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Oral history interview with Jacob Alexander Elshin, 1965 April 21-22

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Jacob Alexander Elshin on April 21 and 22, 1965. The interview took place in Seattle, Washington and was conducted by Dorothy Bestor for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's New Deal and the Arts project.

Poor audio throughout some of the interview led to some words being inaudible; however, the original transcript was used to clarify some names and words. These names and words are given an -Ed. attribution. The original transcript was edited. In 2022 the Archives created a more verbatim transcript. Additional information from the original transcript that seemed relevant was also added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right. Now we're recording, for whatever it's worth, and would you like to just talk about your contacts with the Art Project, or would you rather have me ask you questions?

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, I think it's always good to start with questions because it leads you to some conclusions and declarations and stuff like that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes—

JACOB ELSHIN: And this way we'll start off—"Ladies and gentleman" is kind of silly. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right. Well, first I think it would be interesting if you tell what your experience and training as a painter was before you got the commissions to do the post office murals. I know you were educated in Russia, and what else I don't know, really.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, I left Russia in 1919, and after that, it was a period of complete confusion, and commotion, and moving. And moving, I mean not from one state to another, but from one world to another. From one continent to another, through all kinds of seas, under sometimes awful conditions, sometimes comparatively comfortable. But it was never knowing what might happen tomorrow. That was a desperate thing. Finally, after all those excursions, and covering tens of thousands of miles, I landed in Shanghai, and there I was stranded with practically nothing to do, and the only thing you could find for some advice—but not material help—was the old Russian consulate that, regardless of the revolution, was operated by the same people—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: —who operated it before the revolution.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: And they were living on funds that they had from the old regime government, and they were fairly comfortable, but also, they were sitting on a gunpowder magazine because they didn't know when they were going to be kicked out.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Quite.

JACOB ELSHIN: And [inaudible] the funds, no matter if they were big or small, I have no idea how much they had. They'll last just so long, and what to do then? And being diplomats—I don't know what were the employment for a diplomat after he's through with his diplomatic career, if he is fit to survive after the comforts [ph], like we all did, in a way, and then go into nowhere. And that was seized immediately after they knew they were representing practically nothing, [laughs] fell down too.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, we were all living in the same sort of basket, and we visited the consulate, and I heard there were parties of the mildest kind, but our means of existence was practically none [laughs].

DOROTHY BESTOR: What years were those?

JACOB ELSHIN: So—well, those were the years of '20, '21, '22, and '23. So, altogether, I will say three years, between '20 and '23. And life in Shanghai was troubled, vivacious for those who had money, and mediocre and somewhat—you know, like people for no particular home or address.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Laughs] You know? But they managed somehow. Well, I could find only one thing to do that I could do immediately, and that was also a sort of a revelation, and it occurred to me to draw some cartoons on the local situation—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: —and to present them to *the North China Daily News*, which was the biggest English paper—in English. English people controlled, actually, the life of Shanghai.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: They were the predominant factor.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see.

JACOB ELSHIN: And that newspaper was subsidized by the British government. Well, I brought my cartoons, and they looked at me, and I couldn't speak a word of English. [Laughs.] And so, one of the editors spoke French. So, I explained myself and explained some of the cartoons that need explanation. Well, he happened to like either me or the cartoons, I don't know which, but he started to buy them from me, piece by piece, at exactly \$20 apiece.

[00:05:17]

Well, I usually produced half a dozen cartoons a month, and that gave me some drinking money and just keep myself in shape and clean, and appear here, and there, and everywhere.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Had you drawn cartoons in Russian at all?

JACOB ELSHIN: No. I did drawing, but cartooning, what could else I do there? What could I do? Local views? [Laughs.] Who wants them? Nobody wants them. So, I just said, Well, it will be—I concentrated mostly on the racecourse, because racecourse was the center of all the elite of Shanghai society.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: Life was around the racecourse. As a matter of fact, it was several seasons of racing, and when the racing season starts, all offices closed. How do you like that? All business stops, Chinese, or European, or English, or American, and everybody rushes to the racecourse for gambling. So, that was sort of a stimulant, and it was lots of funny things[inaudible]. I joined the race club.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You did?

JACOB ELSHIN: I did. And raced myself. So I met all of the people and the jockeys, who were all gentleman jockeys, I mean, they were racing, what do they call, amateur—or not amateur, but not for money—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: —but for the fun of it. And I found they were great sportsmen. They were equally all sporty kind of people. There were American, English, French, everybody competed. That was sort of, you know, like a tournament in medieval times [laughs].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: And so, I found it a good deal, and I hit the spot, so I was doing those cartoons. Well, of course, the revenues from it was very little, and besides, I got—I got extremely sick every fall—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: —on account of climatic condition. I couldn't stand the climate, being born in St. Petersburg, and then Shanghai, it was just devastating. July, August, September is just absolutely impossible. So, one year I was sick—just laid down flat for three months. Next year, I was even more sick with some kind of unknown ailment that only exists in tropics. And so, I decided that it's time. That next year I probably will be dead.

So, I moved early in the summer to America, applied for a visa, and then started here. And when I arrived here on a visa as an artist, they let me free from the quota, you know? And—but I found it just as tough here, if not tougher than it was in Shanghai because, no matter where I went, it was my poor English—I spoke English there, by then, somewhat, but all the juicy spots were occupied by commercial artists and artists of good standing. And why should they get a nobody from somewhere, or some kind of—

DOROTHY BESTOR: This was in 1925?

JACOB ELSHIN: It was 1923.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, I see.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, I found it very difficult, but then I tried all kinds of designing. I tried freelancing and all sorts of things for commercial things, advertising things, and discovered myself absolutely not talented for commercial art.

DOROTHY BESTOR: This was in New York City?

JACOB ELSHIN: In Seattle.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, how did you choose to come to Seattle?

JACOB ELSHIN: Oh, I came through Canada.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: I came on a Canadian boat, *Empress of Asia*, and landed in Vancouver. But I immediately was put in a camp, which was called immigration house [ph], but actually it was a jail.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: And they held us there just like jail birds—

DOROTHY BESTOR: How long?

JACOB ELSHIN: —and—two weeks. And they threatened us to be deported every day. Well, that was a very sad kind of a deal. And finally, I managed to be questioned. And when I was questioned, they said, Well, you're [inaudible] visa. Why—what are you doing here? I said, That's what I would like to ask you. I don't know why I was sitting here. So, they immediately released me, and I came to Seattle, and then I said, well, already I started. But then—it was lots of refugees then, and especially from Shanghai and the Orient that came.

[00:10:00]

And they were all looking for jobs of any kind. People were doing everything. Washing railroad cars, working in the lumberyards, sawmills, and logging camps, and it was poor with English who were treated like no savvy, no, [inaudible] no savvy you come here.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, it was really dreadful. But then somebody got an idea to get all those refugees acquainted with the local society. And they produced a big performance called the Russian Night. It was held in Masonic Temple. And so, it was lots of actors, ballerinas, singers,

comedians of any kind, that came together, and it was a big colony then in Seattle. And so, they all wanted fabulous scenery in Russian style and everything and gave it sort of a revue—Russian revue free-for-all, you know, performance.

Well, tickets were all sold out for fabulous money, but it was charity for the benefit of the refugees. And I submitted sketches for the scenery, and few others did. Well, they approved my sketches, and so there came a fabulous scenery. I still have photographs of it. And I'd never painted scenery before in my life, but using my imagination and seeing wonderful productions through my life in Russia—so, I did quite well. It was fabulous applause when the curtain opened [laughs]—

DOROTHY BESTOR: [Inaudible.]

JACOB ELSHIN: —so that was my reward. But this way I got acquainted with Seattle people of influence, and who got interested in me, and I started to exhibit in the Northwest Annual that then existed in those even early days. They just celebrated the 50th Northwest Annual—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: —not so long ago. Well, I was in it from beginning to end. And so, I got known. And when you know people, that is always, you know—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: You get a plum [ph] here, and we get a little thing here, a little thing there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: When you started—

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible] suggested that I publish greeting cards in Russian style, so I did. They went big.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: And [laughs] so, some of my competitors probably up today could call me a sociative painter. Well, I broke away from society years and years ago, and I decided that this business of greeting cards and everything is just a temporary little labor to get over and to feed my stomach and get dressed. It was no fabulous profits, and even though it looked tremendous, which created antagonism among the local American artists.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: "Who is that so-and-so? He must be so-and-so and so-and-so." You know how it can go on, and—well anyway, so, I abandoned all that idea, especially after the Depression hit, and nobody wanted to spend any money. That was business was just dropped off, and I tried to even forget it because it caused me an awful lot of unhappiness when I had to pay the debts. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, it would.

JACOB ELSHIN: And then, as I said, Depression—well, Depression was an awful thing. Having your landlord coming every month, and waiting at your door, wait to collect money. No money. Finally, when he catch you, he ask you a question, How about rent? When are you going to pay? Well, I became—I figured out this way—the best way to be aggressive [inaudible]. His name was Fry. He died long ago, so it's alright. I said, Well, Mr. Fry, do you think I'm a fortune teller, to tell you when I'm going to pay? [They laugh.] He thought it was highly insulting. [They laugh.] He said, You're a Bolshevik! You're a Bolshevik! I said, No, I'm not a Bolshevik, but the way you treated me—and [inaudible], he said something very [inaudible] and very inappropriate, and so—well, I said, People like you create Bolsheviks [laughs].

[00:15:11]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very good.

JACOB ELSHIN: And he was awfully mad. But anyway, finally at that time, I remember the first swallow came in the spring, and all of the sudden we were informed that the government is going to buy our paintings. We're supposed to produce one painting every two weeks, and the government will buy it, and install it in some government building, or public building, or

something of that sort. That was PWA.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: It was not WPA.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: Remember, that was different.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

JACOB ELSHIN: And that's when Mr. Fry just nearly pinched me to the wall, so I had to leave or pay. Well, when I got—they invited me on that thing. I was quite known [ph]. And so, I started to do this painting, and I produced about six or seven, or eight very substantial paintings.

DOROTHY BESTOR: What kind—

JACOB ELSHIN: I really worked hard.

DOROTHY BESTOR: What kind of paintings were they?

JACOB ELSHIN: Mostly landscapes. Views of Seattle, and one of them is right now owned by Seattle Art Museum because they're wrote to Washington and they—it was allocated [inaudible] to the art museum. And one got in Senator Bone's office in Washington. And Senator Bone is probably gone long ago, but he wrote me a letter about it, how much he enjoyed the painting. And other institution—and some of it I don't even know where they went. I lost track of it. It wasn't important, but the important part of it was that they were paying—I couldn't tell you exactly how much, I forgot. But enough—plenty, enough. So, I called Mr. Fry. I said, Ah ha! Let's make a bargain. I owe you for six months. Well, suppose I pay you that much. Incidentally, I was paying \$25 a month, but that was [inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, he made a bargain with me. He said if I pay cash, I could move out and— for so much. Well, I probably gained about 25 percent of what I owe him. I paid him all that thing, and then I started to look for a location and found some kind of dilapidated house that nobody wanted and bought it for \$1,350. After big persuasion by the man, all that he asked, if I give [\$]150 down, I will pay [\$]12.73 a month.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Goodness.

JACOB ELSHIN: I resisted it with all my power, but he said, You will not regret it. And I certainly didn't, because the minute I moved into the house, I made some kind of a circular, a letter to all my friends and whom I knew: Pictures 50 percent cut down.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh. [They laugh.]

JACOB ELSHIN: And so, it was a little response—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: —but enough for me to buy the lumber and to build a studio. So, all of the sudden, out of misfortunes, the fortune came. I had my own home. I didn't have to pay rent, except [\$]12.73 a month. Half of what it was before, 25.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: And I, in 15 years, paid it out. And decided build some—bought some lumber and built myself a studio.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very good. Where was that house located in Seattle?

JACOB ELSHIN: It was located 1512 31st South.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: And so, I became the envy of everybody. "That bourgeois," you know, "That rich

Elshin." Rich Elshin. [They laugh.] I wish they could see me sitting on that roof, and digging [inaudible], and mixing that cement, and doing all of those things. But when I was building, I was a bourgeois, among painters.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: And that created—it was good for me.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very.

JACOB ELSHIN: But it created me a lot of antagonism among the local painters, because they thought I probably brought terrific funds back from Russia, you know, or robbed a poor Russian peasant and all that junk, and [laughs]—and so, I am sitting pretty.

DOROTHY BESTOR: They could have done likewise if they wanted.

JACOB ELSHIN: They could have done.

[00:20:01]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible] stop talking, and start working, and doing something, and putting their mind into it, they could have done the same thing. They came later on. But anyway—so, that were this way. Then I worked in the museum. Then I did everything—

DOROTHY BESTOR: In the Seattle Art Museum?

JACOB ELSHIN: Yeah, I worked there for a year and a half. And—but there was some antagonistic characters there, which I didn't get along with, so it wasn't pleasant, and I had to leave. And by that time, I was invited to the school—Edison, you know—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: —to teach things, but a few dollars came out of that, and the WPA Art Project started. So, they invited me to come there, and immediately they put me to work on some murals. Well, the reason why I got the murals, and not somebody else, I don't—couldn't tell you, that other painters were worse than me or I was a top painter, nothing of the sort. No, simply I was willing. They were trying to avoid work.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: They didn't want to work. That was my impression. They wanted to sit there and declare how great they are, what geniuses they are, and criticize other people's work, and actually producing nothing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You mean that—

JACOB ELSHIN: I could make that statement.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —that the regular staff—

JACOB ELSHIN: The regular staff.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —were there all the time at the Bailey-Gatzert School?

JACOB ELSHIN: Yeah, yeah. No, it was in the Pioneer Building—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: —on Western Avenue.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: You know, down below there—

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's right.

JACOB ELSHIN: —by the [inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: And then later at the Maritime Building, wasn't it?

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, Maritime Building, that I mean. That I mean.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: I forget—what was this? Maritime Building?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Maritime Building, yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, that's the first time I went there. Well, the minute they saw my murals, Why? Well, actually, it was a responsibility. You know, I have the feeling that sometime painters—you notice that I don't say artists, that's from God. But painters, they want to, you know, pretend geniuses and avoid responsibility. That's where—what the big point of the Project. [Cross talk.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very interesting.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible] a person who could have uplift them out of that peculiar sort of a—peculiar feel that they're some kind of genius, they think [inaudible]. It's all fake. That's all silly.

So, that's—I was glad. I'm getting \$94 a month. I have three dependents, so four of us, who could live on that money, comparatively speaking to the Depression, which was behind us, fabulously. So, I really start to work. And whether it was good or bad, God knows. Judge me if you want to, but I did work. And, of course, I—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, your University Street post office murals show that you did.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, yeah. [Cross talk.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: [Inaudible.]

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, this was a [inaudible] contest, you know—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: —from the section of Fine Arts.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

JACOB ELSHIN: But I did those high school murals—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: —and I never painted murals before in my life.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, really?

JACOB ELSHIN: But I put my life into it, my salt into it, and everything—was willing to do the best and wanted to please people. Wasn't easy, you know.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: But, anyway—but those critics over the WPA Art Project, they came to—oh, there was something super-duper—geniuses unrecognized. Well, that's the wrong approach—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very.

JACOB ELSHIN: —because my opinion, there is no geniuses in that world at all. Only one works, and the other thinks he's a genius and wants to abide in glory of some kind. But they read too much books about the past, how so-and-so was glorious, how so-and-so—bohemianism.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: That's it. The imitation of Van Gogh and other guys—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: —Soutine, and Modigliani, or whoever—whoever there.

DOROTHY BESTOR: It's a sort of carry-over of the Romantic idea—

JACOB ELSHIN: Yeah, that's it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —the painter as a writer.

JACOB ELSHIN: They want to play on the Romanticism and be that, but you have to have the guts of those fellows whom they imitate, because they don't know the struggle and the work that those guys put into this before they became so famous and people found it found it worthwhile to write about them.

[00:25:09]

DOROTHY BESTOR: True.

JACOB ELSHIN: They want to be right there, the click-clack [ph], and [that is a queen, coming for the big line (ph)].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: And that always irritated me.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I can see how it would.

JACOB ELSHIN: And it doesn't mean that I don't think an awful lot of myself. We all do, but why to put in an actual—in actual action?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: You know what I mean? Well, that was a backlog, you know? That was a weight, that was confronting the director of the WPA.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: Now—

DOROTHY BESTOR: I was going ask you about him a bit.

JACOB ELSHIN: Yeah, well [laughs], that's what I'm coming to. I was just approaching just opposite direction.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, right.

JACOB ELSHIN: Instead of starting with the director, I'm just starting with what goes around.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good, good.

JACOB ELSHIN: There was lots of people from the skid rows, you know, what they call Handy-andies.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: Here, one knew something about electricity, one knew something about plumbing, one knew something about that. And so, all those guys, they were not paid more than \$50 a month.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: They're not getting \$94 a month, but they are all working, to the best of their ability, to the best of their knowledge, maybe [inaudible] private character, but they did work.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: What about those geniuses? Did they work? No. They were rampaging. They

were objecting everything that the director said. They were—tremendously high opinion of themselves. They criticized me, and—on the fact, because I was working, and they were rampaging, they thought I was the opposition.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: I am the reactionary, you see? Well, in other words, in their mind, it figured this way, that if you work any of your timecard, even though not quite successfully, you are a reactionary.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see.

JACOB ELSHIN: You [inaudible] occupied the opposition side. You should make sure to read a lot of Tolstoy so that [inaudible] not resisting the evil [inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Ah.

JACOB ELSHIN: That's my sincere opinion.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: And I talked to them and tried to—and each time I make a protest—I did make some protests against the director, several times. Each time, fabulous applause. [Inaudible] applauds it's alright, because I said what's supposed to be said. But I'm not going to join you in constant opposition of the director, in a constant sort of a sit-down strike, Italian style. Because, after all, we're paid for it, and I will do what I can.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good. To whom were these protests made?

JACOB ELSHIN: To Bruce Inverarity. Well, now we'll talk about director. If he was a man—well, at this certain age, he was just a kid. I knew Bruce when he was 18 years old.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You did?

JACOB ELSHIN: [Laughs.] And so, I never took him very seriously. Well, I said, Oh, well, he is in charge of somebody, [inaudible] has nothing to do with it. I get my job, I get my pay, I will do what I can. And I advised him many times. I protested to him many times, and many—in many cases, he took my advice. But I wasn't snickering behind the partitions. The minute he was out, everybody's, Ha, ha, ha, so-and-so, ha, ha, ha. But they didn't go and tell him what should be done. They just criticized him, and they make it constant opposition, so it was a constant fight between the artists and the director. Well, he was young, inexperienced, and cocky [laughs], which is a terrific combination.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I wonder how old he was at that time.

JACOB ELSHIN: I couldn't tell you, but he looked very young. He was a long, sort of giraffe's build individual, maybe seven feet, maybe six [feet] seven [inches]. And to make it funnier, he bought himself a Austin car, so when he was unfolding out of it, the traffic stopped on the street, you know?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I see.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, you see? He was a showman, too.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: But again, because he was young. If he was a little older and a little more dignified, he wouldn't have done such silly things. [Inaudible] won't make him famous [inaudible]. Well, it was all very, very unhelpful.

And so, he started to show his authority. Well, in here, and there, and everywhere, and did publish sort of a—it wasn't a magazine, but some kind of an every-morning declaration—

[00:30:20]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh?

JACOB ELSHIN: —about—it was lots of words, and what should be done that we're paid fabulous amount of money for the work, and we're not doing anything, we're not producing enough for the pay that we—fabulous pay that we get from the government, and stuff like that. You know, silly stuff. [Laughs] So, one of those bulletins came to me, and Mrs. Thyng, who was the secretary, she would go with that bulletin around all the victims of the Project [laughs]—as we call them, "aborigines" [they laugh]—and make them sign. Mr. Inverarity wants you to sign this. So, I read the declaration that I'm being overpaid and I'm not producing enough work [Dorothy Bestor laughs] for the government for \$94 a month, et cetera, et cetera, just sort of hit me in the wrong place. And so I wrote, "I do not agree, Jacob Elshin." So, there was a big commotion when he read that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good. Good [laughs].

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible.] What did he mean? What did he mean? You know, Mrs. Thyng was [inaudible] bickering with Inverarity. And they were all upset. What does she mean she doesn't agree? And such a disciplinary [ph]. So, she comes and whispers me that, Mr. Inverarity wants you in [inaudible]. "Well, what do you mean, Jacob, that you don't agree?" I said, I don't agree with your declaration. "In what respect?" That you say that I am overpaid, and I'm not producing enough work for the government. Said, Maybe the others are not producing, but I am producing. I said, I paint your three murals in two months, that means each mural was less than \$100. Do you think I'm overpaid? I produce two paintings every week on your order. That means eight paintings a month for \$94. Whereas we could sell any of those paintings on the free market for much more. Well, what do you mean that I'm overpaid? That's what I mean. "I do not agree, Jacob Elshin." He didn't know what to [inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very—

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, that was a demonstration. But that was not a demonstration of the whole thing sort of getting into a clique or getting into cahoots and producing cat's concerts or scandals or, or demonstrations with flags or something like that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, so you see, this shows you the negative side, on this side, and the other side. Well, the conclusion is that when they appoint somebody on the job like that, he not only has to be a man—substantial man, that everybody's opinion—everybody respects his opinion.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: We didn't. He should be a mature man, whether he is an artist or art critic, or art painter or whoever, he should have something behind, in the background, not just a kid, who was the son of some kind of politician that had good standing in the party. And for that reason, he was appointed.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, you really think so?

JACOB ELSHIN: I know so.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: That's the way he was appointed. It was a political appointment because he was the son of a retired politician of the party. And so, he got the job, and so nobody could kick him out of the job, they tried, but they fail. And I didn't try to kick him out of a job. I didn't join them when they get a mass protest and march. You know, all of this march.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Did they really have a march? I didn't know that.

JACOB ELSHIN: They had a march. They had—you know, and Inverarity was sitting in the next compartment of the higher authority whom they approached to have him removed. He listened to every word they said. But then Inverarity saw that everybody was down in that march of protest, except me.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: And he told me, he heard every word, what nasty things they had to say about him. But what kind of a deal is that, huh?

DOROTHY BESTOR: It doesn't seem very helpful.

JACOB ELSHIN: No, it is not helpful. He wasn't removed, but he knew who was who.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: And he didn't particularly like me because I criticized him in his face very often.

Well, so, I say, if the government wants to do something like that, they should think 10 times whom they appoint for that thing. Then another thing, when they appoint even the good man, no matter how good you are, you accumulate a certain amount of friends among artists.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

[00:35:19]

JACOB ELSHIN: And you have the tendency to patronize the same bunch, one after another, same thing, same thing, they should be removed off. I think free jury on any kind of project or competition, and everything, should always be changed and selected from different groups of entirely different environments.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I think you're right.

JACOB ELSHIN: You get all organized, they just get so organized—just like Greeks, you know, Greeks are all for Greeks, you know, stuff like that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, that's ridiculous. Lots of injustices have been made on account of that. Lots of injustices, because people get sit [ph] there, and they think it's their estate, they sit with their legs on the desk and declare, and all the declarations for the same people all the time. So, if they want to have a project, they should really invent some system of changing the art government once in a while.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. Rotation.

JACOB ELSHIN: Rotation, or different districts or, for instance, a paintings contest, Washington painters should be sent to Alabama, or Alabama painters should be sent to Oregon.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very good.

JACOB ELSHIN: And get them confused, so they don't have the time to organize.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very good indeed.

JACOB ELSHIN: To produce the effect of justice, so artists know that he is entrusting his work into impartial hands. And not a bunch of crooks and fiddlers and cahoots.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, now there were some other administrators around here, Kenneth Downer over in Spokane and Carl Morris. Did you—were you in contact with either of them?

JACOB ELSHIN: No, I knew Carl Morris. But I didn't know the fellow in Spokane. And for personal reasons, which I don't care to discuss, I wouldn't make any comments about Carl Morris because I dislike him greatly, and he knows why.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very well. Very well. Well—

JACOB ELSHIN: Because he was unfair. And so, now—you see that you mentioned that name. Okay, well, let's forget his name. I don't think artists should judge artists.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see what you mean. And yet, if they don't, who—who should?

JACOB ELSHIN: Oh, there's plenty of so-called museum directors, critics, et cetera, who are not painters themselves—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: —but who know something about it, and whose authority everybody respects. I

don't think an artist could be an impartial judge of another artist. That's my definite, 100 percent statement. I mean, artists gets in cahoots sometimes, and help each other.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, you gave me the price this year. I will give you the price next year.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: They're willing to do that. But then eventually, they all come to a quarrel. When it comes down to getting hired again, the more venomous they get. Examples? Hundreds I could give you, but I don't want to start that trial here on your devil machine.

DOROTHY BESTOR: [Laughs.] You won't.

JACOB ELSHIN: No, I won't. But I will tell you, it's a fact, in cahoots, working all together, helping, [inaudible] they go on the top, then all fight, and all fall apart, the whole organization falls apart. Why? Because each of them thinks of themselves. And so, it should be somebody who doesn't think of themselves but think of everybody. If that is possible, the project is desirable. But if it's going to be run on those bases, it's just a waste of money, a waste of time, and a lot of grief for the painters and everything and makes them feel they lose faith in humanity.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see what you mean. As you think back over the Project here in Seattle, are there any exceptions that you can think up to this?

JACOB ELSHIN: Among artists?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, among artists, to this sort of unfortunate spirit that was manifest?

[00:40:00]

JACOB ELSHIN: [Laughs.] No.

DOROTHY BESTOR: No.

JACOB ELSHIN: Including me.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Including you?

JACOB ELSHIN: Including me.

DOROTHY BESTOR: [Laughs.] Well, that's a [inaudible]—

JACOB ELSHIN: Because I could be fair, if I didn't know them all.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: But after you know them all, how could you be fair and just?

DOROTHY BESTOR: It would be hard.

JACOB ELSHIN: Now, for instance, I have been cheated with a whole bunch of them, altogether and separately. How could I be fair to them? Suppose I am on the jury and I am to pronounce them. The painting is okay, but he's a crook. Why should I patronize a crook?

DOROTHY BESTOR: But wouldn't you accept the painting?

JACOB ELSHIN: I don't mind if you say, Now, I know he cheated me. And she has the best painting in the show. What do I feel? I will [feel the Judah (ph)]? No.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, it would still be the best painting in the show, wouldn't it?

JACOB ELSHIN: The best painting in the show, but I will feel resentful. And I will try to find some mistake in that painting, and that is no painting in which you couldn't find a fault.

DOROTHY BESTOR: True.

JACOB ELSHIN: Rembrandt or Michelangelo, or anything you want to say, I will find you a fault in

that painting, if I want to. And suppose I have, in the same show, a bosom pal, and a wonderful guy and an honest guy, wouldn't I be—according to me.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. You would [inaudible]—

JACOB ELSHIN: Wouldn't I have a tendency to let him?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Anyone would. Quite true.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, the only thing you could do—because the artist are agonistic to each other. That's just—you know, why the tiger doesn't like the lion. They're in opposite camps.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: But each time they have a chance to do, they grab each other by the throat and kill the other. [Inaudible.] So, I said to put an artist ahead of the Project or a painter rather, I will say, it's a mistake.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, was Mr. Inverarity considered a painter at that time? I know he was a printmaker—

JACOB ELSHIN: He considered himself a painter. But if he was, a very poor one. The painter that will never could make a go of it. Never could give any recognition or even a living. Well, you could say that about many good painters. But he wasn't exactly a painter. But he was a kid.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: And the kids want to look older, and want to look more important. Like some of the young creatives do.

DOROTHY BESTOR: True.

JACOB ELSHIN: The first thing, they attack all the old painters. Like that guy, here.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Tom Robbins [of the *Seattle Times* -Ed.].

JACOB ELSHIN: [Laughs.] They will attack all the old painters, do you know why? Because they're older. Because they're not—see, he thinks he is a tiger, and anything [inaudible] are the lions.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: And yet he will patronize all the rebel tigers there that amount to nothing. He's friendly with them. And the younger you are, the more vicious you are.

DOROTHY BESTOR: [Cross talk.] [Inaudible.]

JACOB ELSHIN: You don't choose your expression. You don't have any mercy for that poor old lion. You want to kick him like a donkey. Not like a tiger but like a donkey because the lion couldn't move anymore. [Inaudible.]

Also, if I had to decide what to do about that kind of deal, well, I have to think and think and think. And that's a duty of the department of the government that deals in those affairs, whoever could provide funds for that project, which is desirable. It saves families of the painters and if his family's safe, he could work.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: If his family goes to pieces, he goes to pieces.

DOROTHY BESTOR: True.

JACOB ELSHIN: If he's any kind of a man.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah, quite.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, that's a good thing. But how to do it? How to organize it so it has had some semblance of justice, and not just a bedlam of some kind, because that project was a bedlam, what I saw.

[00:45:08]

All those geniuses—the minute Inverarity moves out [inaudible] a chase starts, [inaudible], tickling each other, grabbing each other, pinching each other, acting like high school kids.

DOROTHY BESTOR: That sounds pretty juvenile, doesn't it?

JACOB ELSHIN: It sounds awful. More than that. And I would sit behind my partition and admire all that spectacle. I said, goodness me, goodness me. What are they trying to accomplish by that? And Inverarity comes in, they sit with mournful faces of protest and indignation.

DOROTHY BESTOR: [Cross talk.] Well now, [inaudible]—

JACOB ELSHIN: [Laughs] [Inaudible] what I call the Italian strike.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: Sit-down strike.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. Well, of course, some of them think that Mr. Inverarity didn't find any use for their talents, that they would make sketches for murals, and then the murals would never be commissioned. And—

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, that was the case.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —things like that.

JACOB ELSHIN: He did that. He did that. Yes, it's true. But some of the fellows that on the Project were something of 19 years old. You know? They were older and more mature painters, but those fellows were ambitious, that they should get the mural permission. First, nobody wanted to do them. But then [inaudible] put them on the map and make them famous. So, they all started to object, and all the men that were the mural commission worked together. There were not enough walls for all those kids of 19 years old to produce a mural.

DOROTHY BESTOR: True.

JACOB ELSHIN: They may produce a genius piece, nobody knows. But what—how the director would know? They didn't have any kind of education. They barely went through high school, if they did. [Cross talk.] Why [inaudible] any director would give them a mural commission, all of a sudden, out of the clear sky? They never exhibited in any shows. On what basis they could demand a mural commission, when nobody knows—even of their existence, then how they get on the Project is a miracle.

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's what I was going to ask you, how could they have gotten on a Project without any art training?

JACOB ELSHIN: I don't know.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I thought they have to be qualified artists to get on?

JACOB ELSHIN: Oh, they don't have to. But at least they had to produce something that is—has been noticed or seen or appreciated by somebody. Out of a clear sky: Here is my mural project. For why—why would he do it? I don't blame him for not giving it. What is the guarantee here that they wouldn't mess up a huge canvas? And then he will have the cover the trouble to force the people to hang it on the wall that school or office building or government building?

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see what you mean.

JACOB ELSHIN: Why should he experiment like that? Maybe he's a genius. Who knows? But what is the proof of it? After all, it is a big thing. It was about 50 people on the Project. If everyone involved will demand a mural right away, well, that will be 50 murals. Where are they going to be put?

DOROTHY BESTOR: I don't know either.

JACOB ELSHIN: They don't want to. Simply they feel that they were not recognized—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: —and et cetera, et cetera. Well, who doesn't feel this way? All painters were not recognized enough.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Laughs.] I should be there sitting in Paris, decorating the pavilion of Napoleon, or something.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: That's the way that I feel, [laughs] but nobody else feels this way. [They laugh.] What can I do? [So, I should sit there making cats' concerts, protests, -Ed.] sit-down strikes and everything, and agitate people about it. Well, you could always agitate people. But most people don't have much sense. You could agitate them to anything.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: But—so, I say it was equally wrong on both sides, administration, which was incompetent, and the painters, who [inaudible]. The only poor people that I feel sorry for is this little fellows from the skid row, those Handy-andies, you know, who is plumbing, and electrician. And they did everything you tell them that they needed to do it. They are all sorts of subservient.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible; foreign language], what they call them, understaff.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

[00:50:00]

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, why should they be understaff? They may be geniuses too—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Perhaps so.

JACOB ELSHIN: —when we give them a chance. But they were treated like nothing, and—but they just worked and worked and worked, and they certainly received the [inaudible] of what they were paid for. They're given labor, in return absolutely 100 percent.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, good.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, I have respect for them.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good. Well, now, there's one statement I've heard made, sometimes around Seattle, that except for a few things like your post office murals and Fitzgerald's bas reliefs on the gate of the floating bridge—

JACOB ELSHIN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I remember those.

DOROTHY BESTOR: —that not very much was actually produced by the Project that endures around Seattle. Is that your feeling?

JACOB ELSHIN: No. Well, I tell you, I could answer you that very well. You see, Inverarity has a hard time doing [inaudible] doing it. We were producing—we were supplying the labor.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: And the painting, and the sketching, and the construction, et cetera, et cetera.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: But the customers, or the receivers of those things, were supposed to produce the funds for materials.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: See?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: And as little as that was, it was very few of them willing to pay even for the material.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: You don't know that?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, that hadn't come up in the correspondence about the Project that I read. [Cross talk.]

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, it was this way. In my case, when we did those murals for West Seattle High School—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: well, West Seattle High School bought the canvases, bought the material and the installation, and everything.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Good.

JACOB ELSHIN: They paid for it. But Inverarity wasn't able to get enough customers.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: Because—because [inaudible] that too.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: That—those protesting geniuses produced such ill advertising for him that nobody wanted to talk to him.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, well, now that's interesting. I was going to ask you—

JACOB ELSHIN: They undermined, undercut their own. They pull the rug out from under our own feet.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, well, then I was going to ask if these protests got beyond the studio or the Project. And I gather, they did reach the public somewhat.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, they went all over town.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see.

JACOB ELSHIN: They talked about it. And many of them had a [well-hanged tone (ph)].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes?

JACOB ELSHIN: Whatever the opinion of the public, whether there's a dump [ph]—the WPR Art Project is a dump [ph], and what's the use, et cetera, et cetera. They are producing bad publicity. Which is a very, very wrong thing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very.

JACOB ELSHIN: Don't you think so?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Very short-sighted.

JACOB ELSHIN: Very short-sighted. And—and that couldn't help but—of course, some of the things that the Project did like this, you know, the model for the City Light (Company -Ed.)—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: I told you about it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, that model cost the city \$10,000. And when it was delivered, it was supposed to operate, you know, the water was supposed to be running, and stuff like that. Well, it got all moldy. So, the \$10,000 were wasted, and the model had to be thrown away. Well, that —

DOROTHY BESTOR: Dreadful.

JACOB ELSHIN: —quite poor publicity for the Project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: And why? Because incompetent management. He should have known that if you start running water in a vacuum kind of a container [inaudible] that it will all turn moldy.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Or you think so.

JACOB ELSHIN: Just one example.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I thought you were saying the other day that someone set up a pump or something to arrest the mold. And it finally worked.

JACOB ELSHIN: It didn't.

DOROTHY BESTOR: It didn't, even so.

JACOB ELSHIN: It was too far gone.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: Everything got rotten.

DOROTHY BESTOR: And it was generally known, it was in the newspapers, then that—

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, I don't know if it was known or not, but what I just said, My goodness. [Inaudible] for \$10,000. And then I talked to those fellows who built it, I think one was Burns [ph], and the other was Baron [ph], the mechanics. I'm not certain [inaudible] forget the names. Well, they worked hard and everything but fellows like that need some kind of an engineer, or some kind of a technician who knows something about this thing to tell them that that's all going to be the bunk.

[00:55:00]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Absolutely.

JACOB ELSHIN: I didn't know it myself, but I had nothing to do with that model.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

JACOB ELSHIN: Oh, they made me paint in the background [inaudible], which was not needed either. Which I did, but it all turned out moldy. Well, so you see, incompetence. A young kid wanted to be an engineer, he wanted to be a model builder, and everything, out of nothing.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: If you don't know, you go an inquire someplace, or invite—ask for advice.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

JACOB ELSHIN: But he knew everything. Well, examples of it there were numerous. To tell them all to you, it just will sound like an avalanche of somebody being infuriated. [Cross talk.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: [Inaudible.]

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible] pathetic. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: It sounds very objective, really.

JACOB ELSHIN: Pathetic.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: The whole setup. And there was kids, as I said, 19 years old, was there on the Project. Of course, they're all geniuses. The kids are always—nothing but short of genius. And so, they were doing foolish things, as I said, and behaving abominably. And so, finally, an order was set. Mrs. Thyng was supposed to check time for how—what—how long they're going to [the toilet room -Ed.], how many minutes spent. And so she will report to him, that young man spent so much time in the toilet. I wonder what he's doing there. [They laugh.] I tell you, I almost popped when I heard that. [They laugh.] And you know on the Project, the peculiar thing about the secrets and all this whispering, were the partitions were so thin you could hear everything that was said. [They laugh.]

I said, Oh, well. [Laughs.] What do I get care? It isn't my problem, and keep plastering that paint. And because I have to paint so much, and at such speed, some of my painting were just very awful. I wish I could have some of them back and destroy them.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Where are they now, do you suppose?

JACOB ELSHIN: God only knows. Everywhere.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Are they among the ones—

JACOB ELSHIN: I know a bunch of them is in the sanatorium here, at [Firlands Sanatorium -Ed.]. And whole bunch of painting—they invited me there to see the paintings. And they wanted to ask me what I think of them. I think I found a couple that I said, well, I like those two, I think the rest should be destroyed [laughs].

DOROTHY BESTOR: I suppose they didn't?

JACOB ELSHIN: Oh, no. I think they have a mind to sell them, and see how much money they could collect out of those paintings. I don't know. I think a couple of paintings were pretty good. But that was just an accident. You know, in mass production, you always find some good paintings. [They laugh.] You know, like that guy—like stamp collectors sometimes go into the grab box, you know, grab so many stamps, [laughs] and out of several hundred stamps they found two very valuable, rare things. Just about the same thing when it comes to mass production. And well, I first was much more enthusiastic than at the end of the Project. I was there too long. And—

DOROTHY BESTOR: How long are you there all in all?

JACOB ELSHIN: Oh, at least two years, maybe three. I couldn't swear on that, to be quite honest. But I think from the beginning to the end I had—you know, I had to eat, and my family. And—but I really tried, at times I tried awfully hard. But you know, I think that the times I tried awfully hard, it was the least appreciated [they laugh], for some reason.

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's very often the way.

JACOB ELSHIN: And sometimes I will pull up a good painting, and then I tell you where I was dishonest.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You were what?

JACOB ELSHIN: I was dishonest.

DOROTHY BESTOR: How so?

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, I knew one painting was good, and [inaudible] how to extract it from the Project so I could have it.

[01:00:05]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, I painted a bad one, was very showy and spectacular. I said, Will you exchange me that painting for this [laughs]? And the director bit on it. [They laugh.] [Inaudible.] Could you believe it? I said, I had to cheat. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well—

JACOB ELSHIN: But I was [inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: I understood from some of the people on the Project that if they painted, say, 27 watercolors, they were allowed to keep two, anyway and only turning in 25.

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DOROTHY BESTOR: Now we're recording again.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, as I said, I was working a considerable amount of time. What proportion it was now in hours but—but I was what I call a remote control. Meaning, I could go out and, and paint landscapes, you know, outside, because I said, I'm out of ideas, I painted all the portraits of all the workers [laughs] on the Project in this kind of monotonous, this portrait gallery. And so she agreed that I would go to the remote control. And that's when it's happened. You know, I have to present two pictures every week.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: And so, I remember one still life. And so, coming here, I had a one-man show [in the Museum -Ed.]. And that painting that he exchanged for really junk was the most prized painting [inaudible] [laughs].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh my goodness.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, I mentioned I knew what was good. This was my work after all. And, well, I don't know what happened to the other monstrosity that he exchanged for it. But it was kind of showy and spectacular looking.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: And, well, so you see, we're all bad. [They laugh.] We're all pretty bad. And so in order to correct, we have to have some kind of a judgment—some kind of an authority that's completely impartial, which is awfully hard to find.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, it is.

JACOB ELSHIN: And if you cannot find it, what's the use having a Project? It will be a mess. [Inaudible.] And I remember ghastly scenes on the Project. Some fellow—he was a commercial artist, I remember, [I think he did most of the lettering -Ed.]. And he disliked another fellow, [inaudible] someone who does miniatures, you know?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: Two weeks on one miniature. It was ridiculous. I told you about that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, the thing for the American Index of Design?

JACOB ELSHIN: Yeah. That was ridiculous. I could do those things in two hours.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Why did they take so long then?

JACOB ELSHIN: To prolong their job, not to lose their job. The only thing they could do. Well anyway. So, so one fellow approached the other fellow—[I won't go into the turmoils, I told you about it -Ed.].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, he came [to see what he was doing, looking over his shoulder -Ed.], and all the sudden, the fellow jumps up and says, Get out of here, stool pigeon! He got the idea that he reports everything to Inverarity, which he didn't. He was not a bad guy. But he had that kind of [inaudible]. So, he, in his small mind, decided he was a stool pigeon. And really, it's a slap in the face in front of all the workers.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: Gruesome. Gruesome. And all the things happened, just because you know

painters act this way. And the director didn't have any authority or any [inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's tragic.

JACOB ELSHIN: Awful. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Do you know anyone around the Northwest who could have been a director of such a Project, and had authority?

JACOB ELSHIN: [Laughs.] It's always a strange thing to say, but he used to work—I know one fellow that I really would have appointed a director of any kind of art field because of his soft, quiet disposition, and yet very righteous kind of man. I think his name is Lee [ph]. He used to work for Loman and Hanford, then for Miller Paint [ph] company, and he wrote poetry, and he did wood blocks, and did a little paintings himself, but never had the ambition to be great. But it was very just, all of that. He always deals with artists because he sold art materials for years. And he was very, very nice. And I never saw him say any nasty thing about anybody [laughs].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, Lee [ph].

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Do you know what his first name was?

JACOB ELSHIN: Bob.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Bob Lee [ph].

JACOB ELSHIN: I think he's still alive, of course he's of an age now. Probably my age. But I said, Well, I said, Bob, I tell you if I get to appoint the director, I will appoint you.

[00:05:06]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Did he actually work on the Project?

JACOB ELSHIN: No, he didn't. He worked at Lohman's, and then he changed to Miller Paint [ph] company, and he established an art supply department there which always have extra material and everything. And he was genuinely interested, and then current of all the affairs and never pushed himself forward.

DOROTHY BESTOR: He's—

JACOB ELSHIN: Where do you find people like that?

DOROTHY BESTOR: I don't know he's rare. He—

JACOB ELSHIN: One in a million.

DOROTHY BESTOR: He isn't, by any chance, the Bob Lee [ph] who works out at the Wedgwood Fuller Paint Store now?

JACOB ELSHIN: I doubt it. I think he went into jewelry designing. [Inaudible] heart trouble, and so he—it was too heavy for him to work in a paint shop.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: And I think he's—last I saw him he told me—he always greets you friendly. He would never—we never were bosom pals, but a person like that, he knew all about—excellent taste, and his carvings or his small painting always were of very good taste. But it was no—no thirst to be great. [Laughs.] [Inaudible.] And so, it's very hard to say who. But—

DOROTHY BESTOR: One other thing that—

JACOB ELSHIN: It's awfully difficult. [Wellington Groves, Inverarity's assistant, was the most balanced individual on the Project. He could have been an excellent director. -Ed.] From all art directors that I met in my life, I was favorably impressed with one person. He used to be the director of the Portland Art Museum. What's his name? Portland Art Museum director.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Would Mrs. Elshin—

JACOB ELSHIN: Colt [ph].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Colt [ph].

JACOB ELSHIN: What was his first name?

DOROTHY BESTOR: I'm afraid I don't know, either. Maybe Mrs. Elshin knows.

JACOB ELSHIN: No, no, no. [Inaudible.] It will come to me. Janie [ph], what was Colt's first name? Janie [ph]—[inaudible]. [Thomas Colt. He's a director of a museum in Ohio now. -Ed.]

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Now that we heard the tape you gave, I think it's very good, and you made a couple of points that no one else has made. One about the youth of a lot of people on the Project and how that accounted for some of the inefficiencies. And also, that people on both sides were to blame, the administrators and the staff. There are several things I've thought of that I've heard that I'd like to check up on.

One is, do you think there's any truth in the story that I heard that workers, who are supposed to be paid \$50 a month, and the artists, who are supposed to be paid \$94 a month—that sometimes the workers got paid at the artists' rate and the artists at the workers' rate because of jealousy in spite in the administration of the Project? Some people told me that solemnly, as truth.

JACOB ELSHIN: I don't know. I know that people like others you mentioned, Carl Morris and Hilda Deutsch, who wasn't his wife then.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: But they were both imported from the East someplace. On what—for what reason? I don't know.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Were they from New York?

JACOB ELSHIN: Inverarity picked them up someplace. I don't know exactly where. I would have told you—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: —it's no secret, but I don't know. But anyway, they were exported to be in an advisory capacity. Which means that they have to be advisors, and they actually didn't do any work.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: And they were probably both paid the full amount, whatever the Project would allow, or maybe more.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: I didn't ask them how much—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

JACOB ELSHIN: —to get into that. But they were in sort of a privileged category for that reason, that Inverarity personally picked them up someplace. And the rest of the people—I think, Guy Anderson did some teaching in Spokane—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, he did.

[00:10:17]

JACOB ELSHIN: —or someplace. Maybe the Fitzgeralds [ph] was there too, for a while. Well, they were, as far as I know, all paid about \$94 a month—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: —without exception.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see.

JACOB ELSHIN: And among painters—also, painters were divided into several categories. And we kidded each other very often in this manner that says: first, you are a painter, the second category was tracer, and the third category was tinter.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh. [They laugh.]

JACOB ELSHIN: Hey, you, tinter! [They laugh.] Nobody got offended, but it was just a standing joke.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: A painter, tracer, and tinter. [Dorothy Bestor laughs.] Where those titles came from, I don't know. But never pay—paying something like maybe next—maybe tracer got \$80 or [\$]75, and the tinter got [\$]65.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: And those men who built the models, and technicians, and— they knew quite a bit about that business.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: Don't say they didn't know, because they built very complicated things, I will never be able even to start.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

JACOB ELSHIN: But they were paid something like 50 bucks. Unless—there was a bunch of pathetic looking women that were doing a sort of—I don't know what they were doing. Whatever they were told to do.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: And they were paid very low prices. But they were grateful to be on the Project. But you know, it amazed me, how meek they were all.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: Suppose I was a nondescript Handy-andy—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: —I probably would have raised cane or kick or something.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible] old men.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: Were I unfortunately be called in that category and get little pay. But they were actually kicked around, and they were very willing and—

DOROTHY BESTOR: They were.

JACOB ELSHIN: —meekly took their lot.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: Just like martyrs.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I wonder what happened to them afterward. Do you know?

JACOB ELSHIN: I know one of them came to see me after many years, not so long ago. That was the Burns [ph] of that portrait that I showed you.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Joseph Barnes [ph], yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: Burns [ph].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, Burns [ph].

JACOB ELSHIN: Burns [ph]. And he—he came, and was awfully sweet, and remember all those days like something very wonderful, even though he did much better after the Depression was over. But he came and sat here and asked me, please, to let him have that photograph that I have— a photograph [of the portrait that I did of him -Ed.], because it was just a little image of him, you know, the photographer—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: I get interested in his expression, you know?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: His attire, of a craftsman, apron—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. In the overalls.

JACOB ELSHIN: Overalls, apron.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: And that, sort of a, concentrated expression. Then, you know, they laid quite a few mosaics—you know, that mosaic that Inverarity did. Actually, what he did, he went to the library and traced some Egyptian murals.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: And set them into design, the tracings and make those fellows, those meek characters, to lay mosaic about 10 by 10, or 10 by nine, which is hanging in the chemistry department [at the University -Ed.].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I've seen it.

JACOB ELSHIN: You've seen it?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, that is a complete tracing from the Egyptians, if you remember.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: And then he had [the audacity to sign it -Ed.], but actually, that commission for that mural and mosaic design was assigned to Tobey.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Huh.

JACOB ELSHIN: And Tobey did the design, and actually did a gigantic cartoon, on the— nine by 10 or something like that. And when his design was evidentially accepted—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: —and he did that cartoon, which was like a mural. And the last moment Inverarity did some kind of a shocker-mocker [ph] and exchanged it for a design of his that he traced from the library. You know, Egyptian god of some kind, with a big—with a bird head, and you know. Something very well-known. And call it formula—Egyptian formula for gold. . And who in the heck knows what is this formula for gold—still don't know it. But the Egyptian knew, and

he figured out, he couldn't read the [hieroglyphics -Ed.].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:15:05]

JACOB ELSHIN: But anyway, he managed to talk the university to accept it. for the chemistry department as a formula of gold by Inverarity. So, that put him in the category of muralists. That probably was the first and the last mural he ever did. Do you see?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, that's—that's criminal. And Tobey got so upset about that whole deal after he worked so hard, made a very excellent little drawing. Incidentally, that was supposed to be burned.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, Bill Cumming told me it was burned. [Cross talk.]

JACOB ELSHIN: And somebody snatched it off.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: Because I learned from the framer that somebody brought Tobey designs. Well, I said, I have that mural. I saved it from the bonfire.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: It was carried to the bonfire. I saved it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Did you?

JACOB ELSHIN: Yeah.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Where is it now?

JACOB ELSHIN: A military secret.

DOROTHY BESTOR: A military secret.

JACOB ELSHIN: Tobey has it. Tobey has it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Hm. Well, about this bonfire?

JACOB ELSHIN: But the—bonfire they were carrying—

DOROTHY BESTOR: When and where?

JACOB ELSHIN: That was in high school at Ballard, or it was a junior high, or some kind of a school at Ballard, right after the Ballard Bridge [ph] there. Then we moved there. And then it was all militarized, the Project, for all kinds of models, you know—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: —bases, maps, and constructions and, you know, relief maps for—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: —construction of bases, and stuff like that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, so, the order was made short and simple. Anything that's out of shape or too big or doesn't fit the space, to be burn. So, a big bonfire was built in—in a plaza of the school, in the court.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: And they were carrying just—probably some of mine. I really didn't care [laughs] what they burned. But was it was—I was about to leave the Project and I wasn't too proud of

some of the things that were more showy, they were allocated to military camps—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: —and things like that, in Alaska. I heard I had a one-man show and Nome—

DOROTHY BESTOR: You did?

JACOB ELSHIN: —[laughs] Alaska. I mean, it was a military club. A recreation center. So all the walls were covered with Elshin. "Gee, you had a one-man show." Not that I know of. [They laugh.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, where did they get them?

JACOB ELSHIN: From our Project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: From your project.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, they were framed very cheaply, and [inaudible], and sent to all those centers to decorate their walls, is what—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, did the painters know that—[Cross talk.]

JACOB ELSHIN: [No, they weren't notified. -Ed.] [Inaudible] the murals.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, right.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, I was attracted to two brothers—I call them brothers.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Laughs.] I thought it was a good title. [My attention was caught by two workers -Ed.] carrying a long, huge tube of a heavy paper. Then I say, Brothers, so what are you carrying? One of them told me Tobey's mural. I said, How come? "Well, we got orders to destroy everything that is not handy," et cetera. I said, Wait a minute, let me look at it. So, they lay it down on the ground—courtyard, and unfolded and unroll the roll. I said, Well, that's good. I said, Why do they want to burn it? "Orders are orders," [laughs] you know?

I said, Well, no. Let me have it. I will take it with me home. "Suit yourself. Suit yourself." [Laughs.] I said, Okay. So I took it, and it was very difficult to manage to get it into a streetcar, because I didn't even dream about the car in those days. And so, carries it home and had it for years and years and years.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, that's certainly not generally known. Because most people think it's been destroyed.

JACOB ELSHIN: No, I don't want to advertise that kind of an affair [ph], what a great guy I am. Because, after all, Tobey is not a pal of mine. We never quarreled, but we were going each one in his direction. We were independent. But it was no trouble. And I didn't see any reason why, when a man laid on his stomach on the floor, plastering [ph] this [on the floor for days executing it -Ed.]. And so, it's just ridiculous.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It is.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, I said, Well, then I will take it with me. "Suit yourself." Imagine! And I know why. Because Inverarity probably had in his—on his conscious, the fact that he exchanged, the last minute, his tracing for a mosaic instead of Tobey. And to eliminate the evidence, it was the best way. No evidence that he ever did anything.

[00:20:17]

DOROTHY BESTOR: I see.

JACOB ELSHIN: Do you see what I mean?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, I do.

JACOB ELSHIN: They're destroyed.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I do, very well.

JACOB ELSHIN: And that's what I say, those guys who are painters, what kind of a soul do they have?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Small.

JACOB ELSHIN: And I—I say this, the man who worked on it, and then boom, in one minute, all smoke. Why not to save it? And that was—at the time that that happened nobody thought anything about all of our celebrities here, and well-recognized painters. We're all just nothing. It is not the question. But I know that the man put some kind of work and to destroy it this way, is scandalous.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, it really seems horrible. Didn't any of you painters have any advance notice that things were going to be destroyed? So, you could rescue them—

JACOB ELSHIN: No, no. He just said destroy them. He wasn't even in the school. It was at the end of the day when we're supposed to go home. I don't remember if it was four o'clock, or whatever time we left. So, I just picked up the thing, put it under my arm—the conductor kind of looked at me, [inaudible] but streetcar was not very full. [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Fantastic.

JACOB ELSHIN: Isn't that fantastic?

DOROTHY BESTOR: It really is.

JACOB ELSHIN: But I tell you, I don't want any articles written about it.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, no. No. Definitely not.

JACOB ELSHIN: Because [inaudible] is Tobey probably may object, he said—hell, he was in such humiliating circumstances. Well, I don't want to. I declare that we were all in humiliating circumstances, as far as that's concerned.

DOROTHY BESTOR: You really feel that?

JACOB ELSHIN: I felt humiliated. Because, you know, when you go to the toilet room, and they're checking on you, how much time you spent—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, that—

JACOB ELSHIN: —that's just absolutely—

DOROTHY BESTOR: That would be.

JACOB ELSHIN: It's comical. Yes. Then I laughed. But now when I look back at it, [inaudible] what are we [inaudible]. [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah. Well, how long did that kind of checking go on? That didn't last very long, did it?

JACOB ELSHIN: Oh, it was for quite a while.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Did it?

JACOB ELSHIN: Quite a while. Then I guess it was so ridiculed and laughed about that it was sort of forgotten. But you know that Mrs. Thyng?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: Sweetest little—you know, like a baked apple [Dorothy Bestor laughs], you know, she was. And short woman, much wider than tall, and with just a kind of a naive expression. And you think, well, that mama is probably doing awfully good apple pies.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: And that's about all that she was good for. Then she was a secretary of a great

big executive.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I wonder how she got the job.

JACOB ELSHIN: She just worshipped him. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: Like all secretaries do. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Cross talk.] [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: She isn't still alive, is she?

JACOB ELSHIN: I doubt it. I don't know, she might be.

DOROTHY BESTOR: [Inaudible.]

JACOB ELSHIN: Lots of people have died since. Lots of people.

DOROTHY BESTOR: One very minor but interesting thing was, those directives and declarations that you mentioned that were passed around the Project office in the morning, and you had to sign, do you have any of those? Were any of those preserved?

JACOB ELSHIN: For heaven's sake. [Dorothy Bestor laughs.] You know, if I collected everything, all those—you know, those important letters, my correspondence—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: —[with the Section of Fine Arts -Ed.]—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: —well, you know, you could make a book out of that correspondence.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right. Right.

JACOB ELSHIN: Where we started to swear [ph] at each other. And that will really produce a case for the Supreme Court of United States. Everything disappeared. I don't know who swiped it. Maybe somebody was in—most of my important letters, that show me in good light—all the important things—of course, you see, I had a case [inaudible] I had wife before. And when she disappeared, lots of those very important letters—whether they were destroyed purposely, maybe it's just my suspicion. But anyway, I only could tell facts. But I couldn't get documents. To get those documents you have to go to the archives of the United States. They probably—all those offices that closed, they probably put—

DOROTHY BESTOR: They're in the National Archives now, I believe.

JACOB ELSHIN: And I would like to get some of those very important letters, from sublime to the ridiculous. Now first they praise me, "Oh, you're so wonderful," and "Everything is perfect, we congratulate you." Then the same person, a few months later, after political meetings and everything, writes me that "You are a no-good and so and so and so and so," because they cheated you. And when you cheat somebody, then you defend yourself by blaming it on him.

[00:25:06]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right. Right. Projection.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, that's why I wish I had all those letters to prove to you ho—it is just, you know, like Napoleon when he landed when he first ran away from the island.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: And went to Marseilles, or near Marseilles, he came [inaudible]. Well, he landed.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, all the Parisian newspapers wrote: the tyrant landed, in Marseilles [ph], after he ran away. Then, when he came to Lyon: the General Bonaparte enters Lyon. Then comes to Paris: the emperor triumphantly came to Paris. [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: That the same man—I have seen it in plays, that happened [inaudible]—that the same man, according to the situation, change his recommendation—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: —for the same man.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right, yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, that was just typical of that Project. And that certainly put that Project—an example to check everything I said, Edward Bruce and Edward Rowan. I can say those names, they are both dead.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: Probably fortunately for that.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: Because that started with great declaration; oh, they were going to save art, and the president wants us to do that. And then [ended like plain cheats -Ed.].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Bruce and Rowan?

JACOB ELSHIN: Bruce and Rowan. I told you that. I had won the commission.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: From Eugene, Oregon.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. You told me about that. But I didn't realize that both Bruce and Rowan were involved in that.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, I wrote to both of them.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, I finally [inaudible] "received your letter and read it during our breakfast," that's from Rowan. "We are amazed of your brazen attitude." Brazen attitude? When they stole my commission, and gave it to Carl Morris. Why? Because he went there and talked to them. And I didn't have a chance to. And I told that to Callahan about it, who is by far not my friend, just the opposite.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, really?

JACOB ELSHIN: I sat talking with him, [inaudible] defense against this kind of audacity. My envelope closed, sealed behind the [inaudible] was open, I was pronounced the winner, and then the commission was taken away from me.

DOROTHY BESTOR: It must have been pretty hard to take.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, I couldn't think for six months, I was just sick. So, you know what Callahan told me?

DOROTHY BESTOR: What?

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, you—he got an advantage over you, Carl Morris.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh?

JACOB ELSHIN: I said, what kind of advantage? He had a car to go to Washington and you didn't

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: How do you like that kind of conclusion, of those things? We will art. We will fight partiality and prejudice and everything and everything.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: That's how they fought it. That was their end. That's why I say, those guys that sit behind the desk, with their legs on the desk and declare, after being a few years and having a soft, safe spot from which nobody could dig them up. That's just—and I—I found the letter that I wrote to them, "It's a flagrant demonstration of what you did with your declaration in the beginning." No answer. What could I do? [To write in my notebook that the United States government owes me \$2,300? -Ed.] Well, I suppose I could have appealed to the president, but that—it was just the time when [war was declared -Ed.].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: And [inaudible] annoyed with my poor personality [ph] and my little bickerings, and nothing to compare with that what was coming. So, that's what—on this topic I—and, you know, I could fight.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: And I would have gone to the president, myself, catch him someplace in the street and give him the complaint. But war.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: This is war. [*La comedia est finite.* -Ed.] What could you do, with bureaucrats?

DOROTHY BESTOR: What indeed? Well, with such an embittering experience, I think it's very, very unusual that you can see the whole Project as objectively as you have.

[00:30:06]

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, that wasn't the Project, that wasn't the Project—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. I know.

JACOB ELSHIN: —that was the Section of Fine Arts—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right.

JACOB ELSHIN: —which was another big project.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yeah.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, I entered—I tell you, I entered about 12 contests, [inaudible] department of the interior, Dallas, Texas, Los Angeles, all sorts of things.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: And I have stacks of murals that you have seen. [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: I've seen a good many of them.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, out of 12, I was winner in three, That's not bad.

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's very good.

JACOB ELSHIN: But on the third one, they decided—they decided it's too much. So, they went and [whistled me out -Ed.] in Washington.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: And it was taken away from me and given to that guy,

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's really dreadful.

JACOB ELSHIN: And, you know, another falsehood was that it was just one winner and not more in that content. They manufactured another figure, a runner up.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Who's that?

JACOB ELSHIN: The runner up is the next guy—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, runner up. Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: They made him a runner-up and gave him the commission.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: What do you think of that? What kind of court would stand that?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Seems off. Who was the runner up?

JACOB ELSHIN: [Laughs] Carl Morris.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, that was—that was how that was done.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Oh, they loved him -Ed.] after that. Because he went to Washington and he went to Washington because he had a car. I didn't go to Washington, because I didn't have a car. [Inaudible.] Is it a comedy of some kind, or is it an art project? It's a crooked comedy. [Inaudible.] That's why I said all those things. Who are we going to appoint who is going to be honest?

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: After all, Bruce and [inaudible] and the choice of the president. He wasn't starving. Why did he have to cheat like that? Of course, I've had my correspondence—most of it was with Rowan, and so finally I said, well, if Rowan doesn't work, then I will go to his superior and wrote—and wrote them really devastating letters. Well, he didn't answer me. And Rowan answered me that, "Today at breakfast we were reading your long letter.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Hm. That seems uncalled for, doesn't it?

JACOB ELSHIN: So, Bruce never answered me. And then finally Rowan—finally I forced them—the logic was so much for me—I forced him to promise me that the minute a commiss—location appears in my state of Washington, that I will get equally important and large commission here. Then the war came in and the clos of the Project, and I never get anything.

DOROTHY BESTOR: That's very sad. It really is.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible.] Now it is long past, but then it really killed me. I didn't take the brush for six months, I just sat and think, Well, what is next?

DOROTHY BESTOR: I don't blame you.

JACOB ELSHIN: They will come, just put their hand in my pocket and steal what I have. And I cannot protest because it's war, because there is no appeal. Not any kind of institution where they would appeal it, unless to go and sue the United States government for cheating. [It wouldn't be nice to do that. -Ed.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes. Did other people that you know meet with injustices like that on the—

JACOB ELSHIN: I have no idea. I know what they did to me.

DOROTHY BESTOR: On the whole, do you think that the Project—

JACOB ELSHIN: And I still have the sketches. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: The winning sketches.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, you showed me.

JACOB ELSHIN: That's all that I could say

DOROTHY BESTORY: You showed me. They're very impressive.

JACOB ELSHIN: Well, they were awfully good.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: In those days, I was much younger. When I worked on things like that [inaudible]. [I studied all the machines or whatever things go into the composition -Ed], thinking it will be not just some kind of a flip flop sketch, it's a sturdy [ph] thing from beginning to end.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: It was a tremendous amount of work [inaudible].

DOROTHY BESTOR: I'm sure that it was.

JACOB ELSHIN: But I would paint until three o'clock in the morning, and didn't feel particularly tired, just get sleepy and go to bed. Days and days of work. And then you will win, and then you don't get anything.

[00:35:05]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Horrible.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Laughs.] Nobody will believe it. But it is a fact.

DOROTHY BESTOR: I believe it. And I'm sure Mr. [Wolfenden believes it -Ed.].

JACOB ELSHIN: And I think that Bruce Inverarity—not Bruce Inverarity—Edward Bruce and Rowan—Edward Rowan, were related. [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Oh, really? Oh.

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible] family affair.

DOROTHY BESTORY: Could be.

JACOB ELSHIN: So, what one did, you couldn't complain to the other because he's his chum, all the time.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Could well be. Well, you've been awfully good to give me all this time. Do you have any summing up of the Federal Art Projects? The different ones—

JACOB ELSHIN: [Cross talk.] I've already summed it up.

DOROTHEY BESTOR: —in Seattle? Yes [inaudible].

JACOB ELSHIN: If they have decent administration for that project, fine. If they couldn't find anything, and just say, oh, who, who, who—oh, I have a nephew or uncle that I could put in. [Well, then the better stop it. -Ed.]

DOROTHY BESTOR: Right. Right.

JACOB ELSHIN: Because it's useless. And you know, sometimes, [even in their groups, that if they are smart groups you could make some sort of showing -Ed.]—

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: [Inaudible.] But when you deal with a dumbbell, [Dorothy Bestor laughs] it's hopeless.

DOROTHY BESTOR: True.

JACOB ELSHIN: And chances are, if you use that kind of a policy, then there is some kind of a funny job of director of the project, of some kind. And all that you think, whom of your friends or relatives you could put in. Or what is use having that project?

DOROTHY BESTOR: True.

JACOB ELSHIN: But nobody understands.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Well, I hope if they have another one, as there's talk of, that they profit by some of the mistakes of the old one. Maybe they will.

JACOB ELSHIN: Would they? [Laughs.] Now you know how history repeats itself. Take all the history of mankind. The same thing happened to nations after nations.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes.

JACOB ELSHIN: They go to pot for the same mistake that somebody did 2000 years ago.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JACOB ELSHIN: They say, at least we could learn from history. Oh, who wants to learn from history? So, I don't think that's the case. But I mean, if anybody in the government really feels fine toward that art development in this country, and really sincerely wanted to be developed into something good, [they should think what they are doing, whom they are appointing -Ed.].

DOROTHY BESTOR: Yes, they certainly should. I hope they do. Thank you very, very much indeed, Mr. Elshin. Shall I turn this off now?

JACOB ELSHIN: Sure.

DOROTHY BESTOR: Okay.

JACOB ELSHIN: But you wouldn't write stories out of that?

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]