edinburgh?

RI: That's right. Yes. I made a very lovely acquaintance in Edinburgh, a member of my English Lit class, Alison Balfour, oh, came up to me one day very early while I was a student and introduced herself and asked if I weren't English. I said no, I was an American. She was a very friendly girl, and she's the grandniece of the Prime Minister.

RB: The Balfour family?

RI: Yes. And on their estate outside Edinburgh I was a guest many weekends and had again experienced a welcome and a cordiality which was rather rare in Europe, but certainly made my stay in Edinburgh much, much more. . .

RB: Well, Arthur Balfour, the Prime Minister, was a very intellectual, scholarly man. Was the family an intellectual family?

RI: No, I don't think so. Her father was his nephew, not an immediate heir, and the present Earl is a businessman and has rather a businesslike demeanor. They have a boat and they sail in the North Sea. I was invited to sail with them to Norway that following summer, but I chose to spend the summer in London and attend the University of London instead, feeling that somehow I could enjoy a summer in London more than I could in the Norwegian fjords.

RB: So that's what you did on the conclusion of your. . .?

RI: That's right.

RB: You obtained the credits, I take it, that you needed to qualify?

RI: Yes, yes.

RB: Did you have to take final examinations or something?

RI: Mmhmm.

RB: And then set forth from Edinburgh for. . .?

RI: Well, remember that I was also at the Art College and while I was there I did some figure drawing and I also entered into the typographic department and I was writing poetry at the time. And I set some of my poetry in type and printed it myself and illustrated it with lithographs and so forth.

RB: When had you begun writing poetry? Just then, or had you done some in Chicago before. . .?

RI: No. It was mainly a Scottish experience, and English, and I then did write when I returned to New York for the first year or two.

RB: Possibly provoked by this new experience of being away from the culture in which you were brought up?

RI: Maybe, but really. . .

RB: Some of the loneliness of the initial periods in all these cities?

RI: That, but I'd say just the literary climate of the University and Scotland and England and so forth. It's a climate much more suited to writing than it is to painting.

RB: Should I invite you to recite one or two of your poems at this point?

RI: I don't think so.

RB: Good. I dare say they're classics and I can only hasten to the library to find them in anthologies, but. . .

RI: There were some printed there.

RB: Were there?

RI: They were published. . .

RB: Did you become a member of any sort of little literary clubs in Edinburgh?

RI: Yes, the poetry society.

RB: What was that - an undergraduate body?

RI: That's right.

RB: Which met in students' rooms and. . .?

RI: Mmhmm.

RB: And you read your own poems, or. . .?

RI: Yes. And they put out a small anthology of their work while I was there and I designed the cover for that particular magazine.

RB: What character did your poetry have? Was it traditional in form or were you an innovator?

RI: No, it was just traditional.

RB: I hereby invite you to present to the Archives of American Art copies of these beautifully printed, hand printed, hand written poems.

RI: I have one or two which possibly. . .

RB: I think it would be interesting for them to have, if you're willing. The experience of writing poetry was really new to you, though, here in Scotland?

RI: Oh, I had possibly written when I was in high school, Richard.

RB: But you took it more seriously, I take it?

RI: Oh, surely. Surely.

RB: Tell me more about this typography business. Were you studying the formation of letters?

RI: It was more like a workshop, Richard. I had use of facilities and I was primarily interested in setting up my poems and any instruction was merely of a practical nature, how to go about this. Not typographic design or anything like that.

RB: But in view of the fact that so much of your current painting production or recent work has involved words and stenciled letters, there is something of interest in this. . .

RI: There is a connection.

RB: I think we should go into this a little more fully. Of course you worked on a newspaper originally but you weren't directly associated with the printing process or anything like that?

RI: No, not involved with that.

RB: And as far as I know you've never spoken of yourself as being a rare book collector or an enthusiast for typography or anything.

RI: No.

RB: This would have been the first experience along this line. How did it come about - through friends there that you got involved with this. . .?

RI: No, it came about through my interest in seeing my own poetry in print, and one of the members of the poetry society was doing just that; he was a member of the faculty of the University of Edinburgh. He taught Italian and he was doing just that himself, and he encouraged me to do like wise.

RB: Well, did he have a hand press, or. . .? I'm not quite. . .

RI: The Art College did, yes.

RB: Had a . . .

RI: Of course, yes.

RB: . . .wide assortment of fonts?

RI: Yes, yes.

RB: So you would do a single sheet for each poem?

RI: That's right.

RB: These were sonnets or longer poems, or. . .?

RI: No, they were about sonnet size but they weren't in the sonnet form.

RB: Yes. And you would draw in addition. . .?

RI: Lithographs. Lithographs.

RB: Well, I mean -- when I said "draw in addition" I meant to say you printed quite a few copies of each?

RI: Yes. I meant to collect or accumulate a folio but I found it took much longer than I anticipated, and I actually accomplished just a few, but I would have probably got together a little book as my poet friend was doing if I had more time.

RB: You mentioned the word lithographs. Were these illustrated?

RI: Illustrated poems, yes.

RB: What sort of illustrations are they?

RI: They were realistic. One in particular which I think is the only one I really saved was a poem about the deterioration of cathedrals using as a metaphor for, shall we say, spiritual or moral deterioration. And I illustrated it with workmen working on facades of cathedrals.

RB: With this literary interest that you had developed in Edinburgh, did you have any tendency to pick up old books and buy ancient editions?

RI: I didn't do that because I was very impressed with traveling light, Richard, and I didn't feel that I had the -- it was not the time to be collecting things like that because my return to America was filled with a number of uncertainties, one being I wasn't quite sure where I was returning to, and I didn't want to be loaded down with a lot of possessions. I accumulated several texts and books of English novels, and so forth, poetry, while I was a Edinburgh, but I left those behind with a friend in Edinburgh and never did reclaim them. They are lost forever.

RB: I asked that question because it seems you are on the verge of becoming what might be called a bookman, and I don't suppose you are a bookman? You don't. . .?

RI: Well, I have lots of books, but I might have become such if I had stayed in England or Scotland; and I did try, but I couldn't seem to find any way of prolonging my visit there. I would have had to have found a job of some kind and that didn't present itself. So at the end of my summer, in the fall, after having been there just over a year then I returned to America.

RB: I want to go into your experience in London during the summer a little more fully, though. You said you lived in Hampstead.

RI: I lived in Hampstead because Milein Cosman who had a donkey stable there for a studio was able to find me digs with an English sculptor, an unknown sculptor. And I enrolled at the University of London again in order to draw out my GI Bill benefits to the very end of its --

RB: What courses?

RI: It was not a course; it was a seminar. It's offered primarily to people visiting London during the summer, and it was merely an appreciation of English culture, a visit to outstanding buildings, churches, museums, a kind of brief survey of English literature, music and art.

RB: Conducted by a faculty of various people?

RI: Yes, a large faculty of musicians, literary people, art historians came, visited, gave lectures; a very interesting seminar.

RB: Well, I should imagine a culturally enriching experience and designed to be such by the British.

RI: That's right.

RB: For -- well, most of your fellow students were other Americans?

RI: Most -- no, well, Americans were in the majority. . .

RB: Dane and Germans?

RI: . . .but there were nationalities from all over the continent and most of the people were student level. There were some adults, but most were younger people.

RB: Was this a full day's thing? I mean, would you go in the morning and stay all morning?

RI: Plus the field travel and so forth it sometimes was almost more than a full day. I meant trips to Oxford and country houses outside London, and so on.

RB: Some of the country houses that have been opened, you mean to visitors for their architectural and historical interest, such as, for example -- what. . .?

RI: Yes, that's right. I don't really remember now the names, Richard. The ones that I really wanted to see, interested and stimulated by the seminar, were those -- well, I did see Marlborough - or Blenheim rather.

RB: Blenheim, the Duke of Marlborough's palace?

RI: Yes. And that architect -- who is the architect?

RB: Van Brugh did his --

RI: Yes. I would like to have seen all of Van Brugh's houses but they were too far away from London. It was not possible. So I saw some Adams' houses.

RB: Well, I was wondering if you had visited the Duke of Norfolk's estate - Syon (S y o n) House?

RI: I didn't see Syon House.

RB: Which has got some splendid Robert Adams rooms.

RI: Offhand, I cannot remember the names.

RB: It's not the Duke of Norfolk's. Well, anyway, Syon House has. . .I was just trying to smoke out the extent of your interest in architectural design and architectural history.

RI: I would have visited them all if I had had time, but due to the nature of this seminar once one was in it, it was to cover everything.

RB: Oh, yes, I can quite understand that. . .

RI: So there were all kinds of various things to do. It was not just English country houses. But I could have spent the whole summer just visiting English country houses.

RB: You paid a fee to attend this, I suppose, out of your funds?

RI: Yes. Sure. It was part of the GI Bill.

RB: Yes. Well, at this time had the scholarship?-- well, the scholarship money was sort of a general fund. . .

RI: I was still using it, I was still using the fellowship money.

RB: Yes. But the GI money was on a monthly basis or something?

RI: That's right. And it ran out.

RB: But you had to be enrolled in some sort of educational institution to get it?

RI: Yes. It was not payable unless you were enrolled.

RB: I see.

RI: So that's why the formality of the universities.

RB: I'm rather envious of that experience. I think that would have been a very interesting summer.

RI: It was.

RB: I never heard of anybody doing this.

RI: Next to the summer in Maine, which of course was completely pastoral. . .

RB: Which was the summer before. . .

RI: Yes. It was certainly one of the most pleasant summers of my life.

RB: This would have been the summer of 1954?

RI: 1954, and it was in September of 1954 that I returned to America and to New York to live for the first time.

RB: In Hampstead, in sharing a studio with a sculptor, you had little time but some space, I suppose, to do some art work?

RI: Yes, he helped me make an easel and I did some painting and, as I said, I was working in a somewhat realistic manner. I was doing portrait heads and I did some portraits of London friends, the English poet, Phillips, and other people.

RB: Do you recall Phillips' first name?

RI: David.

RB: David Phillips. And you still don't recall Mr. Walker's first name, the one with whom you traveled to Italy - just Walker? I used to know at Oxford a Scottish boy named Nigel Walker, who did not like to be called Nigel. He considered it rather sissy. You were supposed to call him "Walker." That's why it struck me that you had a friend known as "Walker."

RI: I just can't offhand -- I saw this chap later in London, too, but I cannot offhand remember his name. We were not close.

RB: I was wondering, did you visit Keats' birthplace?

RI: Yes, in London.

RB: Had you visited it in Rome -- not his birthplace -- but where he died?

RI: I saw the house at the Spanish Stairs but I didn't actually visit it.

RB: It's very moving to go in. Next time you're in Rome do go there.

RI: That somehow didn't occur to me.

RB: You read the description of his final hours while in the room. It's a small room, and somehow you can imagine being there with him somehow; it's very sort of touching, I think. Hampstead is quite attractive really, I've seen parts of it.

RB: Well, it seems quite like an American suburb actually, Richard. It certainly wasn't a strange experience to live in Hampstead. I lived in a very modest house actually. It was not one of the fancy houses of Hampstead. But I did enjoy it mainly because of its proximity to

the Heath. It was always a gorgeous place, you know, such a different park from, shall we say? Central Park. And I enjoyed that very much.

RB: How did exposure to Scottish and British accents affect your voice? I don't know, I think you speak what I would suppose is standard very good English, I was wondering whether you had originally had Indiana accents and things, that in the course of time got eliminated through these. . .?

RI: I think I lost that in Indiana. I never really spoke like a Hoosier. And I don't think my experience, certainly not in Scotland, nor in England, had very much to do with how I speak. That somehow started in Indiana.

RB: So you sailed back then to the United States? You flew, or sailed?

RI: I returned on the Italia, a kind of miserable boat and a very miserable trip coming back. . .

RB: Third class?

RI: Yes. Filled with middle-aged Germans who had returned to the fatherland for the first time since the war. And it was a miserable trip back. One of my shipmates that I became acquainted with had had a distinguished record during eh war of killing something like twenty-five American soldiers out side Pisa, and in Germany he couldn't get a job because of his illustrious army -- he was decorated by Hitler himself -- but he was able to get work in America and he was on his way to the good country.

RB: You mean he went around boasting of these exploits?

RI: No, he wasn't boasting, but once drawn out he wasn't exactly ashamed of them. After all, he was a soldier and it was the war, and he was doing what soldiers were supposed to do.

RB: When you returned to New York, your future was completely indistinct, wasn't it?

RI: Oh, very much so, yes. First of all, I had left all my paintings, possessions and so forth, art materials in Chicago with friends and rather anticipated returning to Chicago but the friends that I -- I remember I returned broke -- I had overstayed myself in London and in order to. . .

RB: How many months were you actually abroad?

RI: About thirteen. And even to get back and pay my passage, I had to borrow money from the U.S. Embassy, you see. And the friends that I was more or less counting on for help to get back to Chicago and get reorganized, they failed to come through, so I was more or less marooned in New York, had absolutely no contacts or friends here that I felt I could count on. I found one former Chicago friend who had been a model at the Art Institute, who found me a cheap room and a job and so forth. So that for the first few months it was really. . .

RB: This was autumn, or. . .?

RI: This was October.

RB: October. Oncoming winter. In 1954?

RI: Yes, yes.

RB: Where was this cheap room - what part of New York?

RI: The Hell's Kitchen area. The West side. I was just there for a short time, and through another former Chicago classmate who had since settled in New York, he had been an art student in Chicago but he later became a dancer in New York, a dancer named Paul Sanisardo, I took his loft for the following summer while he was away, and that was my first loft and, once initiated, I have never been in anything except a loft studio.

RB: When you came back you weren't accompanied by any large output of paintings were you, from England?

RI: Only some of these head studies that I had made. It was oil on paper actually, Richard.

No; I really accomplished very very little from that standpoint during that year.

RB: In other words, you had no built up capital of potentially saleable art?

RI: Nothing. Nothing.

RB: You had nothing, so you had to find some money. So you went to work, I suppose:

RI: Mmhmm. One of my first jobs was in an art store here in New York, and I was there for, oh, a couple of years, I thin, part-time job.

RB: What art store was that?

RI: Fredericks.

RB: On 57th Street?

RI: Yes.

RB: What did you do there? Where you a clerk?

RI: Yes. Sure.

RB: On the ground floor selling ---?

RI: Art supplies.

RB: Well, they also have people, I think, doing framing and things. . .

RI: Yes, but I sold art supplies.

RB: You were a salesman?

RI: Yes.

RB: And that was your very first job?

RI: Mmhmm.

RB: How did you get that?

RI: Through a friend who lived i this rooming house that I lived in.

RB: I presume it was not very well paid?

RI: Oh, no, it wasn't. Something like less than a dollar an hour.

RB: Well, that's below the legal minimum at present. I don't know whether that legal minimum did exist in '54.

RI: I think it was within the minimum at that time.

RB: I can't remember whether you had done salesmanship before this job.

RI: No, this was the first time I ever was before the public. No, in Chicago (I forgot to mention) I had worked for the post office at Christmas time and so forth.

RB: Sorting mail, delivering mail?

RI: Doing all - doing various things like that, but this was the first time I had a job where I actually dealt with the public.

RB: How did you like that part of it?

RI: I wasn't a bad job. It enabled me to buy art supplies at half cost and it put me kind of in contact with other artists. I actually made, in fact Jim Rosenquist, who has since become a close friend and a neighbor - I met him through - he was a student at the Art Students League at that time, and I met him just because I was working at the art store. And I met Ellsworth Kelly because I was working at the art store.

RB: I don't know what sort of clientele (I was just going to ask) whether Fredericks sells to a lot of prominent artists, or. . .?

RI: Yes.

RB: The location would seem to indicate they might sell to Art Students League people.

RI: That was the source of most of their customers but then there are the kind of semi-commercial, professional artists who have big studios on 57th Street, like, for instance, Bouche' and people like this might have been customers of Fredericks.

RB: It is, I suppose, one of the big art shops.

RI: Yes. They have three stores in New York.

RB: It must have given you an extended familiarity with the tools of the artist's life by selling all these various things?

RI: Well, I knew most of those, though, just from four years of art school.

RB: And this was a job you would go to every morning. . .?

RI: No, I don't recall now whether it was morning or afternoon, but it was a half-day job.

RB: Oh, a half-day job, I see. And then the other part of the day, did you have another job or were you doing. . .?

RI: No, I worked on my own.

RB: You didn't go to the Art Students League or any other schools to finish your art. . .?

RI: I never attended school in New York.

RB: Yes. Well, you'd had sufficient art training, I'm sure, by this time. . .

RI: Yes.

RB: . . .so you didn't contemplate entering the Hofmann School, or. . .?

RI: Oh, I might have -- well, I might have been at the Hofmann School except, as I said, I never felt close to Abstract Expressionism. I might have taken classes at the New School; I might have taken classes at the Art Students League; but somehow I think I had just plain had enough of art school.

RB: Well, I think you would have by this time. Situated in a business way on 57th Street, you were accessible to a lot of the prominent art galleries.

RI: Surely.

RB: Did you start going to see shows?

RI: Oh, positively, as soon as I got to New York, sure.

RB: What was your impression of the art scene, arriving here almost fresh to New York? I mean, you hadn't really been much in New York.

RI: Well, the art scene was by that time becoming totally Abstract Expressionistic, Richard. I mean all the galleries now were dominated by this, and I felt. . .

RB: However, in '54, '55 I don't believe it could be said to have conquered to the extent it had by '59 and '60. There wasn't quite as great an emphasis on the importance of the School. . .

RI: Well, those galleries that I went to, it seemed to have already made inroads. . .

RB: Yes, from the exhibition point of view, but it was less accepted than it seemed to have been later. There was less purchasing, and prices were low and all those things.

RI: I wasn't very much concerned with prices.

RB: No, you probably weren't, but this is a matter I think I can state as a fact and I don't think it -- It was a growing time, though. I suppose you felt it in a sort of. . .

RI: Oh, sure.

RB: I'm trying to find out more about *your* personal reaction to this. . .

RI: Yes, my second - the first loft that I had for myself and my second loft was on Fourth Avenue immediately contingent to de Kooning's studio.

RB: Was it?

RI: Yes. And I could look out my back window and look right into de Kooning's studio and watch him paint, you know.

RB: What did it look like - seeing him paint?

RI: De Kooning painting? Well, sometimes in the summer it was in the nude actually. But this made no impression on me. I never felt drawn to this expression at all.

RB: No, I understand that, but I. . .

RI: I'm just half a block from Tenth Street.

RB: Nevertheless, since you brought this up, I think it's sort of interesting - an eavesdropper's view of a celebrated painter at work. Was he then working on his women pictures, or on his abstracts, or. . .?

RI: The women paintings, I think, had been painted because I saw that exhibit at Martha Jackson's in her earlier gallery, and I think by that time he was working on American abstractions. I saw none of the -- I don't think I saw the women canvases under brush.

RB: Well, I gather that you weren't so impressed by him or his reputation and wasted much time watching him.

RI: Oh, no, I was impressed. And after all, he's a very extraordinary person, and. . .

RB: You've met him?

RI: Yes, I've met him.

RB: At that time?

RI: No, not at that time. I saw him on the street and I saw him in the studio. But, as I say, I still did not, and could not gravitate toward either the younger painters who were under his influence or to that -- to him.

RB: In a way, you were first coming into contact with this kind of painting at this time, weren't you?

RI: Yes.

RB: And so you had sort of instinctive hostility toward it?

RI: No, not hostility, but. . .

RB: Indifference?

RI: . . .but no kinship, Richard, no fundamental rapport. Let's put it this way: I hadn't found myself yet.

RB: No. No, at this stage I should imagine you hadn't evolved your own style.

RI: This was still -- at this point I was still under the influence of Dubuffet. I was still painting these heads which had been set off by him.

RB: Your Dubuffet-style heads would be rather grotesque sort of heads, or thick-textured, or. . .?

RI: No, they weren't -- they were thick-textured. I mixed sand with my pigment and -- yes, maybe they were rather grotesque. They don't look like Dubuffet but, as I say, they had been influenced, particularly texture-wise, and so forth.

RB: We spoke of this a bit before, but this is the sort of thing I associate with Chicago art of that time.

RI: Yes, it probably had something to do with that.

RB: In a sense you were reflecting your training.

RI: Yes, I was a wing - still a wing, maybe, of the monster school.

RB: What exhibits might you have seen in the galleries of New York in this first few months of your being back that you did like?

RI: I must say now these things run together, Richard, and I can't -- of course, I remember seeing the de Kooning women at Martha Jackson's, and I can remember - oh, shall we say? Some shows at Curt Valentine and Matisse and Betty Parsons and Kootz, but to be specific and say exactly what shows, I wouldn't ---

RB: Yes I'm not surprised but I just thought there might have been a few things that stood out in which case it would be interesting to know. . .

RI: No.

RB: Well, we've come so close to the end, I think. . .

[PAUSE]

RB: This is Richard Brown Baker on November 7, 1963 resuming my conversation with Rbert Indiana. Since we last talked, Bob, somebody made the remark to me that you had shared in Chicago a studio with the artist George Cohen. Did we speak of this? I don't remember. Is this true?

RI: Oh, not at all.

RB: It's not true.

RI: No, no, I've never met Cohen.

RB: Well, that's an interesting fact then. At least somebody told me this. Now I don't know -- I thought, well for heaven's sakes! You had not mentioned this. And your last tape when we were speaking about grotesque heads and so on it suddenly occurred to me that some of Cohen's work is also in - was - in that vein. Another thing I wanted to ask you: I have also been told by somebody that you had a picture or two in the Washington Square outdoor exhibit once. Is that correct?

RI: No, no.

RB: That's not true, either?

RI: No. Very bad information.

RB: Yes, I'm being very misinformed. Well now, we've clarified two errors. Now, you yourself, however, just after the last tape told me that you'd kept a diary for many years. I don't think we discussed that. I didn't know it at the time of the tape. That is still true, isn't it?

RI: Yes, and it still goes on.

RB: Well now, I myself have sporadically kept a diary since I was about fifteen or sixteen. I'm very interested in this form of expression, so I wondered if you would care to describe in general how you do it. What do you -- do you write daily?

RI: I try to. There are times when I don't.

RB: When did you begin this?

RI: Oh, I began writing a diary when I was in grade school.

RB: Now, my own particular habit is to use notebooks of uniform size. I've just made a habit of this. Do you use different kinds of books and papers?

RI: I do, and particularly the latest journals that I've kept have been old ledgers that I found in the abandoned lofts on the waterfront, nineteenth century ledgers, very beautiful, fat books which had not been used for some reason or another, and particularly in the last three or four years my journals have become, have provided an opportunity to keep a visual record of works in progress, paintings finished and exactly what I was doing day with my particular paintings. Whereas before I had never kept that kind of record in my journals; they were merely written.

RB: Well, everybody's diary probably differs somewhat according to this individuality. There seem to be, in my recollection, two general types: one in which the emphasis is on facts, like, "I took the train this morning to Boston" and that sort of factual statement of one's activities in life. The other is the more reflective, meditative, ruminative journal. Is yours a combination these?

RI: It's a combination of the two.

RB: Ever since you began more or less you *think* in this. . .?

RI: I usually keep a double journal. I keep a daily, just a kind of an appointment book record of day by day activities, and then tend to fill this out perhaps not even on the same day, perhaps a week, perhaps a month later.

RB: Well, James Boswell had somewhat a similar system jotting down notes like, for instance, if I were Boswell, I might just jot down, "Talked with Bob Indiana this evening" and then maybe, say, one or two clues to what the subject of the talk, and then perhaps next week I would get won to business and write a five-page description of your brilliant remarks or something of this sort. You use this technique, too, of amplifying later on?

RI: Amplifying but then at the same time it tends to filter in that a lot of the trivia which one might have in the front of one's mind at the time, why after a few days' passage you've lost those unimportant things.

RB: Do you ever read your journals over?

RI: Just rarely.

RB: Very rarely.

RI: More for fun than anything else.

RB: Yes. But I mean, it's not probably for you - I don't know whether your way of doing this resembles mine - but I think I feel at times---Now actually for many weeks I haven't written a word. I can't remember when I last did it. I've just had an absolutely blank period. This happens with me. Other times I keep it regularly everyday; I wouldn't think of leaving a thing out. However, I feel I get a sort of satisfaction out of doing it that's a curious thing. Now could you explain why you think you do it? What motivates you in keeping a diary?

RI: Well, I'm not sure really why I started, Richard. I suppose it was just kind of a schoolboy sort of because, as I say, it began years and years ago. But the main motivation at this pint is to keep a record of my work. And that dominates my journals now. I like very much to know, for instance, when a painting is conceived and when it was first painted and when it was secondly painted and when it received its third coat, and it serves as working guide, you see.

RB: It sounds very valuable as a record of your career in terms of fifteen years from now, if there should be a question, say, about when you did a particular painting, (well, we'll say the one that you have in the Brandeis Museum University, Rose Art Museum); you would have the record of when this was begun, changed. Do you keep a record of when it's sold, too; for instance, I mean, if your dealer calls up and says, "Bob, we just sold you big XYZ painting," would you probably note that down that day in your. . .?

RI: I would, I would not it in my journal. But I also am keeping a card file on my work now, Richard. The trouble with the journal is, since the journal is not indexed that would require. . .

RB: The card file would be more hand for just looking up. . .

RI: It's much easier. . .

RB: It would be less of a literary production, of course.

RI: Well, it's in the journal. But the card file enables me to check a painting immediately. If someone is writing a catalogue and says, "When was such and such a painting painted?" Why I can turn right to it and can tell without thumbing through pages and years of journals and so forth.

RB: You gave me the impression that many of these entries are very extensive, hundreds of words?

RI: Oh, yes, they're -- they're --

RB: Copious expression of your activities and thought.

RI: There was a time particularly when I was in Europe when I would cover easily a typewritten page a day or sometimes more.

RB: I have the feeling that possibly this whole interview is rather superfluous if you are that well documented. May I here enter a plea on behalf of the Archives of American Art that you eventually deposit, or allow to be microfilmed at some stage in your career this splendid record?

RI: I think it would be possible, Richard.

RB: It certainly should never be lost or just thrown away. This precisely the sort of thing which the Archives aspires to preserve or have access to in its records. Do you ever read other people's published diaries at all? I mean, is it a form of literary expression that interests you as literary expression, or. . .?

RI: There have been times when I think I've been conscious of that more than others, Richard. As I say, now. . .

RB: It becomes more a working manual, I take it.

RI: . . .my journal is a working thing now, whereas at certain -- say, like my year in Europe when I was doing very, very little work, it was much more of a literary nature, and I went into long descriptive passages about what I was doing and what I was seeing, which really wasn't, you know, nothing very unique about what I was doing.

RB: Well, a diary of travel is most frequently kept I think in a sense by Americans in the twentieth century. I would gather that an immense number of people do it during a journey and then stop the moment they get home. And some of these things, I think, are done in a very brief and not very interesting literary way without subjects and sentences, and so on. Now, I take it, you write actual prose sentences; you don't just sort of make notations?

RI: No. Mine is complete prose. You know I like to write, and I've written a great deal. The journals are in a continuous prose form. They're not just jotted notes. The day by day notations that I make are often of the nature but the expanded versions are definite. . .

RB: Have you ever read Delacroix's journals? Is it Delacroix that kept. . .?

RI: Yes, he kept his. . .that's probably next to. . .

RB: A leading. . .well, there's an eighteenth century English painter named Farendon whose diaries have been published in many volumes. I have. . .

RI: I don't know of his at all, and I've only read passages from Delacroix's. I've not read the whole journal.

RB: Those are the only two painters I can think of offhand, but there may be many who kept diaries. But I just was surprised that I never thought to ask any of the few people I've yet interviewed whether they kept a diary. When you mentioned that you had, it really gave me rather a shock.

RI: Well, of course, I suppose it just isn't done very much these days, Richard. I very seldom ever run into someone who admits to keeping a journal. You're one of them. You're one of the exceptions actually.

RB: I have found it very -- I don't normally reread it much because I don't even keep it here in New York usually, but when I have reread after fifteen or twenty years, it's been very gratifying to have these details preserved that otherwise would have slipped from my memory.

RI: So much slips away.

RB: Yes. Well, it was always urged upon the young by eighteenth and nineteenth century people to do this diary keeping. In the twentieth century I think it's less common. To go back to your painting career, since the diaries record everything at such length, it's almost unnecessary to ask you questions. You were working in these heads even after you were back in New York. Now, what lead away from these heads in your work? Or what happened? What replaced them?

RI: Well, the most significant thing that occurred to me in New York, I suppose, took place at Fredericks, as I mentioned. One day I was -- I took care of one of the windows, I dressed the window with art postcards and reproductions and I had put a Matisse postcard in the window. I think it's one of his still-lifes with _____, or something like that. And Ellsworth Kelly was passing by on 57th Street and saw it and came in and asked for that particular postcard. And that's how I. . .

RB: That's how you met Ellsworth. . .

RI: That's how I met Ellsworth Kelly. And at that very time I was very desperately in need of a new loft, a new studio, because I was -- my sub-lease was terminated on the one I had been living in. And it just so happened that at that time Ellsworth, who had been for a few months in a loft on Broad Street, was also thinking about -- he wanted a larger loft, so he was thinking in terms of lofts nd moving and actually needed some help just in the sheer physical process of moving. And so it all came about as a matter of convenience. He encouraged me to look on Coenties Slip and I found. . .

RB: Had he already been down in that area, is that it? Or you went together?

RI: No. Broad Street. Which is just a block form Coenties Slip. So I came and took the corner loft at 31 Coenties Slip, which was my first; and just a few days, or a week of so later, Ellsworth took another loft on Coenties Slip, which I had looked at myself. But it was something like forty-five dollars a month, and mine was thirty dollars a month. So that fifteen dollars made quite a bit of difference in those days.

RB: A substantial difference.

RI: So I took the cheaper one and let Ellsworth have the more expensive one, and we've been in similar physical place ever since.

RB: Were there other artists already situated in these lofts in that area?

RI: No.

RB: You were really the first then to get down there as artists?

RI: No, that's not true. For instance, my loft at 31 had originally been Fred Mitchell's loft. . .

RB: Oh, Fred Mitchell had preceded you?

RI: . . .an he had used this loft as his school. I think he called it his Battery School, something like that. But he had left and had taken up residence and a job at Cranbrook in Detroit, and came back to the slip area, (he never lived on the Slip again), but he came back to the Slip area a few years later and is still there on Front Street.

RB: I was once taken by a friend on a tour of some of those lofts about 1958 or something, and one, I think it may have been Agnes Martin, was just moving in to a loft which obviously had not previously been occupied by an artists and was full of immense amounts of waste material, paper boxes and all sorts of refuse, and quite a few of those lofts I suppose had to be physically cleared by the original artist inhabitants, but in your case Fred Mitchell must have preceded you and yours was -- What state was it in?

RI: No. It was in pretty bad state. First of all, a lot of the refuse of Fred's art school was still there. There were still stacks of drawings that his students had done, and so forth. But that really was no problem. The problem was that he had been gone for some time and. . .

RB: Had been unoccupied since he left?

RI: Well, not unoccupied, but the loft had been used by derelicts in the neighborhood and it was piled high with refuse just from these waterfront characters and so forth. After all, South Street is a kind of an extension of the Bowery and you get that type of person.

RB: It must have taken a bit of courage of face this cleaning up task, and moving in to a rather isolated area from a residential point of view?

RI: I doubt very much if I would have faced it by myself, Richard. But having Ellsworth as a neighbor made it much, much simpler. We did these things together. He helped me with mine, and I helped him with his loft.

RB: That loft you stayed in for --- until the building was torn down?

RI: Yes. It was owned by a man who was more interested in the parking lot potential of the building than the rental of the building itself. And when he lost his liquor license for his bar downstairs, he decided to tear the building down. And then I moved two doors away to 25.

RB: Well, then, that building was - let's see, when I was down -- now I recall I was taken by David Herbert on this tour, and we went to see Jack Youngerman who was then living with his wife and family. . .

RI: He was my next door neighbor.

RB: Yes. Well then, you were not in that same building? For his has been torn down, too.

RI: I stayed in Jack's building for about a week while I was getting my building a 25 ready for occupancy.

RB: But he came afterwards, anyway. . .?

RI: He came while I was still living - while I was still at 31.

RB: He was right next door, but both those two buildings are now down.

RI: They're down.

RB: Where that parking lot is.

RI: That's right.

RB: Well, Jack Youngerman was there. I don't believe I met you there at that time. But I did meet Agnes Martin, Ellsworth Kelly I know was in the neighborhood. . .

RI: Leonore Tawny, the weaver, was in Jack's building for about a year. There were other people: there was a French violinist, there was a New York night club entertainer; there were various other tenants in the building. He had the whole building, an extraordinary situation. Whereas I had just, at that time, just the top floor of the adjoining. . . The two buildings were twins. Our two studios were very much alike except that in his studio the raw beams had never been covered. So that it was a very dark and rather depressing top floor. But he cut a hole in the ceiling and made a skylight for himself.

RB: This is Jack Youngerman?

RI: Yes. Whereas my studio -- a skylight had been installed years before, and the loft was all

covered with tin, which of course whitewashed very easily and it made for a very beautiful, light studio.

RB: We've discussed earlier on some previous date your present studio quite at some length, I remember now. So let me get back to the question I think I put a while ago on the evolution of your style from the heads. . .

RI: Yes, quite right. First of all, upon meeting Ellsworth Kelly, this was my first head-on contact with painting of any geometric or clean, hard-edge style. I had never been introduced to it personally, never knew a painter who worked in this manner, and had never very seriously thought of this kind of painting.

RB: Let's just bring the record of Ellsworth in as it was at this point. He had already exhibited here in New York at Betty Parsons?

RI: He had just had his first show at Betty Parsons, after having exhibited in Paris.

RB: Yes, he'd matured his style, I imagine in Paris, and had done this work, but at that time, although there were few geometric painters still showing, of whom Ilya Bolotowsky was one, and a woman. . .

RI: Charmion Von Wiegand?

RB: Charmion, yes. Both of them I think had shows that I saw prior to hearing of Ellsworth Kelly. But, anyway, most of the New York scene painting was not of this flat and hard-edge character. He really represented, anyway, a kind of innovation, didn't he? By not having straight lines in his flat painting to some extent. I think he was not preceded directly by anybody, was he? In that approach.

RI: He was what you would call non-geometric and I think he never wanted to be known as a geometric painter. Most of these other people like Glarner and Bolotowsky. . .

RB: Those people are more geometric. What I was trying to say is that the term 'hard-edge' painting I think probably was invented to encompass somebody like Ellsworth Kelly who. . .

RI: Who was not geometric? Yes.

RB: Yes.

RI: That it inferred a style which has a mechanical aspect to it but which did not derive from geometry.

RB: Of course, Leon Polk Smith may have been doing his work here, but I think he did not exhibit around this time, anyway, and you probably would not have seen his work. He's an older man than Ellsworth so he very possibly was doing this.

RI: I didn't know Leon's work until I knew Ellsworth. Ellsworth was a friend of Leon's and through him I met Leon socially and saw his painting. But it seemed that their two works had developed very independently, and that neither had exerted and influence.

RB: Yes, But from the exhibiting scene during the time you were in New York I think you wouldn't -- I'm just -- it's not necessary to go into this, I suppose, but I'm just clarifying my own recollection - you would have really found Ellsworth's work a rather fresh experience.

RI: It was. I had never seen anything. . .

RB: You saw it in the studio primarily, I suppose?

RI: Yes. I didn't see that first show. I saw his second show at Betty Parsons. But then by that time i had become his friend.

RB: And you liked it immediately or you were so startled by it for a bit that you had reservations? Do you remember?

RI: No, I don't think I had reservations, Richard, but I don't think that the minute I saw it I felt that that was particularly for me, this approach to painting. First of all, I imagine -- I know I resisted the influence just out of a matter of pride, I suppose. But it took two or three

years before there was any really active influence on my work. I continued to work on the heads that I had started in the loft on 63rd Street and had worked on Fourth Avenue and I was working on them when I met Ellsworth. Then a new. . .

RB: These heads were largely painted or drawn?

RI: They were, as I said, they were painted with thick pigment, with gravel, with sand and they later became gilded. I used gold leaf for the backgrounds which must have been some sort of a reference to Byzantium, I'm not sure. But another influence, a very indirect influence occurred and that was my meeting Cy Twombley. He had a very, very small place in an area that has now been totally razed, over by City Hall. And his quarters were so small that he didn't have room to paint and one day he heard about my loft and knew that I had a part-time job and was not there all the time and one day he came by and asked if he might share my studio in order to paint a show that was going to be at the Stable Gallery, the old Stable Gallery. And since the possibility of splitting a month's rent, and since I didn't use my loft all day anyway, I welcomed the idea, and he painted this show, many of the paintings or the show, in my loft. And as a kind of gesture and partial return for this he gave me several of his old canvases which he more or less was scrapping and told me that I could use them and paint over them. Since I was painting with thick-textured paint, it wouldn't make any difference what kind of ground it was. This never happened, because by that time I had exhausted, I had lost all interest in the heads, but in. . .

RB: Could you give the tape a brief description of what Cy Twombley's work was like at that time? I suspect that this is the work that I remember of sort of little markings. How would you. . .?

RI: That's right. He was -- well, this is how -- this is the influence I am going to describe. He was using, first of all, these were very badly stretched canvases on very poor makeshift stretchers. But they were still -- it was more than I had myself, because I had been working on homoson, the heads were painted on homoson, not having enough money for canvas. His work was done at that time with Duco or house paint of some kind. He would apply it very thickly to his canvas with a house painter's brush and then take a pencil and work into it with these squiggly lines of his. And at that time there were no references; there were no words; there were no pornographic references; they were just almost totally abstract. And he apparently had become immediately discontent with them or had applied a fresh coat of paint and then had jus put newspaper on this wet paint so that it adhered, and that was his way of destroying his work; that meant that the canvas was blocked off. So when he gave me these canvases and said, "Here, here are some old canvases that you can paint on," instead of doing that, instead of extending my work that I had been doing, that, instead of extending my work that I had been doing, in the process of just getting the canvases ready, I began to tear this newspaper off. Much of it would pull off easily but then in other sections it would not where the paint had really adhered or had made the paper adhere. And I suddenly found myself in possession of a rather beautiful collage technique, and I worked into and on top of those paintings totally obscuring his configuration and so forth, but making use of the torn newspaper that had been put on top. And I did just two canvases that way. I worked on them for some time, though, and was very happy. I liked very much what I had found. And then Jack Youngerman arrived on the scene from Paris with his wife and child. I think he had his child then, yes, he was just a baby. When I saw Jack's work for the first time, these collages were so close to what Jack had already been doing for so long and with great accomplishment that I was kind of thrown and discouraged, and so stopped that whole direction of effort.

RB: I am unable to see from the description you give of these things you were doing, I'm unable to see the relationship with my recollection of Jack Youngerman's work.

RI: Well, Jack's painting has very jagged, torn-looking edges.

RB: That's right. Yes.

RI: And that's what these newspaper torn things had too.

RB: The edges. . .

RI: They weren't greatly alike but they were close enough alike that I was discouraged from going on, because I liked Jack's painting and I suddenly saw that -- well, here we'd be two neighbors who'd be working much, much too much alike. So therefore I was jarred out of

that direction. And at this time then I moved into the new loft at 25 and, shall we say. . .?

RB: That's where you are now?

RI: Yes. And really started fresh and by that time I was not so reluctant to experiment with the hard-edge approach, and began my experiments right then.

RB: Now, haven't you put on record that you found in one of these lofts and old stencil or something of a sort which you began experimenting with? Haven't I read this?

RI: Yes. But that came much later. That was later.

RB: Oh! Well, I thought because you said you had moved in, you would have --

RI: No, those stencils were not found in my own loft but in a loft which I worked on for someone else.

RB: Oh, I see.

RI: And that came later.

RB: Well then, I shouldn't have introduced that. Go on with what happened.

RI: Well then, in searching for some, you know, personal expression I went through several experiments. I came upon the gingko leaf, which is the tree which grows in the park in front of my loft, nd I took it and made it into a - I doubled it and made it into a yin and yang form and spent, oh, many months working on a large number of variations of this form, coming then into direct contact with hard-edge and flat color and working, however still not having money enough for canvases. Almost all of these paintings are on paper and have since practically disintegrated. They are no longer in existence.

RB: While I think of it, what has become of the heads? Did you destroy those, or do you still have those?

RI: They are still extant.

RB: Including the ones with the gilded - gold background?

RI: Yes.

RB: How do they look to you now? Or haven't you looked at them for some time?

RI: They probably are due to be destroyed any day, Richard. I don't really think that I would want to -- I'll put it this way: I don't really think that I would want to go to the pains of moving them again.

RB: Again! Yes.

RI: So when I leave the present loft they may just be destroyed.

RB: I don't know what they look like, so I can't give you advice, but I would suggest that you --

RI: One of them is collected. One of them is collected.

RB: You look through them at least and try and perhaps save one or two of the best so that in the actual historic record, as it were -- Perhaps you'll find them better than you recall.

RI: Oh, they're all right, but they're so little relevant to what I'm doing now, that it's, you know, practically as if someone else had done them. Their only relationship is that they're very central and they tend to be very symmetrical, which still is a characteristic of my work.

RB: Let me ask you this: if acknowledging the fact that they have very little relation to your current work, if it should be a fact or, at least, the expressed opinion of people of capable, critical judgment that they have merit in themselves, surely you would have no objection to their being preserved, sold even, would you? Just because they don't resemble your current work? Would you feel that because they no longer represent the you of today that they have no right to exist?

RI: No, no, I don't feel that way. As I say, they're heavy, they're painted on a very perishable material, and they're very prone to damage, and I think they probably are damaged now. So that I would feel it better that they wouldn't be. . .

RB: Well, you possibly are very wise to destroy them if they are inferior. I'm just trying to figure out your attitude toward things like variations in an artist's style. Do you have any views on this question that sometimes is written about? Certain artists are accused of having too much of a formula, having too narrow a range, repeating themselves. Does this trouble you in other people's works occasionally, or do you favor artists having a pretty defined style over a given period of time, and favor the artists who are consistent stylistically?

RI: I suppose, Richard, that I admire a Picasso more than I do a Rothko. Let's put it that way.

RB: You feel that there's much greater variety, of course. By this you mean in the output of Picasso?

RI: I think that Picasso's life and his work and his development is much more interesting and complex and exciting than someone like Albers or Rothko who spent a greater part of their life doing more or less one thing.

RB: Well, I think many people would agree with you. But do you carry this further and feel that people like Rothko and Albers, who are not exactly alike, but anyway who are among the artists whose work has a self-imposed, narrow limitation, do they seem to you definitely minor artists because of this?

RI: No. I don't think I would necessarily think they were minor because of that. It's like, shall we say? Brancusi with his extremely modified forms. The fact that he found a severe style doesn't make him a minor artist, by any means.

RB: I didn't mean because they were severe, because -- well, somebody like the French painter, Georges Mathieu, who is linear, and more or less has possibly a formula, (at least in many peoples' opinion) there isn't a sufficient variety. He would be another sort of person I was thinking of.

RI: I wouldn't want to talk about him. But I would certainly say that I don't feel Rothko or Albers are minor artists because of their self-imposed limitation. I don't feel that way.

RB: Well, let's get back to your own work now. I just wanted to smoke out some of your opinions. You work more and more toward -- well, just where have we got it? We got you rather upset by the resemblance of your newspaper jagged edges to Jack Youngerman. I'm not quite sure I know what you did after that.

RI: As I said, I worked for a year on the gingko form.

RB: Oh, yes! The gingko form. Now, frankly I'm not sure I know what a gingko form is.

RI: It's a fan shape which in a combination, when it's doubled, resembles a kidney form, and so this enabled me to work in two colors only and. . .

RB: Oh, yes. And this is what you said it more or less became. . .

RI: Yes. And there is an exception. There are two smaller canvases which have a gingko, one being gilded with gold leaf, which is an immediate hangover from the heads. Another, however, a larger work has become, has gone into the permanent, into what I call my permanent repertoire of works, and that is the *Sweet Mystery* which is in the Walker show right now. . .

RB: Oh, it is?

RI: . . .and which was one of the first paintings to acquire words. Then when I decided to start using words, my first word painting was *Terre Haute*, a kind of homage to my home state. I found there was a reason and space to add words to this painting and it became the *Sweet Mystery* and with the *Triumph of Tar*, which is a companion painting, and which had also existed previously without words - these became two of the very first word paintings.

RB: What was the year that the word painting started?

RI: That started in 1960.

RB: As recently as 1960? Yes.

RI: But they had existed as paintings before that, you see. The major, the principal format of the painting had been developed before the words were added. Then, after that, my paintings were all conceived with words in mind that they had at the time of conception.

RB: When did you start working on these columns of wood?

RI: They came first. They came before the word paintings. The constructions came into being because many of the old warehouses were being razed in the neighborhood for the widening of Water Street and the wood was just lying around waiting to be picked up, and I brought it into my studio and, as you know, at that time assemblage was kind of in the air.

RB: What year was this?

RI: '59, I suppose.

RB: You didn't start those until '59. I see. I'm going to look since. . .to find out --

RI: The constructions, too, were first used without words, but the words appeared on them first, Richard.

RB: I was just checking on the date of our meeting there in December 1959 because my recollection is that at the time you came with Larry Calcagno to my apartment to see my painting collection that you were not an exhibiting artist and were rather holding yourself, presenting yourself as a person who had not yet, wasn't ready, shall we say? To exhibit. Is that correct?

RI: Quite correct.

RB: Then, this was really on the eve, anyway, of your developing these various achievements both in the sculptural form and in the painting form, isn't it?

RI: I think I exhibited first in '61. So there was a whole year there before I. . .

RB: '61 is when you had your --

RI: "New Forms, New Media".

RB: -- show at Martha Jackson Gallery and the David Anderson thing. Well now, I wanted to figure out, to confirm my impression during this time, you did not seek galleries. . .

RI: No, I didn't.

RB: You were not trying to, you were just trying to evolve. . .

RI: That's right.

RB: . . .rather than to offer yourself, your work. You felt that you were a bit undeveloped, or you felt also that your tendency was somewhat contrary to what seemed to be the fashionable thing? Or both factors, or. . .?

RI: I think my main goal was just to develop or to acquire a body of work, Richard. I felt that it was very necessary to be able to work consistently in a given style for a given period of time. And that was my main preoccupation. It was very easy to zig and zag, to change from one piece to another, and I knew that I could not feel that I had found my own expression until I could cover a body of time with a given style and a given direction.

RB: How much criticism did you receive from your friends and neighbors, like Ellsworth Kelly and Jack Youngerman? Did they come to your studio? I mean, considering that you were then, shall we say, professionally a totally unknown individual, I suppose they were better known and possibly -- I was wondering if they gave you advice?

RI: None from Ellsworth. Jack Youngerman, of course, had become my immediate next door neighbor and I would see Jack much more than I would see Ellsworth, and Jack and I even

went into a little venture together. We had figure drawing classes in our studio.

RB: Oh, I had heard about that, yes. David Herbert participated in that.

RI: That's right. He came down, and many painters from uptown came down and took opportunity of being able to draw from the figure. This didn't work out very well.

RB: Was this devised as a means of supplementing your income?

RI: That was the thought and it ended up -- It didn't do that at all. We didn't make any money. We probably spent as much getting it ready and paying for models. . .

RB: Well, what did it consist in? What -- were you still at the time you had this little class working at Fredericks?

RI: I think so. I don't particularly recall.

RB: Well, I just wondered if you got some participants through your connection there?

RI: Oh, no, it never -- no, I don't think so.

RB: You just invited persons you knew to come and - once a week, was it. . .?

RI: Well, most of the invitations came from Jack. Jack knew many more painters and had many more contacts in New York than I did. He was much. . .

RB: Well, he hadn't been here as long as you, had he?

RI: Of course not, but he was much more firmly established.

RB: Well, he had a show at Betty Parson's, and in Paris, too.

RI: He had a show at Betty Parson's and had excellent contacts, and he provided the main source of interested people.

RB: Well, the idea was not so much that anybody was teaching people, was it - just to offer an opportunity for drawing from the life, sharing a model?

RI: It was meant as a workshop where people could come and do whatever they wanted to do.

RB: How many people did?

RI: Oh, we had sometimes a dozen people drawing, and it was fairly successful for a short time.

RB: What did they pay - by the session, or. . .?

RI: By the session, yes.

RB: Do you remember how much they paid?

RI: No, I don't know.

RB: But you had to pay a model each time?

RI: That's right.

RB: How much did you have to pay the model? Four of five dollars and hour?

RI: Something like that.

RB: I'm always interested int he economics of art, since we're speaking for the historic record. That's why I'm trying to get those little facts in it: how it worked. You, in your present painting and in your sculptural work have no occasion to use a model, I shouldn't think, at all.

RI: I haven't for some time. And I probably never would.

RB: At the time you had those classes, though, were you yourself doing life drawing?

RI: No. I drew during the classes just because -- for the sake of projecting something, but no, I wasn't -- there was no particular interest. . .Neither from Jack. His work was totally abstract.

RB: No. His work is abstract, of course. I was wondering, in a sense, how it came about, because this period, I think this was 1960 perhaps you had the class. . .?

RI: Oh, no. That would have been in '58 or '59.

RB: But this was at a time. . .

RI: '57 or '58.

RB: When abstraction was certainly dominant, and I'm just curious that you did find a few people really wanting to draw from the figure almost. . .almost curious. . .

RI: Oh, my, there are innumerable figure drawing classes in New York.

RB: There are, I know, but in your particular circle figure drawing wasn't exactly the fashion. Oh, there are tens of thousands, I'm sure. Probably right this minute there are --

RI: This was mainly Jack's idea. And it turned out that there were people interested, but what defeated us more than anything else was cold weather. We couldn't really provide, we couldn't keep the lofts warm enough for a model during the winter.

RB: Ah, yes!

RI: And it collapsed because of the, to most peoples' minds, the inaccessibility of the Slip, plus bad weather, plus inadequate heating, plus a freezing model. It just collapsed.

RB: Yes. Let's get back to your wooden structures. You may have said, but I'm not sure when you first did those.

RI: Started in '59.

RB: '59. Now how long did you keep doing them? Are you still doing them?

RI: Still working on them. Still doing them occasionally.

RB: Still doing them occasionally. Well, you did some very beautiful ones certainly. Are these included in - any of these in the Walker Art Center show?

RI: One.

RB: Just one.

RI: Marine Works.

RB: Well, how many have you sent out into the world, as it were, in this form? How will we describe these: as wooden columnar pieces with painted areas and lettering sometimes? Or always? Do they always have lettering?

RI: They do now. They didn't to start with.

RB: Sometimes they have a little metal attachment, like a wheel.

RI: A wheel.

RB: Always have a wheel or just some. . .?

RI: No, not all of them have wheels. Most of them did. The wheels came about because of meeting Steve Durkee. He knew of a place where there were a number of old wheels that had been abandoned and provided me with a great number of uniform wooden and iron wheels that had been probably for baby carriages or something. And he himself was working in this form at that time. And we often competed for the wood that was in these demolition sites.

RB: I see my opportunity to make history in art. I should buy up some commodity and give fifty or sixty pieces of it to a creative artist who will then manage to incorporate it into some stylistic development that may make history.

RI: This is what the Raywalds did with their Buick when they gave it to Caesar.

RB: Oh, when they gave it to Caesar to smash up. Well, I think they directed him to do that, though. I wouldn't be able to conceive. . .But that is interesting, that just by having this group of wheels made accessible to you, you really worked them into a . . .

RI: However, it wasn't an unnatural assimilation because I had become very interested in the circle and used, and have used, the circle consistently in my paintings. And after all, the wheel is merely a physical projection of the circle. So it was just a natural find and one which I could put to use with complete ease and relevancy.

RB: Speaking of sculpture reminds me of one of the evenings that I interviewed you earlier. You were dashing off to a meeting of sculptors called by Louise Nevelson. What was the result of that?

RI: There's due to be a group sculpture show at a gallery in New York, not my own, not Louise's. I don't know that very much is going to come of it, Richard; it would mean the inclusion of one of my constructions in this group show, that's all -- nothing -- My new constructions, (and I guess I can't call them constructions), my new pieces of wood are -- I've had these columns for some time; they were originally the masts of old sailing ships, and you can still see the worn areas where the iron rings that held them together were once fitted onto. Then they became columns for these warehouses that were built after the fire of 1835. And then as the buildings were demolished I acquired several of these columns. I had to, unfortunately, had to cut them in half to get them into my loft; they were once nine feet tall. And I'm working now almost exclusively on them. They will not be assemblages in that there is nothing, there is no other material being added to them except words painted around the perimeter of the columns.

RB: Am I right in thinking, Bob, that you make use of the weatherworn surface of the wood? In most cases, you do not --unlike Louise Nevelson, for instance - most of her pieces are constructed of wood and then painted either black or white or gold or something. Yours have paint on them, as you say, like lettering or sort of bands, sometime of color perhaps, but a good portion of them remain weathered wood. Isn't that correct?

RI: It is so, Richard, because the weathered wood was so beautiful that I was just reluctant. . .Now, there are a few which I did stain - I didn't stain like Louise - but which I did paint black, because the wood was not in such good shape. It had been scarred and disfigured. But where the wood was in good shape I couldn't resist leaving the natural surface, which of course there fore makes a separation between my painting and the constructions. To be consistent with my painting, my constructions probably should be made of brand new wood which has no patina or age whatsoever. But that's not how it go started. I found the wood. . .

RB: That's an interesting point, isn't it? I don't see any reason you have to be consistent, but it is an interesting thing to reflect upon, that your paintings are completely freshly-painted sort of things; you don't go in for the kind of surface which certain painters do which seems to repeat old walls or things like that, cracks and seams and discolorations. You reject that totally in our painting but you accept it in your wooden material in your sculptural work.

RI: Just as it was found. I think there's validity in the "foundness" of the object.

RB: And yet there's no question but what your, to my mind, maybe it's because I've seen some of these wooden pieces from the very first time almost that I saw any of your own work, but they seemed to belong with your painting very much and, as you say, the circles and other things, the lettering --It's all very consistent. Your style seems to have emerged almost, shall we say, fully matured? We should go back a little further into the evolution of it. I think there must have been stages that you haven't spoken of tonight before you reached the phase when you produced the first paintings that were exhibited.

RI: There were. One particular phase which I spent, oh, a good part of a year on, Richard, was a coming out of that gingko period that I told you about. In fact, this particular work, it's a large mural-size work; it covers one whole side of my studio; and, again, due to lack of funds, it's only on heavy paper and a heavy paper which I found on the floor of my loft. The

loft had at one time been used as a print shop. And so I found this great stack of --

RB: Your present loft had been used as a print shop?

RI: Yes. And here was this stack of paper and so I made a mural out of it using forty-four sheets. And at that time, as a part-time job, I was working at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and ---

RB: In what capacity?

RI: I was -- it was a kind of semi-secretarial capacity, Richard. The then present Dean of the Cathedral, Pike, had just been appointed or had been nominated to become Bishop of California. And be had become swamped with correspondence because of his former marriage status, or divorce status, or something like that, and he needed help in answering letters and so forth, so it was a part-time job.

RB: How did this happen? How did you happen to get such a job?

RI: I just applied for a part-time job through a part-time agency, and this is what befell. By this time I had become very wearied or working in the art store and I was trying to get away from it.

RB: When do you think you left that job?

RI: Just offhand, I couldn't say. This is all down in the journal. So that kind of record is all there some place.

RB: You weren't getting enough out of it? By the time you --

RI: Oh no, the pay was lousy.

RB: But you left that before you started exhibiting, before you had any kind of success?

RI: Yes. That's right. That's right. I suppose there was some sort of influence just by being so close to the Cathedral that I decided that I'd do a Crucifixion, and the technique was dry brush. I used printer's ink with brush and did a lot of this rather large work, and it was the first thing that I did in New York that brought me to the attention of a gallery. Through friends, someone came and saw it and I was invited to show this work.

RB: What gallery?

RI: This was a gallery that is now out of business. It was once Jim Harvey's gallery.

RB: Parma?

RI: Parma, yes.

RB: Oh, you showed something there?

RI: No, I never did, but they came down. . .

RB: Oh - Harold Rubin and Robert Kayser.

RI: Yes. And invited me -- Robert Kayser came down and invited me to show this work, but I declined. It just dawned on me that this was not a very good idea and so I didn't, and it's never been exhibited. But it made use in two places of those gingko forms. And it also brought me into a very biomorphic phase whereby I still felt an affinity for the heads that I had been doing. There was the element of man in this work but it was also becoming more geometric and less what I had been doing before. It was a very transitional thing. So the work became harder and more geometric and then when I did start using words in 1960 and these were as I said, forest on the constructions, because the constructions just needed the words; they did not look complete without them. And they were only decorative until they had their words. This was the beginning of my present work.

RB: The words on the constructions were usually one word only.

RI: Yes. That's right. And very brief, usually three letters or four letters.

RB: They could, though, have been simply abstract letters or something similar. . .

RI: They could have. . .

RB: Like Cy Twombley's scratches or something. . .

RI: But they never were. They always meant - they always said something from the very beginning.

RB: Yes. I'm trying to recall -- of course, it's well known that Stuart Davis many years before you were painting incorporated words into his paintings. I suppose there were many other instances. But it wasn't quite as general. In the last few years more people have been using words, haven't they?

RI: It seems that everybody was using them. I think that was probably the incentive, Richard. Again, just like assemblages were in the air, everybody was making assemblages; everybody was beginning to use words. Remember that Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, who I knew, (Ellsworth introduced me to them the very first year on the Slip) and at that time they were still doing department store window. They were still doing their display work. I even worked for them once on one of their display jobs.

RB: I didn't even know they had worked in that fashion.

RI: Yes. They had a terrible job whereby they did mass displays that were sent all over the country to chain stores. . .

RB: The two together in association?

RI: Yes, and they got stuck in a bind and they needed help and they called up and so some of us went and helped them on these displays. But you see they were only two blocks away. Now I never became personal friends of Jasper Johns or Robert Rauschenberg but they were both, particularly Rauschenberg, they were very concerned with assemblages. And Steve Durkee was making assemblages and then, of course, it all culminated in martha Jackson's "New Media New Forms" and eventually in the assemblage show at the Modern.

RB: How did you become known to the Martha Jackson Gallery? How did that develop? Martha Jackson Gallery is one of several that could claim to be among the leading galleries. It's not automatically a cinch for an unknown artist to get consideration by them, I shouldn't think.

RI: Not at all. It came about solely just through good luck, Richard. One of my neighbors on the Slip who had once wanted to be a painter himself and has now long since given up that ambition. . .

RB: Who was this?

RI: This was Rolf Nelson. He was on the Slip, oh, for a good two or three years just as a struggling artist like myself. . .

RB: I didn't realize Rolf had intended to be a painter.

RI: Yes.

RB: If I'm not mistaken, he's now got a gallery in California.

RI: Yes. He has his own gallery in Los Angeles. But in order to make ends meet he took a job as gallery assistant to Martha Jackson, and when their idea came up for an assemblage show, he, of course, knew of the things that I had been making and invited me to participate. In other words, he was responsible for bringing Martha down to the Slip, and she saw the pieces and said okay, and I was in the assemblage show. Then it was thrown again; there was a second version and I had. . .

RB: I think that show came in 1960.

RI: Yes. Both of them did. One was in the spring and one was in the fall.

RB: I saw the one in the spring. I missed the one in the autumn. And Steve Joy also -- I saw

Steve Joy today in his new gallery, Alan Auslander's. But I remember they were going around visiting many artist's studios, weren't they? Trying to find new media. . .

RI: Of course, he didn't have to search me out because he had known me for several years. And that was the beginning and of course from there he became the director of the David Anderson Gallery, which was Martha's son's gallery.

RB: Who became the. . .?

RI: Rolf.

RB: Rolf Nelson?

RI: Yes. So that then the next stop was a two-man show at the David Anderson Gallery with Peter Forakis and that was the real. . .

RB: Was it a show which contained just two or three of your paintings?

RI: No. Six.

RB: Six paintings. And. . .

RI: And many constructions.

RB: Many constructions.

RI: Because the garden was. . .

RB: The garden! Well, I sort of remember the garden. I thought possibly there hadn't been room, since it was a joint show, for more than two or three of these paintings. And from this show Alfred Barr bought the painting that. . .?

RI: Nothing happened during the course of the show. Not a single thing of Peter's or a single thing of mine was sold, and it was very disappointing because Rolf kept the whole operation secret. He didn't want me to be disappointed. When the *AmericanDream* was called to the Mordern to be looked at, he did not let me know because it was very possible that a work could come back rejected. They look at many, many more things than they ever accept, so he didn't tell me until he knew that it had been accepted. And that was the real, that was the beginning of ---

RB: Well, was it sent to the Museum because the Museum asked to have it sent, or was it just sent?

RI: No, no, of course not. The Museum asked for it to be sent. These details, though, I have never been completely filled in on. I've never even asked, it didn't -- I'm not very much concerned. . .

RB: But it was boost to your career, as any purchase by the Modern Museum is apt to be for any artist's career in this country.

RI: Tremendous. But it still didn't mean any particular -- it didn't have any particular immediate effect. I still was without a permanent gallery. There was a kind of a promise of an invitation for another show at the Anderson Gallery, which I really wasn't too enthusiastic about, because it had such a secondary aspect. . .

RB: Well, we might clarify that a bit because at the present time the David Anderson Gallery doesn't exist. Martha Jackson did for perhaps only two seasons have her ground floor converted into a, as you say, sort of secondary gallery and many of the shows were prints, I think.

RI: It served as an auxiliary gallery for --

RB: Yes. But it was called the Anderson Gallery, for a while, and then Mr. Anderson and his wife departed for Paris, where they now have the Anderson-Mayer Gallery; and so now there is no longer, that is, the same physical premises exist, but it's all part of the martha Jackson Gallery.

RI: For my self there was complication in that Rolf Nelson left the employ of the Jacksons and the Andersons, so that my patronage from this standpoint. . .

RB: It really came through him.

RI: . . .no longer existed. I didn't mean that there still was no interest in my work. I did receive an invitation from the Anderson Gallery to have my first one-man show there, this being again more from an outside source, it was Marge Turan who is now gallery assistant at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery. She saw my work and believed in it an urged that they invite me, and they did, but I think it was primarily upon her enthusiasm that this came about. However, by that time the picture had become more complicated. I had also received an invitation from Allan Stone and this again, (all these things happened indirectly to me), this came about because of Steve Durkee. Durkee had been taken on by Allan Stone, and Durkee had recommended me to Allan, so I had received an invitation to show from Stone. But the enthusiasm was somewhat lukewarm.

RB: Allan Stone, I suppose, just to clarify, was fairly new to the gallery business in a sense. He was starting a gallery and so he was very energetically looking for good artists, really spending a immense amount of time rushing around to studios of painters. This seems to be the situation when a gallery is new; the dealer will look much more readily than when he's been going fifteen years and is already pretty well filled up with names, so that you would have had more appeal to him, I suppose, than to -- the concept of taking you on, would have had more appeal than it would to an established dealer.

RI: Well, this was a kind of turning point.

RB: But I'd forgotten---

RI: There was a whole new generation of young people who were not second-string abstract expressionists, who were not anything, who were working in new materials and, as the show suggested, new forms; young people who therefore didn't have an immediate place with the established galleries because these galleries were still committed to abstract expressionism. And then when people like Allan Stone and Richard Bellamy, of the Green Gallery, appeared, here was this new generation which filled the vacuum, the void. But Allan Stone became -- his enthusiasm was not intense for my own work and in fact the invitation was changed. He thought it might be a good idea that my first show would be a two-man show with Rosenquist whom he had previously invited to show. And this fell so flat for both Rosenquist and myself that it enabled us to bow out gracefully. We just were not interested in -- I had already had a two-man show and I was not interested in another.

RB: You and he are good friends though? It wasn't --

RI: Yes. Rosenquist and I have known each other for years and it was not out of any personal lack of feeling of each other, but we just felt it was a bad idea. There was no reason. We felt our work was strong enough. . .

RB: I can see why he particularly might have felt this in a sense, because his paintings are so large, he couldn't get very many in. . .

RI: Well, it wouldn't have been a very good idea. Our work wouldn't hang very compatibly. But then neither did Forakis's and mine. There was no reason to show Forakis and myself. It was more a contrast show than a comparison show. We both made constructions, and we both painted, but we both worked in very different ways. And then a third situation appeared and this was an invitation from Eleanor Ward to show at the Stable Gallery. It meant waiting a whole summer and not being able to show till the following fall, whereas I could have shown at either the Anderson Gallery or the Stone Gallery in the spring. And I was ready to show. I had had paintings hanging which I was beginning to worry about because they were hanging in my loft for so long.

RB: I think Campbell Wylly took me to your studio while you were still contemplating having another show with David Anderson. . .

RI: That's right.

RB: . . .when I bought *Nonending Nonagon*. I don't remember the precise date, but it seems quite recent but. . .

RI: That's right.

RB: This would have preceded this invitation from Eleanor Ward?

RI: Just a short time, yes. And her invitation, of course, was so -- I mean, I have always been very fond of the Stable Gallery, although it no longer occupied its stable, which was one of its major charms. -- That this enabled me to abandon with no regret whatsoever both the Stone invitation and the Anderson invitation.

RB: How did Eleanor Ward happen to come? I mean, was that easy to arrange, or. . .?

RI: I had nothing to do with it, Richard. It so happened that one of my pieces was being shown in the penthouse at the Museum of Modern Art. The curator of the penthouse, Campbell Wylly, knew my work and had selected this piece, and one day Eleanor Ward, I think, was just visiting the penthouse and she remarked that she liked my work very much, but was sorry that I was tied up. And Campbell merely let her know that I was not so committed as people thought. And that it might be very possible that I could be invited to show with her. And as it turned out, that was all arranged in one weekend. It just happened like that.

RB: Very good. Now I ask that partly because I have the impression that it's not easy often to get a dealer of any standing to come to see an artist's work.

RI: It helps if someone acts as an intermediary.

RB: Of course, it helps if they see an example on their own and like it, as this instance shows.

RI: Sure.

RB: But I mean if you try and drag somebody down, they are rather psychologically resistant, I think. But that is a good gallery, I think, to have got a connection with and your show was then only a year ago? When was that?

RI: It's a year now, yes.

RB: A year now.

RI: It was last October.

RB: And that was really your first show anywhere other than --

RI: My first one-man show, yes.

RB: -- other than that half show that David Anderson. . .?

RI: Well, I did have a three-man show which I didn't mention. I think on a previous tape I said something about my first loft being that of a former friend and classmate from Chicago, Paul Sanisardo, and in - oh, by '59 or '58 he had his own dance studio where he taught. And he had a foyer and he thought it would be very nice if he presented some small showcase exhibits in this foyer for the benefit of his dance students. And so he invited me to form a three-man show and I asked Steve Durkee and Dick Smith, and English painter who had taken a loft just a few blocks away from Coenties Slip on the waterfront, on Whitehall. They joined in with me, and we had a three-man show which was roughly simultaneous to the two-man show at the David Anderson Gallery.

RB: I think maybe -- Did I see this? I remember going to some show in which Dick Smith had some little construction-like things.

RI: That was it.

RB: Yes. Well then, I did see that.

RI: And I had just constructions. I didn't show andy paintings in that show. In fact, that was the point. It was a construction show. Steve Durkee exhibited some of his constructions, Dick exhibited his very small constructions, and mine, some of the ones. . .

RB: I think I met you through Richard - through Dick Smith, not through James Harvey.

RI: That's very possible. I've really lost that. . .

RB: Well, it's just that I now associate the two of you together and I can't quite remember -- maybe I met him through you. I don't know. No, there was a man, Loren Libau who I met through Steve Joy, whom I think. . .

RI: Yes. Well, he lived just a block away on Broad Street.

RB: Well, he's the one actually that brought Larry Calcagno, so it must have been through him. . .

RI: Loren, yes.

RB: He was busily trying to get into a gallery.

RI: I still see Loren once in a while. I don't know whether he's still painting now or not. It was he who interested Castelli in coming down. Castelli came to see his work and he was gracious enough to ask me to hang one of my paintings in his studio so that Castelli might see it at that time. And that's the first painting of mine that Castelli saw. And Castelli later came to visit my studio at the very time when people were becoming interested in -- shall we say, a number of people were becoming interested. But it was Eleanor Ward's invitation which came through first and became final.

RB: Let us hear about the extent of you museum inclusions now. We have made some allusions to this current show. Would you tell us a little about your experience going out to Minneapolis and the whole origin of the show,how you happened to be invited.

RI: Surely. Well, of course, the first inclusion was *The American Dream*, which at that time was just *The American Dream.* Now by the fact that there are others, it has become *American Dream Number*1. That went to the Museum of Modern Art. Then -- my first show at the Stable was not immediately successful. I think more paintings sold immediately *after* the show than during the course of the exhibit. That may have been due to the fact that it was the first show of the year and there's always a little bit of a problem at that time.

RB: Yes, that's early in the year.

RI: People just aren't on the scene yet. But one of the first acquisitions was from the Albright. The Albright bought a large painting *The Year of Meteors* which is now in the Walker show in Minneapolis.

RB: On loan?

RI: Yes.

RB: Was this selected by Mr. Seymour Knox or by Mr. Gordon Smith, the Director of the Museum?

RI: I think it was in collaboration. They both saw it -- I forget which gentleman saw it first, but they both agreed. . .

RB: That's the way they usually do it, I think; and they have a very foresighted program at Buffalo. I think that's the one museum outside of New York that you can count on to be sort of ahead of the game in most. . .Well, it's probably that Mr. Knox gives the money, of course, to make it possible.

RI: Maybe there is another one now in that the next acquisition was the Rose Museum of Brandeis University.

RB: Yes. I suppose they . . .

RI: No. But Sam Hunter bought the - or Mr. Mnuchin, I'm not sure which, selected the companion painting to *The Year ofMeteors - The Calume*t. . .

RB: That's the one I had liked so much in your studio with the names of the Indian tribes. . .

RI: Yes. That's right. And the seed painting for *The Calumet* I gave to Campbell Wylly just as a token of appreciation for his making my contact with the Stable Gallery possible. And he has that in his collection. But then after that, the next, I suppose, was the man who is building up a collection for Allentown, Pennsylvania.

RB: James Michener?

RI: Yes. Michener. . .

RB: The James Michener Foundation. The novelist.

RI: Yes. His acquisition of *Highball on the Redball Manifest*, which was in the American 1963 Show, that was the next museum acquisition. And. . .

RB: Well, I always think of him really as a private collector. He bought this for the Allentown Museum - is that it?

RI: Well, it's for that. . .

RB: He may -- he buys so many things for himself, he may also buy for Allentown directly and the Foundation.

RI: This has that. . .

RB: It was presented or given to the Allentown Museum.

RI: Yes. And, of course, that's on tour in the American Show now. But *now* the latest. . .

RB: Well, you really haven't mentioned the one at the Museum of Modern Art, the American '63.

RI: Yes. Well, of course there was nothing acquired from that show, Richard. That's the. . .

RB: No, but as far as participating in an important manifestation among the museum patronage that was an important thing.

RI: Well, that was the next most important thing that occurred was that inclusion, and that came very quickly, very quickly after my becoming affiliated with the Stable Gallery. Dorothy Miller came and saw my work. . .

RB: Came to the studio or. . .?

RI: Yes. And I was one of the first artists that she selected for the American Show.

RB: How many paintings did you have in that? I forget. . .

RI: Oh, it was, I think, six or seven, Richard. And one had to be omitted from the Modern Show because of lack of space. But it was reentered in the show in its traveling aspect.

RB: I didn't realize that that show was traveling. Where is it. . .?

RI: It's going to about seven or eight museums all across the country.

RB: Really! Is this the first time that her American Show. . .

RI: I think so. I think so.

RB: . . .because Dorothy Miller on many occasions has selected shows called "Twelve Americans," "Fifteen Americans" and various things, and I don't recall their traveling around.

RI: Well, apparently they've gained in some sort of prestige and it's going to Florida; it's going to California; it's going to Washington; it's going to Canada; it's going to Washington, D.C. It's really going to make quite a circuit of the country.

RB: Well, when we stop to - I suppose just in the last year then there must be all these shows - Pop art. Now, how do you link yourself with Pop art? You're included in Pop art. Pop art I think as a phrase is a sort of catch-all that's caught on so much that I and everyone else sort of use it automatically, and it's a kind of tie-in with certain other new artists. And it's

useful promotionally as far as your career is concerned. But your work to my mind is quite different from most of the called Pop artists, like is quite James Rosenquist and Lichtenstein. But the fact that that probably led to your inclusion in more shows than might have been the case otherwise, because there are all these sudden exhibits that include---

RI: It's really happened more, Richard, and of course my own attitude about where I stand is pretty well explained in the current *Art News.*

RB: Yes.

RI: Swenson's article. But all this happened really because of the time thing. For instance, Rosenquist and I were old friends and we knew each other's work intimately. I mean, I saw his development and he saw my development.

RB: But they're certainly not too closely allied.

RI: No, not at all. But, as I've said about other things, like assemblage and the use of word, these things, they sort of, they're in the air; people's ideas are intermingling and - not that I ever - you know there is no program -- the Pop people did not sit down together and. . .

RB: I know that.

RI: . . .decide now overnight we'll do this, as maybe the Dadaists did in Zurich or something. There was never anything like that. This happened rather independently, but I did know Claes Oldenburg, he's an old classmate of mine from Chicago; I knew Rosenquist. I did not know Wesselman. But I soon did. I mean from seeing their first shows.

RB: Yes. Now you're all lumped together as if you were members of the same football team.

RI: But there is an element in my work which, you know, no one would ever have coined the term "Pop" for me. . .

RB: No.

RI: . . .no one would have thought, "Ah! here is the artist of the popular image." But there is an aspect to it, and this is mainly reflected in my paintings, my "Eat" paintings. I mean this is taken from a roadside sign. There are literally thousands of these signs all over the country. That painting came directly from that sign, and painted in the manner of the sign just as much as Andy Warhol's Coca-Cola bottle is painted in the manner of a Coca-Cola sign. Now that only happened by coincidence with that, shall we say, that one painting. But just by the very nature of that, and maybe a few subsequent paintings that I've done, I do have a tangential interest or contact with Pop.

RB: Oh, I think you do! What I meant was that so many museums now seem to be wanting to put on some sort of a show including Pop art, which means including you in a number of different ways they approach it, but it probably has accelerated the dispersion among museum galleries of your paintings just as the others individually too, by the fact that there is a group to which you can be affiliated, so it's not just you alone bucking the trend, but a group of you.

RI: Well, there's an aspect there, Richard, and that is as far as I'm concerned there really are only four Pop artists working in New York who are rally Pop and nothing else but Pop.

RB: They are. . .?

RI: And for me that's: First of all, Liechtenstein and Warhol, Rosenquist and Wesselman. Now these four are to me *only* Pop. I couldn't think of them as being -- you know, they're not in any way related to abstract expressionism or surrealism or realism.

RB: Well, I think Rosenquist has certain surrealistic aspects.

RI: If he does, he fights this. He doesn't *want* to be a surrealist. Yes, there are certain art overtones but that's all. Whereas the other people who are sometimes exhibited with - and this includes my self - who are exhibited with the Pop people - Rauschenberg, Dine, Jasper Johns, and people like this, they all are something else. They too have Pop inclinations or Pop overtones but essentially they are something else, as essentially I am a hard-edge formalist.

RB: Yes.

RI: In the Washington, D.C. formalist show I fit in; I don't say I fit in perfectly, because I was one of the few painters who did use words and, for instance, there was the *Beware! Danger! American Dream Number Four*. I used the imagery of the danger stripes that are on the backs of trucks and on the street signs and so forth. Well, this has a Pop aspect to it, which is not just formalism, but -- and I think perhaps my painting was a little, perhaps just a little out of character with that show. . .

RB: I didn't see that show; but would you have been twice shown then at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art - once as a Pop. . .?

RI: No, no, I was not included in the Pop, and I was included in the Formalist, so there is this real split in that some people feel very strongly that I'm only this; other people feel yes, but I'm also that.

RB: Yes.

RI: And this of course, as you suggest, is working to my advantage, it's very true; it gives me an exposure and an audience which I would never have without it, and I'm not going to discourage this, mainly because I like Pop and there's going to be a certain phase of my work which will probably be closer to Pop and I would like to, shall we say? I'd like to be an artist more like Picasso than like Rothko. I don't feel that I have to go down one straight, narrow road at all. I would like to do several different things. I want to work in graphics. I've already done a very Pop etching in Chicago when I went to jury the Chicago Show this spring. And I have designed a new American penny. . .

RB: Yes. It's very beautiful.

RI: . . .which is certainly not just a formal exercise.

RB: Yes, that was very successful.

RI: I have designed a new American flag, which is certainly not just a foreman exercise.

RB: Where have I seen - have I seen the flag?

RI: The banner show at the Graham.

RB: Oh, yes! Well, you say a new American flag makes it sound as if you were planning to replace the Stars and Stripes, but. . .

RI: It would be a beautiful replacement. As far as I'm concerned it's a much better design than Betsy Ross's. I mean Betsy Ross was not an artist, and I am.

RB: I don't think there's a ground swell of opinion in favor of substituting your flag for Old Glory, Sir; I'm going to call the police and have you put away for lack of patriotism. Your penny, I think, is marvelous, though.

RI: It's being. . .

RB: And that's been shown quite -- Is it still shown in the Guggenheim?

RI: No. . .

RB: It was shown for a long time in the Guggenheim Museum.

RI: It's on tour.

RB: It's on tour now.

RI: But the new flag is featured in the two-man in the Stankiewicz-Indiana Show at Walker and it's hung on the most conspicuous place over the stairway. And who knows whether there'll be a. . .There's already been protests. When it was displayed at Cinema One in New York someone came to the theatre manager and requested that it be removed from the walls and he represented himself as being a member of the Protect the American Flag Society.

RB: Ah! Well, let us hear a little more about some of these other museum connections. The show at the Museum of Modern Art "American '63" must have been the next after your inclusion in the Brandeis show?

RI: Yes, it was.

RB: And then that is going to be sent to a great many museums so that you will be known through them. But there have been some other. Then this Washington Gallery of Modern Art formalist show.

RI: Yes.

RB: What else. . .?

RI: Then the Dunn International.

RB: Oh, the Dunn International in Fredericton. . .

RI: In New Brunswick, this summer, which will go -- which is probably on its was or which is at the Tate Gallery now in London. And then there'll be another show at the Tate Gallery in London this spring, a show called '54 - '64 of about a hundred painters and . . .

RB: Selected by whom?

RI: A group of people. I'm not -- I think it's the Gulbenkian Foundation or something. And I will be represented in that show by *The Year of Meteors*, which is the Albright's, which is in Minneapolis now, which will go there in the spring.

RB: Well, there are still others, aren't there?

RI: Yes, there's the -- I'm in an exhibition at Woburn Abbey in London now.

RB: That's the painting we discussed in some detail at your studio. . .

RI: The *Yield Brother.*

RB:*Yield Brother*. It was on the wall and we talked about it.

RI: Yes. I had forgotten, yes. That's the other --

RB: That's already there now, since that earlier talk?

RI: Yes.

RB: A very handsome painting. I'd like to see that later version.

RI: Yes, the new version will be -- that was *Yield Brother One*; and *Yield Brother Two* will be in the Whitney Annual this December.

RB: Oh, really!

RI: Which will be my first painting in the Whitney. And then I'm working on *Yield Brother Three,* and I'm working on *Yield Brother Four.*

RB: To what extent do these differ from each other? To what extent do you feel you are entitled to explore one specific vein like Yield Brother before wearing it out? I suppose it differs with different cases, but I hate to imagine you duplicating like a factory.

RI: No, it isn't. When I think of how many distorted heads Picasso did, I don't think I'm going to worry about that. No one has ever accused Picasso of being a head-factory, you see.

RB: To what extent, though, do your three or four versions differ? In color, or design, or. . .?

RI: They differ in many ways. The very first Yield Brother which I am not even giving a number - it's a small painting. . .

RB: Yes. It's the second one then that's going to the Woburn Abbey.

RI: Yes. It's the traffic sign. The second one, the single bar of the "Yield" sign became the Polaris symbol.

RB: Yes.

RI: I added the arms. And it's a rectangular painting in rather dark. . .there's blacks and it's a rather somber painting. And also in configuration it even looks a little bit like a rose window in a cathedral, and that aspect of it I am not very happy about. Then the *Yield Brother Two* became a large diamond painting, and a very summer painting. The colors are very -- I use two harmonies: in the summer I use blues and reds and oranges and yellows; and in the winter my paintings have a great deal of black and white and yellow and red, but very seldom blue and green. It is a summer painting. It is a painting which could be a ceiling painting in that it can read from each corner of the diamond, so that it it's hung on a wall upright there will be three segments which don't read properly unless one preferred to hand the painting in four different aspects. Therefore, it would work ideally on a ceiling because it could be walked around and read as it should be.

RB: It sounds larger than the one that I saw.

RI: It is. It's a bigger painting, it's a different shape, it's a different color. And it has added message in that "Yield Brother" became also "Yield Sister, Yield Father and Yield Mother," so that it is a family of "Yields" you see. And then *Yield Three,* which is an immediate variation on that *Yield Two* is -- I went back to the traffic sign but more directly and in that I used only the colors of the traffic sign which is black and yellow. I have a real New York traffic sign that had been knocked down on the street and damaged and so forth. And, using it as an inspiration, this is a yellow and black painting; therefore winter, not summer. And in this one the four "Yields" all read from one standpoint so that it would not make a good ceiling painting. Then the next *Yield Number Four* is a fragmented diamond. I broke the four shields into separate canvases so that it's four separate canvases, four diamonds, brought together to form a larger diamond. And that is going back to a harmony that I have not used since *The Calumet*. It will be a very red and yellow painting, no other color, so that colorwise it's entirely different, entirely different.

RB: Also very large, I take it?

RI: No, it isn't; it's smaller. It's a medium-sized painting. The diamonds are smaller.

RB: Sounds extremely interesting. From the interviewer's point of view, though, I jumped something. I seem to remember that last year you did some teaching. Is that true? Did you ever teach?

RI: I taught children.

RB: Well, in the last couple of years?

RI: No, no, this is some time ago.

RB: I thought. . .

RI: I've been doing nothing but painting for the last. . .

RB: Since you had the show? Completely. . .

RI: Yes.

RB: I thought. . .somehow -- or maybe it was when I first was in your studio and bought my little painting, that you then had an occasional teaching. . .?

RI: Mmhmm. Yes.

RB: Oh, then? Well, we haven't mentioned it on the tape. Would you just say where it was and what you did?

RI: I was just teaching in a suburb, that's all. I really would prefer not to talk about it, it was not exactly a pleasant experience.

RB: Well. . .Oh! Why so? Now you're interesting me.

RI: No, no, I don't like teaching. I don't like teaching. That's all.

RB: But this was something which, presumably, provided you with some income; took some of your time at that stage?

RI: Mmhmm. Yes.

RB: Was it a private school or public school, or. . .?

RI: Private.

RB: Private school. And you did that for less than a year or something, or. . .?

RI: No, more than that.

RB: More than a year. Yes. And were happy then to drop the task?

RI: Very much so. Very much so. It's much too demanding; it takes --Teaching takes too much out of you. I had a brief session of it in Minneapolis when I went out to attend the opening of the Walker Show. I was invited, as was Richard Stankiewicz, to be kind of guest teacher, guest critic at the local art school. I had a week there and that was. . .

RB: By the local art school, what do you mean?

RI: Minneapolis School of Art.

RB: Minneapolis School of Art. That's not part of the University?

RI: No, no. No connection.

RB: Nor is it part of the Walker Art Center?

RI: No connection. It's a part of the Art Institute of Minneapolis.

RB: A part of the Art Institute. Yes. Are you going to be included in their forthcoming show "Four Centuries of American Painting?"

RI: I don't necessarily think so. I think I would have heard of it by now.

RB: Liechtenstein is, because what they're borrowing went today, my Liechtenstein *Blam*. You're not invited. Well -- I was just so surprised that *hewas*, I'm not surprised that *you weren't* because they obviously couldn't invite all the new Pop artists, but for some reason or other they did include him. Well, say something more about this experience. The show was beautifully installed, I take it? You're very pleased with the exhibit in the Walker Art Center?

RI: Yes. Jan Vandermark - It was his -- He was formerly associated with the Stedelijk Gallery in Amsterdam, and then came to this country and worked at the Seattle World's Fair. He's curator to Martin Friedman who is the Director. It was his enthusiasm for my work that made the show possible.

RB: Oh, he selected both you and Stankiewicz's work?

RI: That's right.

RB: How did his work look? Are they together with yours. . .

RI: No, they're not. . .

RB: . . .Or in separate galleries adjacent. . .?

RI: . . .They're hung separately. His gallery separates my two galleries. He has one very large room, and I have a large room and a small room, and they're. . .

RB: Some of his pieces are hanging pieces so they're on a wall.

RI: Yes. They're _____ reliefs, more or less.

RB: Yes. You both taught then, but you didn't other wise make a speech, or. . .?

RI: There was a seminar both at the Walker on opening night, and the next day at the Art School. And I showed slides of the pop scene in New York.

RB: It's quite a lively art capital, isn't it, for that part of the world?

RI: Very surprising.

RB: Had you been to Minneapolis previously?

RI: I had been there about twelve years ago. There was a convention of this art fraternity that I belonged to and as an officer of the fraternity I attended the convention, and visited all the places that I saw this trip. But twelve years is a long time, I didn't see anyone that I had met previously.

RB: Now that show is going to. . .?

RI: That show will come to Boston in December and will be at the I.C.A. . . .

RB: Institute of Contemporary Art. Yes.

RI: Yes.

RB: The whole show of both of you?

RI: I think so, yes. Then there's a Pop show in Toronto. It's going on right now, in which I am included. And there's going to be a Pop show in Cincinnati in December, and I shall be in that.

RB: And you'll also be in this one for which I am lending *Nonending Nonagon* in Des Moines and that's going to the Addison Gallery at And over. And I gather that it was difficult for Mr. Tibbs, the Director of DesMoines to obtain an Indiana. He read me over the phone a list of things that he hadn't been able to obtain. Are your works so much in demand that it's literally almost impossible to get hold of one? Of course, with this big group out at the Walker Art Center that does take a large number. . .

RI: That's the main problem. There are fifteen pieces in that show alone, Richard, and what with the American Show being circulated and all these other things, I've just mentioned, there is a shortage.

RB: Well, it's quite factual to state your work is in demand, isn't it? At the moment it really is getting widely exhibited and widely known. Now you've had also some quality reproductions in periodicals.

RI: More in *Art International* than in any other publication, yes.

RB: As a matter of fact, the day we talked on one previous occasion was the day your picture had come out in color. . .

RI: Yes. Color in *Life* magazine, a painting which is owned by Arnold Maremont, in Chicago. And there will be a color reproduction of *The Calumet*, the painting that Brandeis owns, in the Christmas issue of *Mademoiselle*. And I think -- Mr. Hunter told me that due to the fact that their four-color plate will be in existence, it will serve as the cover for the Gevirtz-Mnuchin Collection catalogue, which they are apparently planning. Now, I'm not -- you know, this is not positive, but I take it that this might. . .

RB: Well, I suppose it would make a very suitable painting for such purposes.

RI: Oh, yes. I've not seen it hanging at the Rose Museum. I saw the Rose Museum. It's a very beautiful little museum. . .

RB: I've never been there.

RI: . . .and I understand from people who have been there that my painting is hung in a very handsome way and looks very good.

RB: Excellent. And other parts of your life history that we've neglected. We've still got several more feet of the tape and we only need to fill it up.

RI: Several more feet? Well, I don't know that there's. . .

RB: We might put on record that you live, you occupy your studio alone at the present time. I think that you did share it for a couple of years, didn't you, with a friend whose name is. . .

RI: John Kloss, who is a fashion designer and now has very well established himself. But due to the ultimate demolition of my area, the building has been vacated by other tenants, so that right now I am occupying three floors of the building, which gives me one floor for the wood, and one floor which I use as a gallery and my own studio on the top floor.

RB: A cat on every floor.

RI: Just about. Just about.

RB: Well, that -- is it really so certain that the building will come down? That you eventually are going to have -- quite soon then?

RI: Oh, sure. Well, not quite soon. But the whole area is doomed. Right now it's due to become the new Stock Exchange. Previously, it was due to become a housing development.

RB: This is where the new Stock Exchange is! Oh! I didn't realize that.

RI: Yes. As I said, my first loft is now the site of the new Metropolitan Opera. And now my loft here will become the new Stock Exchange. I'm always getting in the way of civic improvement, Richard.

RB: Well! You have a feeling for place, don't you? I mean, in several references you've made to future work, things and places that are associated with you personally in your living tend to become. . .

RI: Yes, I've done two Coenties Slip paintings. Right now I'm working. . .Oh! We perhaps didn't mention the World's Fair.

RB: No, you haven't mentioned that. I forgot to ask about that.

RI: Yes. Philip Johnson's New York State building at the World's Fair, the Circorama Building will be covered with the work of about ten contemporary painters and sculptors, some of which are definitely Pop. . .

RB: One of them is Roy Liechtenstein, I believe.

RI: Rauschenberg, Liechtenstein, Warhol, Rosenquist and myself. So that that's already been designed. I'm not making it myself, it will be fabricated by a commercial Broadway sign outfit and will be --- at this point it's planned to be an electric sign. It will make use of the flashing electric bulbs, not neon. And I'm working on that now. Then---

RB: How did this come about? I think, if I understand, that the architect, Philip Johnson, is responsible.

RI: Yes, he is.

RB: He is very much concerned with, and interested in Pop art and modern art in general as a collector and so on, so I suppose the whole presence of you, Liechtenstein, Warhol is due to his personal support and enthusiasm.

RI: I think so. He's also a collector, he has a construction of mine and he has a painting. And personally likes my work and so invited me to. . .

RB: This is your first architectural commission?

RI: Yes, it is. I have done frescos when I was a---I think I mentioned when I had a scholarship at Skowhegan in the summer of '53 I painted two frescos there, which were destroyed by fire. So I had thought in terms of architecture before. But this is the first real commission.

RB: Is this substantially well paid for? I have the impression, I don't know whether it's true, that architecturally-commissioned works of art frequently are highly paid for. . .

RI: No, this is not highly paid for. Johnson is working within a pretty strict budget and, for instance, what I am receiving will just barely cover the cost of having this fabricated. I will not -- the sign will still be mine, but the complications there are so great that it's quite possible I will really stand to gain nothing from this particular commission.

RB: You are paid, shall we say, X number of dollars for it, and out of this you have to pay the maker?

RI: Yes.

RB: Was that your decision or Johnson's decision that you should not personally make it, or is it just physically impossible for you?

RI: No, it's more my decision in that I certainly did -- Most of the artists are doing these things in their own studio, making them themselves, paying for very probably simple materials, but it was my own decision to have it a real commercial Broadway sign. And therefore it's my own action, not Johnson's.

RB: Yes. It sounds rather different from your painting.

RI: No. It'll be very much like my painting. It will be. . .

RB: The lights.

RI: Yes, the lights. The lights make it different. But it will be essentially a large, hard-edge sign which will come to life with lights.

RB: What does the sign say?

RI: I will be a double EAT in the form of an X with the A, one A serving both words, you see.

RB: Are you anticipating -- have you been troubled by nasty, adverse criticism? Pop art, as I am very well aware, particularly the work of Roy Liechtenstein, is quite savagely attacked by opponents of it. I can't offhand remember anything quite so hostile toward your work appearing in print.

RI: Not quite, but certainly there have been not very pleasant criticisms.

RB: It seems likely that the great public, unfamiliar with the sophistication of art may (many individuals of this public) may be very horrid toward not only yours but all the other pictures.

RI: I'm sure they'll practically riot against it. With the kind of exposure that exists at the World's Fair to a tremendous slice of people, I mean people who are not interested in art, who know nothing about it, their reactions slice of people, I mean people who are not interested in art, who know nothing about it, their reactions will probably be very. . .Although, I don't know, I think the days when people used to throw stones at things are probably gone now.

RB: How big will your work be?

RI: Twenty foot square.

RB: Are all of them approximately the same size?

RI: Approximately. We were all given the same space. Yes. And they'll be practically contiguous to each other.

RB: I actually can't envision this very readily.

RI: I think it'll probably be great fun. It'll probably be one of the few interesting buildings at the Fair.

RB: That may well be. It's just that I have a little problem in advance seeing how these will work out with each other.

RI: That's Mr. Johnson's problem. He's going to arrange them. We have nothing to do about it. . .

RB: In other words, as you might say, he's going to hang the collection.

RI: That's right. But due to the fact that it's a round building. . .

RB: Oh, it's going to be round! Well, that'll make it easier.

RI: Given one vantage point, you're only going to see parts of three, probably no more than that.

RB: Well, that'll make it easier, I'm sure, visually.

RI: And it's not an immense building.

RB: And it should, I suppose, spread your fame, even if you don't -- I'm thinking now in terms of money, what you get out of it. You may not actually get much for this particular work itself, but it is at least allowable to imagine that what it does for your reputation will pay off economically to a certain extent.

RI: Just one of those luck opportunities. It's very true, there'll probably be more reproductions this, and more coverage in the press than on anything that I might have done otherwise.

RB: It might lead to further architectural commissions. I don't know.

RI: That's hard to say. Given the arbitrariness of my design, it's not going to be too ingratiating. As I said, there are thousands and thousands of "Eat" signs all over the country, so people are not going to be struck with my originality.

RB: Well, we'll see. As long as they don't strike you in anger that's something. You don't want to mention, I suppose, I discovered when I was in your studio - tonight we are not in your studio for the first time - I can't go and look at these things, but it turned out that you had one or two concealed paintings containing the human figure. Is this secret, or. . .?

RI: Oh, yes! Only a semi-secret. Many people know about this new direction. I have begun including the object in my present schema. And my first object painting was *Red Sails* which is in the Toronto Popshow now, which includes*Red Sails*. The two paintings that you probably saw were my. . .

RB: Well, I only got a sideways glimpse and sort of sssh'd and pulled away rapidly as if they were still unveiled.

RI: These paintings are my mother and father and it's quite possible, if the show has a theme (I don't know whether it will), but they will be included in my second one-man show at the Stable Gallery this spring, and may set the pace for the whole exhibit. At this point I'm not sure, but I think that would be the case.

RB: Your forthcoming show is largely unpainted so far?

RI: Largely unpainted.

RB: You're going to be doing the work this winter?

RI: That's right. These two paintings represent probably the core of the show and will influence the other paintings that will be there.

RB: I don't know whether they were finished?

RI: They're not.

RB: I had a feeling that they were under wraps.

RI: They have taken more time and I have exerted more effort on these paintings than any others that I've done.

RB: Well, could you tell -- I suppose you couldn't -- how successful they are in terms of your

work?

RI: Obviously, it's a fairly major departure.

RB: Yes.

RI: My work has a very strict discipline as it stands, and as it has stood for the last three or four years, and this means for me a new direction and, as I say, it probably will bring me closer to Pop actually.

RB: What da you suppose led you to make this experiment?

RI: Oh, I've thought about this for a long time, Richard. The basis of these paintings are some lithographs that I did in art school over ten years ago. I have the same basic sketches for these that I'm using now. So it's been on my mind for a long time, you see. And of course, as I say, the figure, the realistic representation of the figure as it is, particularly as it is used in Pop, this is very much in the air, I think this is what permeates the whole art field.

RB: I was interested in the list you gave of the people you consider to be the genuine Pop artists in New York. Have you met, as a so-called Pop artist, have you been introduced to lots of hangers-on, you might say? I mean is there a whole bunch of as yet unexhibited perhaps-no-very-good Pop artists coming along. . .?

RI: Well, I suppose so, Richard: I would say in New York, no, I haven't met very many. And it appears that most of the new -- this, shall we say? The second generation, if you can use that kind of term now. . .

RB: One or two years is a short generation.

RI: It is, but it has all the characteristics of a second generation - is in California. And these people are popping up, they're all over the place and from the photographs I see and so forth the work seems very inferior and not nearly of the quality of the four men that I mentioned. And I. . .

RB: Yes, I know something of this group and I've seen a few paintings in the Castelli Gallery by a man - one of California's - named Mel Ramos. But there's also this painter who has exhibited quite successfully in New york, in fact I have a small painting by Wayne Thiebaud who did his painting, I'm sure, in total ignorance of all of you here in New York. He had quite a body of work with slices of cake and lollipops and other objects, sort of common objects.

RI: I've seen his painting and I like it, in a way, but I don't feel (he's been included in Pop articles and Pop shows), but I don't feel he's. . .

RB: His handling of paint is different than many of these other Californians, I think, or at least this man, Mel Ramos, seems to derive somewhat from Wayne Thiebaud's version of Pop art.

RI: That's right. Their concern with pigment sets them apart from Pop as far as I'm concerned.

RB: Yes. It's a different thing from the -- well, Liechtenstein and you, as far as. . . [Machine turned off.] How do you think I failed the most to win out of you a description and revelation of your character? What have you concealed most?

RI: Well, I don't know that I could. . .

RB: I sometimes have a feeling you weren't being entirely revealing. . .

RI: . . .answer this, Richard. I think that possibly the things that didn't come out which probably are very important are childhood things which, you know, linger in one's mind and one never escapes, but. . .

RB: We went into your childhood pretty considerably, though. I dare say we didn't draw out of it everything. . .

RI: No, I'm very. . .

RB: I didn't question you about your romantic and emotional life. But I suppose perhaps it's better taste not to. . .

RI: No, I don't think that's had very much to do with my development as a painter.

[Machine turned off.]

RB: Well, we might as well wind this up for the time being. I guess this -- unless I -- [Interviewer states that the tape recorder was turned off here to allow a moment's consideration of how to use the final inches of tape.] Unfortunately in the interim we've had a fascinating conversation in which you attacked a number of artists, but I didn't have the tape on. Now I can't expect you in a short space to attack them all again.

RI: No, that wouldn't be a good idea.

RB: But there are lots of prominent contemporary American painters whose work you don't like, isn't that true? [After a slight pause, Mr. Indiana said, "Missed it" as the tape's last spun off the machine.]

[END OF INTERVIEW]