Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Edwin Emery, 1965 May 24

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Edwin Emery on May 24, 1965. The interview was conducted by Betty Lochrie Hoag for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

BETTY HOAG: Mr. Emery, does the E stand for Edward?

EDWIN EMERY: Edwin.

BETTY HOAG: Do you use a middle initial?

EDWIN EMERY: No, there is no middle initial.

BETTY HOAG: Before we start talking about the project period, which is what I am supposed to be finding out about, I'd like to ask you about your own life such as where you were born and when and where you were educated and so forth.

EDWIN EMERY: Well I was born in New York City, August 17th, 1918. I was educated in a rather small town in New Jersey looking back on it, called Richfield Park. That was from the early grammar school days and then we moved to New York when I was about ten perhaps. Then I went to school in a New York public school, P.S. 183, and after about two years of that I went to a boarding school on Long Island, Stony Brook. I was there graduating high school and in the depths of the depression and all. I just ended that as the depression began practically.

BETTY HOAG: Had you had many art courses?

EDWIN EMERY: During the last year I guess at Stony Brook I started going to life classes, art classes in New York City and I went a total of – when I figure it out the total number of years I think is about eight that I put in school. At that time unfortunately, none of it was usable as credit toward a Master's degree or anything. It was just art school and that was it. I had an enormous amount of life, drawing night and day. I seemed to have an obsession. When the opportunity presented itself like in Art Center School here where I spent two years, I went at night and went in the day time and it was just around and around eat, sleep, and live art. It was very, very pleasant.

BETTY HOAG: You jumped ahead to Los Angeles when the depression came around 1930. Did you come to Los Angeles then?

EDWIN EMERY: I came to Los Angeles twice. I came here first in 1932 and I stayed here for the earthquake in Long beach. I think that was in March '32. Then a member of the family had asthma and we moved to a different area to try to help her out. Some places helped. Pasadena was a help. Long Beach was too damp. We lived quite a nomadic life.

BETTY HOAG: When you say "we" do you mean you and your parents?

EDWIN EMERY: Yes – well no, my mother was away, she was always away, she was on the stage and she was dancing and she was everywhere. She was in Australia for about nine years and I

never set eyes on her. She was in Australia and New Zealand. And she would be in Chicago at the Palmer House or in Miami Beach and occasionally we'd cross paths.

BETTY HOAG: What a strange boyhood that must have been.

EDWIN EMERY: Real peculiar. So I lived with my uncle, aunt and grandmother. It was very pleasant and quite a closely knit bunch of people who got along extremely well. Whatever anybody did seemed to be reasonable.

BETTY HOAG: What was your mother's stage name?

EDWIN EMERY: Hazel Pierce. And she was very successful from almost instantly. She was about eighteen or seventeen years old when she started and she was just as successful until she hit forty five or fifty almost. And to the point of – to go a little ahead – she and her partner, my stepfather – she had been divorced years before – went on a USO tour in 1942 or '43 and went all over Africa and Italy and into Karachi, India and in '42 I don't know how old she was but she was no spring chicken. But they managed fine, they were over there with Humphrey Bogart and Adolph Menjou and that bunch of the group entertaining the troops. That was the end of her, you might say dancing career actively, physically doing it. From that point on she has been Lucy ball's stand-in all these years. And she still is right now. I mean she really does stand-in twenty four hours a day for Lucy. She never did really get out of the theatre ever. She just sort of stuck in it.

BETTY HOAG: She must have been very good.

EDWIN EMERY: She was. And the two of them worked very well together. They looked good. He was very, very tall and she was one of the one hundred and twelve pounders.

BETTY HOAG: What was your stepfather's name?

EDWIN EMERY: Wesley Pierce. He's not living now. He died about five or six years ago.

BETTY HOAG: In 1932 you started going to the Art Center School?

EDWIN EMERY: I think that was about 1933, possibly near '35.

BETTY HOAG: Was that when S. Macdonald-Wright was teaching there?

EDWIN EMERY: No, Wright was not teaching at that time.

BETTY HOAG: Was he still at ______?

EDWIN EMERY: No, he was on Seventh Street in that little pleasant little business there you know that arcade like affair on West Seventh Street, near what they now call McArthur Park.

BETTY HOAG: Oh yes.

EDWIN EMERY: And then they of course moved to Third Street and I didn't know anything about that. But it was a very good school and from what I've heard recently it's one of the best schools in the country from the standpoint of commercial or what you want to do. You never learn to paint really in a school, you can't. But you can get certain fundamentals and certain inspiration from a given teacher. One teacher I can remember very well, Requist, Stanley Requist. He was such a nice man as a person. And I remember Kamisky, Edward Kamisky. He seemed to have – I don't know, an

attitude that imparted itself to students more than anything else. And Kamisky was a good artist too with it all. Some people can be marvelous teachers and wretched artists, like Robert Henri. He was good and sort of a nice man and an inspiration and would never go haywire and let his temper get the best of him and so forth.

BETTY HOAG: Was this academic work or was it commercial?

EDWIN EMERY: There was a great deal of commercial. In Art Center it was primarily and I think it still is really a commercial school and they force you to take certain things which are very good for you such as perspective and rendering and various type things that may be related but not necessarily what you want to do. But they relate and help out it a disciplinary sense. Like today I think a lot of people just start out in twenty directions.

BETTY HOAG: Excuse me a minute. Would you spell the name of the art instructor you mentioned?

EDWIN EMERY: K-a-m-i-s-k-y. He died recently. I don't know what works of his exist around or whether he stopped painting say in the last ten years or something. He had a lot of emotional problems but was quite good and he might be worthy of somebody digging around and just seeing what was done.

BETTY HOAG: I wonder if _____ (inaudible).

EDWIN EMERY: I don't think so. I think that a lot of these fellows – you see they were so successful in teaching there at the ____ they never need to, even a non, you might say what they call a non-relief basis, as it were. In other words, a person didn't have to be destitute. Many of them were on the basis of being of service to the project and they came in on for that reason. Like Reike was, of course, on there as an administrator.

BETTY HOAG: But he started at the beginning donating things to it. A lot of people like George Baker ____________________ and I asked him, he was the first person I talked to. He said no, he hadn't been on the project and I found out afterwards that he had donated things and gotten it started. That makes him part of the whole movement.

EDWIN EMERY: Well Reike was a director you know for quite a few years. A lot of people don't like him in some ways but he has an executive ability and he looks like he can press a button and it seems reasonable. He came in the sop six months ago and he has this cane he carries all the time and I said "Are you still hitting people with that cane?", because we used to say that he used to hit people with it. But he looks like he could hit people and away with it too. (chuckle)

BETTY HOAG: He's carried it for a long time?

EDWIN EMERY: Oh yes, all the time. He's got an air about him and he's a born in Brooklyn button presser and "Hey do this, do that" and you do it somehow. The world needs them too I suppose. I'm not fond of his painting at all. It just goes on and on the same thing but I've always like him for the reasons I've just mentioned which are not the highest ideal, but he's got the ambitiousness which is useful and we needed his type very badly.

BETTY HOAG: I should make note on the tape that Mr. Emery is a framer at – Art Supplies and Art Store in West Village and it's probably been there longer than any other art store in the area.

EDWIN EMERY: The frame shop is now three years old. That's rather new. The other portion has been there some fifteen, seventeen years. They also moved from Seventh Street, right near the old

Art Center School and near where the project was at one time.

BETTY HOAG: I suppose the artists got their materials there even then.

EDWIN EMERY: Most all of them yes.

BETTY HOAG: Well how did you get on the project in the first place?

EDWIN EMERY: Well I think in 1939 things got real, real bad and I found out about it from reading the papers and listening to people and I just went down and applied for – not necessarily the project, I applied just for something – and I wound up digging fire trails in Santa Monica Mountain which is right near here. We did an awful lot of leveling and digging and I dug there for months. It was rather enjoyable and good physical exercise. The trip was very long. They'd pick us up at St. Vinciti and Peco in a truck and like – like the Vietnam now and it was alright and finally somebody was looking and was curious about the background and said "What are you digging for?" I could dig with the best of them, but they wondered, you know, about a person who had never done this being just liable to keel over or something. At any rate, I did get in – and this was Seventh Street and it was around 1939. I don't know exactly the date but it was I think the early part of '39. We went up and – I picture it now and it's very funny – but four of us came in and we were given four great big cartoon pieces of paper which was about ten or twelve feet long on which we were to make a blow up of a small little sketch that Fletcher Martin had made. You may be familiar with him.

BETTY HOAG: Was this for a mural?

EDWIN EMERY: For a mural design that was being executed for one of the schools. So we started in and we squared the thing off ____________ and these poor devils, I felt sorry for them. One of them was just in trouble from the beginning. He just disappeared, just vanished. You were trying to see if a person had, you know, the ability and one fellow wound up in what they called the Petrochrome which was the stone _____.

BETTY HOAG: This word I think Mr. Reike invented himself.

EDWIN EMERY: Anyway, he wound up upstairs and I wound up the only one saved out of those four poor souls and from there on it was mostly a community mural painting is what happened. There was a small amount – this was the tail end of the easel painting which was to me the ideal way where a person was supposed to at least make a picture a month. One picture a month, on their own, what they wished to do, good, bad, or indifferent and in some cases they had some extremely good, very good work turned out. There was a minimum of supervision.

BETTY HOAG: There was a choice of technique and choice of project….

EDWIN EMERY: The subject, the technique, the size, whatever you wished to do seemed to have been alright. Now I missed all this unfortunately. This was the ideal way of doing it. They were able to get a small – you're never going to get much – but a small amount of rather decent work. There was one particular fellow who could never be supervised, could never be told what to do and that was Ben Garrin.

BETTY HOAG: Oh yes?

EDWIN EMERY: And his stuff, much of it is of extremely high quality and very good and very much his own. It's something, another thing which could be dug up to find out what happened to it and where the art works are. They are probably at the old Otis Art Institute.

BETTY HOAG: Several of the artists have told me that he was ahead of his time and that he has not been appreciated like he should have been.

EDWIN EMERY: Well Berlin had something and it's funny – he died just before he was to come into a great deal of money. It was just within a moment. It was a relative or somebody.

BETTY HOAG: He's the one that had the drinking problem.

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, he drank heavily and was emaciated. I think you could slide him under the door he was so terribly thin. And then he found out – the only time I ever saw him or had contact with him at all – he was raising cane that they had to come down to the project and work; they couldn't work at home. "This," he said "I can't do." He was wild. I think he just walked off in a huff and that was it. I never saw him since and died not very long after from tubercular complications, alcoholism, and various other things I guess.

BETTY HOAG: Well you know those paintings that were done on the easel project went to Oakland public buildings. I wonder where in the world they were placed.

EDWIN EMERY: I know and I'm almost certain that what they now call the Los Angeles County School of Art, the Otis School supposedly had a great deal of these in their storeroom

BETTY HOAG: I'm going to ___ me down and see if I can find some.

EDWIN EMERY: They must have them because they were all catalogued very carefully and there was numbering and listing and it's very difficult to – you can't misplace them so they are there unless somebody stole them.

BETTY HOAG: Were his all oils?

EDWIN EMERY: Berlin painted entirely in oils.

BETTY HOAG: And they were all abstract?

EDWIN EMERY: They were all his own way of seeing things abstractly and they were all rather tiny. He had a touch and he had a little something that he said of his own and it was considerable – maybe – I haven't seen them and now I'd be able to look at them differently.

BETTY HOAG: It would be very interesting to see them now.

EDWIN EMERY: And there was a woman who was marvelous – Josephine Joy.

BETTY HOAG: Oh I haven't been able to find her.

EDWIN EMERY: She was in the San Diego project and she had – she came up one time when I was talking to her and she said – I was commenting – she was a primitive painter, a real true primitive I would say better than any of them and she said – I would point out, I said "This I like very much," and she said "Oh yes, she did that" and she mentioned the time. In other words…

BETTY HOAG: In the third person?

EDWIN EMERY: Yes. "Oh yes, she did like that very much." She didn't understand what she was saying.

BETTY HOAG: Was she quite an old lady?

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, very old.

BETTY HOAG: She probably isn't around anymore then.

EDWIN EMERY: I doubt that very much. She was very, very good. I would say she was the best primitive painter that this country produced by far.

BETTY HOAG: For heavens sake. Was she a primitive because she hadn't had training thought that way or was it her technique on purpose?

EDWIN EMERY: I don't think you could have trained her. I don't think she could have absorbed say, "Make a drawing of this cat." I don't think it would mean anything to her. She would draw it her own way. She would see it this way. She was incapable of seeing other than her own little world.

BETTY HOAG: I wonder where she had come from, you know, what her background was.

EDWIN EMERY: I don't think anybody was aware that she was talking like this. She was talking as if some other little soul had done this and knew her. Very peculiar.

BETTY HOAG: How did you happen to meet her?

EDWIN EMERY: She was visiting the project up here from San Diego. She just dropped in and she came in when the project was located on Western Avenue. And she just roamed around. It might have been a little business tour or maybe she was visiting someone in Los Angeles. But she was a very young old lady, very cute and quite charming. A dumpy little creature but marvelous, really exciting. You bring here to mind now when I haven't mentioned her or thought of her for years.

BETTY HOAG: I'm so happy that you did because no one else has mentioned her.

EDWIN EMERY: Josephine Joy was something.

BETTY HOAG: I've seen her name in the catalogues of some of the California exhibits of the WPA.

EDWIN EMERY: That would be San Diego. I don't think she ever worked here. It's possible she did because we did have quite a few of her works here that may again be in the old Otis building.

BETTY HOAG: Los Angeles Museum had exhibits of this work from the whole area several times during the project.

EDWIN EMERY: Yes and she would be in that. Out of the whole bunch of them I think of the two of them and there's another name that escapes me of a man who was on the project with Berlin and Josephine who I think were really major people.

BETTY HOAG: Getting back to this mural that Fletcher Martin did for which you did the blow-ups – did you go ahead and work on the mural with him?

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, we worked. Now Martin was there, I think, about two weeks and that's all. He suddenly by sending a number of easel pictures back to one of the galleries in New York, I've forgotten the name of the gallery, but this gallery took him right off this thing and immediately he went – and from there on he made a fairly good little living for a number of years and continued quite well. So that was his last, about '39 was his last days on the project.

BETTY HOAG: I think that he had done designs for a federal post office in Idaho.

EDWIN EMERY: Boise, Idaho.

BETTY HOAG: Which he didn't want to complete.

EDWIN EMERY: No, we did that. We completed those.

BETTY HOAG: Did you go up there?

EDWIN EMERY: No, it was kind of unfortunate. It seemed that forty different hands would mix up a grey background for these panels which were going to be butted against each other and they were forty-seven different greys. And the poor soul that did go up there with the pictures – I don't know how he ever got away with it. It was unfortunate. You can't do that. You have to mix just a lump this big and be done with it instead of mixing these little bits and finishing a canvas and then starting another.

BETTY HOAG: Was it Jimmy Redman who installed it I wonder?

EDWIN EMERY: Redman was a little before.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, because he had gone to Spokane with Frank Stevens and I just wondered if he was in that area.

EDWIN EMERY: No, he wasn't at that time. I did not know him either at all.

BETTY HOAG: I wonder who it was. I have no record of who finally put it up.

EDWIN EMERY: The fellow that went up with the mural, his name will never leave me because he had immense nerve – Woody Pagani. In fact, he is the son of this extremely successful illustrator Pagani who is, you know, one of the names that make forty, fifty thousand a year doing illustration and is quite good.

BETTY HOAG: What happened to him?

EDWIN EMERY: Johnny Pagani was the son and Willy, of course, was the father who is not living now.

BETTY HOAG: What happened to Johnny Pagani?

EDWIN EMERY: He went up north and that's the last I heard of him. I don't know.

BETTY HOAG: You don't know how far north?

EDWIN EMERY: Seattle, I think. He had immense nerve, Johnny did, to go up there with that mural. He was one of those – I don't know all those Fletcher Martin mustaches, you know, everybody had a mustache. The mural – Martin would have done a rather creditable job if he had only finished it, but it changed its character a great deal as time went on.

BETTY HOAG: What was the reception?

EDWIN EMERY: We didn't even want to hear it because it would be best if Johnny came back alive. He said "It's up there. Don't worry, everything is fine." He had terrible nerve. Awful nerve.

BETTY HOAG: It's a good thing you had somebody who did have.

EDWIN EMERY: You heard about that from Don I guess?

BETTY HOAG: He didn't tell me that part.

EDWIN EMERY: Oh no? Well I think Don at the time the mural was being worked on and everything was moved from Seventh Street to Western Avenue, Western near Washington and that was the last location of the project.

BETTY HOAG: By that time wasn't Buddy Mc______ head of it?

EDWIN EMERY: Buddy _____ had been the head of it long before Reike. And then Feitelson I don't think was ever really the head of it he was – Reike was always the major – and then Fidelson would be one below him.

BETTY HOAG: Did you do any work under Feitelson?

EDWIN EMERY: Oh yes, yes. I worked on Western Avenue until late 1942 I think.

BETTY HOAG: He told me about the sessions that he had with artists exhibiting their work and answering questions of other artists and it sounded like a very interesting part of that. He said they had seminars.

EDWIN EMERY: We had a few and they were one of those things where the enthusiasm starts and it didn't continue too long. Then the war fears, fears of the war and all that and they started all of this business of – well, restrictions put on the painters. There was no question of there being restrictions such as regarding subject matter and I know that much of the harm done to the project was the glorification of the American Farmer and things like that where you were restricted to subject matter. John Paul Jones…

BETTY HOAG: Did they actually restrict you?

EDWIN EMERY: Well, to the extent that you were kind of channeled into a certain type of thing that was acceptable where something else wasn't. John Paul Jones was fine but…. They were a little fearful and they had this you might say communist scare and they restricted it down to harmful paintings. It was held down very, very strongly. A mural that depicts American history you could even get in, in there. You could have objectionable sections if you were not careful. It has happened.

BETTY HOAG: It seemed to cross the country in all the murals but I haven't found very many evidences of it in southern California.

EDWIN EMERY: Well there seemed to be an overall wondering, also at the time, too, a wondering about appropriations because money ___________ they were figuring this was unnecessary and the battleship was the important thing and it made it so that one fellow went out, his name was Wylie –

BETTY HOAG: Tom Wylie.

EDWIN EMERY: Tom Wylie is the greatest salesman that has ever been born.

BETTY HOAG: Oh really?

EDWIN EMERY: Absolutely. He had more gall and more nerve. He kept the thing going literally by going into a school and saying "You've got to have this." He'd just shove it down their throats. And it would work, again and again. An amazing fellow, actually remarkable.

BETTY HOAG: I think he's in _______ Beach.

EDWIN EMERY: Yes he is.

BETTY HOAG: I found one in the phone book.

EDWIN EMERY: He's one that would have a spiel. You could wind him up and just forget it. That's it.

BETTY HOAG: I've got to be sure to get a date with him.

EDWIN EMERY: He's an extremely sharp, very brilliant fellow. Rather peculiar in that he is seemingly a little erratic. He had frightened people literally. He has frightened them, but he is a very intense man and he just comes out that way. I would say he is brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

BETTY HOAG: What does he do now?

EDWIN EMERY: He's retired. He had worked for an aircraft outfit for many, many years. His wife died and he has a little money and he is, oh, just roaming around thinking he might invest in something; he doesn't know what but he has the drive and although he is a good seventy-two he acts like he's forty. He's an amazing fellow and an extremely good musician – a wonderful piano player, and sing – he has a voice that is marvelous, just really ________and many people have just brushed him off and said "that's not Wylie" you know.

BETTY HOAG: He apparently did a great deal of good for the project then as ___________ told me. They depended on him.

EDWIN EMERY: Oh yes.

BETTY HOAG: Did you work on any murals besides that one?

EDWIN EMERY: Oh, lord yes. I worked on – there's a school on the top of what would be called Bunker Hill downtown and I can't remember the name of it now. Well anyway – oh Hurdy, have you come across her?

BETTY HOAG: Oh yes I talked to her.

EDWIN EMERY: How is she by the way?

BETTY HOAG: Oh she's fine. She's a delightful person, a real character and a charming woman. She's doing commercial work.

EDWIN EMERY: She had, I would say, a good hand for commercial work. She did this mural down in one of these schools on the top of Bunker Hill.

BETTY HOAG: On in the cafeteria?

EDWIN EMERY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: She told me about it.

EDWIN EMERY: And we worked on that for months. It was one of those where – I complained, I said "look a brush with three hairs will take an awful lot of work to do that, let's get one with six hairs." And we worked with these little brushes if you dropped one you couldn't find it. I said, "You know you can take great big wide things and you'll finish." She said, "Never mind." She wanted the little things, building the thing up with the little added to the big. Well, I had to do it because she was running the thing and it was actually ridiculous. It turned out quite nice. It was a, you might say, a stubbornness of purpose that held this whole thing together. Each thing was going to be done with these very fine lines on acoustic plaster.

BETTY HOAG: That must have absorbed…

EDWIN EMERY: It's very, very absorbent and also very, very coarse and you had to match your lines up on this acoustic plaster and the picture was ears of corn with all these little kernels. This is her way of thinking, she thinks this way.

BETTY HOAG: I think that she told me that this school had been destroyed. That mural is no longer there.

EDWIN EMERY: That's funny because the school was in fine condition.

BETTY HOAG: I'll have to check that again. Was Elsia Ober working on that with you too?

EDWIN EMERY: Ober was not there I don't think. No, no she was not there. No.

BETTY HOAG: She's down in _______ right now and I don't want to go down until I have more than one person to see.

EDWIN EMERY: No, in fact Selena Swanson – these names come back now – a very tall girl, Ben Messick – have you contacted him?

BETTY HOAG: I can't find him.

EDWIN EMERY: He's in Long Beach. He's been there for years.

BETTY HOAG: Oh then I beg your pardon I do have his address. It's Gerald Cranston.

EDWIN EMERY: And then there was a fellow with one arm, Lightner, Aurel Lightner. He had a left arm that was missing and he himself – there's a mural in Patriotic Hall, did you see it?

BETTY HOAG: No, I don't know where that is.

EDWIN EMERY: It's on Peter _______, near Washington Boulevard. That was – he worked on that oh for months again. Again, another one of those things.

BETTY HOAG: Excuse me, I'm not following the story. What's his first name again?

EDWIN EMERY: A-u-r-e-l. Another hard first name. Marcus Aurelius is from that you know.

BETTY HOAG: Had he designed this?

EDWIN EMERY: He designed this mural yes. In fact, he designed it with my books of Michelangelo which he took home and he used – you know to build this thing up. He worked fiendishly hard because he was doubtful of himself and he was going to do this right or kill himself so he worked

night and day, night and day.

BETTY HOAG: Poor fellow.

EDWIN EMERY: And with one arm you know. It's rather interesting. It's very tight, it's one of those where all the shoelaces are there and the little eyelets are there and the buttons are the right buttons – you know, big buttons, this big with the figures three times life size. By stubbornness he was able to create this thing and it's rather good. It turned out quite well. It's something very readable.

BETTY HOAG: Were there quite a few people working on it?

EDWIN EMERY: There were just three of us.

BETTY HOAG: Who was the third?

EDWIN EMERY: The other one I don't recall his name. Or can I recall his name? Faber his name was. That's right. I don't know where he went or what happened to him. People just vanish.

BETTY HOAG: Were there other murals that you worked on?

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, the one in Venice High School.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, that was _________. No, that was the post office.

EDWIN EMERY: That's Helen Lundeberg.

BETTY HOAG: Was that Henry Hudson or …?

EDWIN EMERY: It was I think all sorts of discoveries and so forth and various things that had to do – yes it was one of those.

BETTY HOAG: Chaotic…

EDWIN EMERY: Again. Now Falbrook I worked at.

BETTY HOAG: Oh you did? Let's see Falbrook ___________

EDWIN EMERY: They start – yes, we used to – although we never set eyes on them we'd go down and get the little bits and pieces that they would do, the small little sketches and blow the up and Helen Lundeberg was on that too and I think it finally was turned over to her.

BETTY HOAG: Well Ames and Goodman were mainly ceramicists so this was –

EDWIN EMERY: This was a mural, yes.

BETTY HOAG: I've never been to Fallbrook and it's half way down to _________ and I can't decide whether to look it up or not. It looks like it's off the beaten trail.

EDWIN EMERY: A little bit. It's in the orange grove area, but it's a nice quiet little town and it would be a restful afternoon for you.

BETTY HOAG: I have a lot of artists right here who are on the coast.

EDWIN EMERY: I don't think I missed any murals. The only mural that was worked on that I recall or I know was the Martin mural which was done in the shop and transported. The others were done on the spot with one exception. A very large mural the first day I was on the project in 1939 we put it up in Long Beach and I don't know what school. It might have been Woodrow Wilson or Lincoln or something and it was pasted to the walls with white lead, we had a hundred pounds of white lead down there and most of it was on ourselves.

BETTY HOAG: Does white lead hold it?

EDWIN EMERY: White lead and linseed oil and varnish will conceivable hold except there's a gas form under it occasionally. I knew it was wrong to begin with and I didn't say anything. Somebody else found out later that it was wrong completely because it forms a gas and you have to spear it with a hypodermis and let it out and it's a nasty business. It's very wrong. It didn't have to be done that way but somebody said ____. It was wrong.

BETTY HOAG: Did you start to mention Joe ________?

EDWIN EMERY: Joe Funk.

BETTY HOAG: Joe Funk? What did he do?

EDWIN EMERY: Joe Funk was the one – the two of us were putting the thing up. He worked on the project at the time and he's been quite successful – not in terms of money – but a successful lithographer printer. I think he's become one of the best lithographic printers in the area here. He has possible worked for Tamarack, I imagine.

BETTY HOAG: I learned just recently that Jeanne Wayne was on the project in Chicago under another name. I've been hoping I could get in touch.

EDWIN EMERY: Gee, this is like a treasure hunt or a detective story with little bits and pieces and you get leads here and leads there.

BETTY HOAG: Yes. It's sort of fun. In fact, I'll turn the tape off for just a minute and I'll show you.

BETTY HOAG: We've just been looking in my files to find out what school I might have been where Edwin Emery was with Joe Funk. We did come across the name of A.F. Brase and you were going to tell me something about him for the tape.

EDWIN EMERY: Yes. Well Brase was one of those – I remember in New York as a kid I used to haunt the – and get thrown out sometimes – illustrators' studios and the good ones, Harvey Dun and people like that. And they'd, you know, once in a while they were receptive to you and other times they'd just practically fling you down the stairs. But of all I saw of most all of them were working on at one time or another working on things like Gene Cornwall and people like that and Brase could make them all look like they had no fingers or anything. The amount of things that he could do and the time he could turn out a picture that would take another person days to do.

BETTY HOAG: I don't quite understand. Were these illustrations?

EDWIN EMERY: Yes. During the project at the time that Wylie was selling for the project Brase was working and he would turn out three and four landscapes a day. I'm surprised that Feitelson never mentioned it to you because frankly he was so good that if a person wasn't really satisfied with what they were doing or really in a way sure of himself he annoyed them because he was

absolutely amazingly fast. And if somebody wanted Packard Henry he would appear as if by magic with never a research, never a thing, but the buttons were right, the stripes, the collar, everything, name it, it didn't make the slightest bit of difference. He was absolutely phenomenal.

BETTY HOAG: He had been an illustrator for many years?

EDWIN EMERY: He had been working with his brother. He was a decorator. And decorator meaning he may have done wall paintings and things for people. But his facility – if I hadn't been fully aware of what a good illustrator could do – Harvey Dunn or Dean Cornwall or Henry Raleigh or somebody like that, this I would say it's unbelievable. And his fund of information, whether it would be the French Revolution – it didn't make a bit of difference. He'd have the three cornered hats even with the type of trim that was on them, the ________ anything. He had it in his head completely and it would come right out. He was a left handed painter and real funny. He'd just slop along and with cassine which we used to make ourselves. When he was through, nearly dry he'd take the varnish and he'd varnish it and pop it right out, a beautiful little landscape, called them landscape number one, any one he could turn out, but he could turn them out in thirty minutes, marvelous. I'm fast too, but in a different way completely. His fund of information was just staggering.

BETTY HOAG: Was he on just the easel project? I have a mural here for him.

EDWIN EMERY: Unfortunately he should have. He must have done something.

BETTY HOAG: Proposed stained glass.

EDWIN EMERY: Now, while they had a few of us at the time – cut out _________ is that a person like this with this really tremendous ability should have been doing much more than he was doing. The easel project was revived as it were, as an economic measure to save us from going under. He was of course taking part in that instantly but why he wasn't used on this, on this – anything – the history of a man – name it – it would have been something that could have been done in moments compared to – no research, wouldn't have to go tot a library, wouldn't have to steal anything, wouldn't even have to open a book.

BETTY HOAG: It's a wonder they didn't use him as a kind of traveling historical authority.

EDWIN EMERY: It's amazing.

BETTY HOAG: Is he still around?

EDWIN EMERY: If he is he's very, very old. The thing that surprised me a little bit about him – I had set eyes on him for about five years and in the intervening time I kind of thought to myself that he could in this time that I hadn't seen him – he was living in San Pedro and still _______ that he should and could have been capable of turning out some very good work; not this fast, you might say spectacular kind of stuff but a – it was disappointing he just stopped at a certain point. He just went so far and he didn't go further and it was a little sad because within him he had maybe too much of the commercial feel and not enough of – stepping a little beyond. He just didn't seem …

BETTY HOAG: He probably realized that he couldn't step quite beyond and it might have discouraged him.

EDWIN EMERY: Might have been. He thought these things he was turning out like free for the asking – were nothing and these were as good as his easel pictures, as his own so-called serious easel pictures and they were freer and easier. They retained a sketch-like look and that was it.

Marvelous. A most remarkable fellow and he was not used.

BETTY HOAG: This is wonderful you remembering so many of these people. I can't find out anything about some of them.

EDWIN EMERY: You're helping me probably.

BETTY HOAG: What does that stand for?

EDWIN EMERY: Arnold. He's Danish. His parents were Danish. But he was truly amazing. Absolutely staggering the amount of pictures. To be able to have the idea in your head. Another person has to dig up …. Even Cornwall – I'd watch when he'd be working on the mural and he'd borrow these coats from a costume company and he would lay them over chairs because he would need this to know how many ribbons. Brase knew how many little things were on these and where they went and when they changed at a certain period of time. His costume knowledge was staggering.

BETTY HOAG: He must have been a very interesting person. You know Dean Cornwall did the murals in the Los Angeles library but I haven't been able to find out if he was on the project.

EDWIN EMERY: Never. No, he was never on it.

BETTY HOAG: He was kind of well-to-do or established wasn't he?

EDWIN EMERY: His time was valuable and he was making a small fortune at the time. That's something Brase could have done in a few weeks I think. Really.

BETTY HOAG: You know another muralist I'm trying to locate is Charles Kessler.

EDWIN EMERY: I don't remember that name at all.

BETTY HOAG: He did some of the library murals not on the project and then he was on the project and he did the Beverly Hills post office. I keep asking everyone because I'd like to track him down.

EDWIN EMERY: The name would I think ring a bell and it doesn't seem to ring anything at all.

BETTY HOAG: He sort of disappeared.

EDWIN EMERY: I remember the project itself in '39 when I was first on it, it had a very good lithographic department, extremely good.

BETTY HOAG: Were you in that?

EDWIN EMERY: No. Joe Funk was in that and it sort of began to get ___________ in doing that. They had a fine press there. I think a man that was on the project owned the press. Edwin D. He's not living.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, I interviewed Conrad Buff the other day and he had _________ and told me the story about how the project couldn't afford the press and he got disgusted and quit and he said the man who came after him, and I'm sure it was ________ had bought the press and lent it to the project.

EDWIN EMERY: He had his name on it, the same first name that I had, Edwin _______. He became quite friendly with me as an older man to a younger person. And it's a real sad story, his wife died

and he was really broken up about it and he did away with himself.

BETTY HOAG: I wonder how old he was then?

EDWIN EMERY: Not so old. I think he was under fifty which to me at the time seemed old but I was about the youngest person on the project I think, pretty much so for a long time until it suddenly changed. But he was one of those sensitive fellows. Kind of sad story. The press exists somewhere around. I don't know where it is. It's still in town here. You can't get rid of them; they're too big to throw away. They're too heavy to lift for anybody. You can't get rid of them.

BETTY HOAG: Maybe Tamarin.

EDWIN EMERY: Tamarin could possibly have it.

BETTY HOAG: Someone was asking about the old stones that they used there because they wanted to buy some. They seem rather important today but there doesn't seem to be any record of what happened to them.

EDWIN EMERY: No, and they're invaluable because they're very difficult to come by. They come from one part of Germany only, nowhere else and probably somebody might – I heard –

BETTY HOAG: They can be used over and over.

EDWIN EMERY: And they can be used again and again and even if they're broken you can make smaller little works on them. They're marvelous.

BETTY HOAG: I wonder what happened at the end of the project.

EDWIN EMERY: Well, I don't know. I heard a story – I can't recall who told me – that he ran into somebody who had used the stones as stepping stones, as stones in his walk and he said he thought they were lithographic stones.

BETTY HOAG: Oh my goodness.

EDWIN EMERY: Yes. And it's _______________ the ability of somebody to think that way you know.

BETTY HOAG: Sennen Fleder or whatever his name was would roll over in his grave, wouldn't he?

EDWIN EMERY: Lord, wouldn't he?

BETTY HOAG: I wonder who it was. You don't remember?

EDWIN EMERY: I don't remember. Maybe it's as well I don't. It's awful. And it's conceivable that they ….

BETTY HOAG: Well they might be dug out again. It wouldn't hurt them any.

EDWIN EMERY: No it wouldn't. They could be resurfaced. No there were, oh, we had a lot of stones there. They were stacked up in racks. They're heavy and must be kept separate from each other. There were dozens of them, all colors.

BETTY HOAG: Dorothy Gikens told me what a thrill it was to have your own stone.

EDWIN EMERY: Oh yes. They had grey stones, and they had yellow ones. Different colored stones have a different surface and give a different effect.

BETTY HOAG: And it's all the same type of stone?

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, same except for the different strata I suppose. The whole thing is peculiar, the use of the stone, the discovery of it and then it died out and it's been revived and is being revived now very strongly.

BETTY HOAG: Do you think the project had anything to do with people appreciating those works to make this revival?

EDWIN EMERY: I don't know. I think that probably Tamarin that brought it –

BETTY HOAG: More than –

EDWIN EMERY: I don't think so because at the time of the end of the project and this period in between when nothing was done I don't think the influence could have been very strong because there was too much time had elapsed.

BETTY HOAG: Well, woodblocks have sort of gone, haven't they, and they certainly were done on the project.

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, woodblock. And of course linoleum block are easier to cut so they've taken the place to a certain extent and an awful lot of amateurs use them as a means of getting something , a card or a picture done. That seems to be reviving. Etching is reviving very, very strongly now through, I think, U.C.L.A. It's becoming quite a big department there and they do their own printing and so forth. That's another thing, etching presses are hard to find. Like the lithographic press I don't know how they go about making one. It would mean tooling up and it would be a small fortune to make a press. They could make them afterwards. It's like making an automobile from nothing. It's a big job. They're enormously heavy. I guess they weigh about seven or eight thousand pounds. They are really heavy. They have a kind of scrapping action as against the squeezing of the roller of the etching press. It's a different principle altogether.

BETTY HOAG: I interview Mr. Miller, you know, the art critic, and I hadn't realized that etching had already sort of had its day before the project started. He had been a well-known etcher.

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, I don't think they ever even had an etching press on the project and without it you can't see your work because you can't print it.

BETTY HOAG: Are you still painting today?

EDWIN EMERY: Oh yes.

BETTY HOAG: I didn't know how much you were doing as work at Flagstaff.

EDWIN EMERY: Oh I'm pretty busy down there and I stay there a little longer than I should.

BETTY HOAG: You're working all day everyday. You know there's one question I've asked several of the artists and you certainly seem to be the person to know whether you feel that these large murals that were done influenced the size of so much of the modern painting being like these things, practically the side of a house.

EDWIN EMERY: I don't know.

BETTY HOAG: I should say four by six feet. Or is it bigger?

EDWIN EMERY: I don't know. It may be bigger.

BETTY HOAG: Because as far as I know, in this country, we didn't have big paintings from the time of Deerstaff until just recently except for the murals.

EDWIN EMERY: Almost with the exception maybe of the murals.

BETTY HOAG: I just wondered if younger artists like you were working more freely on these projects and if they influenced your work later so that ….

EDWIN EMERY: No, not necessarily because I think the reason, even without the person knowing it, the reason for the large mural would be ___________so that if you make a head like this it would be lost so you have to make it like that. I think that would probably not influence because it would be one of these things, well somebody's going to see it from forty feet away and you have to have it large. Now it becomes, oh it's not only become somewhat an eye catching thing, big, b-i-g big so it probably had a lot to do with, oh, you know, "I'm going to be seen and …." But if you look back in history some of the most warming and wonderful paintings are the size of a phone book, marvelous.

BETTY HOAG: Tiepolo's drawings are …

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, marvelous. I don't know whether it's – it's a funny thing these museum people in talking they come in with these posters down there to frame and the museum is the same museum except it used to be down in _________ Park. There's no change in it really except they have this _________ show which __________ another will take its place, but it's the same stuff.

BETTY HOAG: We know we have the room, however, for really building up the collection.

EDWIN EMERY: It really pains me when I stop and think that if the time that Andrew Mellon, using his millions, he just raided Europe in 1930, a little earlier, and if the people here, if there were one or two souls that had just the sense to start that raiding party in Europe – now you can't do it.

BETTY HOAG: It's all raided.

EDWIN EMERY: Anything the country considers a national treasure stays. You couldn't get anything out of Italy, except possibly some modern works, you can get no old pictures out of Italy or France or Germany.

BETTY HOAG: Of course our private patrons are doing pretty well like _________ Fineman getting that Rembrandt out of England.

EDWIN EMERY: He was lucky. There's no more major pictures you can get, they are all in public collections and they cannot get them out. It's like the national treasure act or something – destroying the goods of the nation or whatever it might be and you cannot get them.

BETTY HOAG: Well, don't they get quite a few because of the tax deductions? They're always getting gifts.

EDWIN EMERY: It's a pity that we don't have major works here. The thing that struck me when I

first came out here – like they do in Chicago or New York and Washington now --

BETTY HOAG: {inaudible} what kind of work do you do today? Landscapes?

EDWIN EMERY: Well, no it's most anything and I've really said that I do this or that. I've never been restricted to anything or held down to doing, you know, abstract or whatever. It's a forced thing in many instances because really if you look at something – well to get back – I don't think people see the same thing the same way anyway, nobody, whether you are a child or an adult, it all looks different. Physically the action is identical in your eyes or mine or Mr. Brown's, but we each see a different picture in our minds. It's a different picture that we receive through experiences, either through happiness or unhappiness or some kind of horror. Like little Mexican kids who do these things of funerals in East L.A. It's just what they know. They are very honest about what comes out of them. When we get older we get inhibited and we're fearful that we didn't make it quite round enough or quite square enough and also the more you see historically the smaller you become and you start to feel, "Good Lord." When you see your first real fine Rembrandt, absolutely really fine one – forget it you just, it's hard to figure that you can get to a point you know where you can turn out either physically any technically …

BETTY HOAG: I think this is very applicable to the project because I think our first real indigenous came out because people for the first time really looked at the American scene and decided to do it instead of trying to imitate European artists.

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, this was primarily from the Middle West, Curry and Grant Wood and people of that nature.

BETTY HOAG: But also I think here in Los Angeles we had a lot of Oriental influence which seemed to come out in a lot of the painters here and this would be through Mr. Wright I think.

EDWIN EMERY: Possibly.

BETTY HOAG: People like ________ and Jimmy Redman who I guess was a fine painter at the time.

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, _________ had retained a lot of the Wright influence, he never lost it, never told him that and he wouldn't like to hear it, but it's true, it is true. He has always hung onto particularly very oriental things he did. You wouldn't think they were occidental at all. And the things he's done today, well, they're alright, they have a repetitious quality.

BETTY HOAG: I haven't seen any.

EDWIN EMERY: They're all sort of muted tones, color is not strong and many over-lapping – they had to me a look of the types of transparency that Disney does. Not that they are like that but they are like that. I don't – it's a little personal. He may be more than I give him credit for. I'm not being nasty about it. You know you look at something and if you want to fool somebody you say "oh, that's nice," you know but here I'm just speaking honestly of what I think.

BETTY HOAG: He didn't do any work for Disney that I know of. A lot of the artists did.

EDWIN EMERY: No. It looks like that to me. It had that look. He wouldn't like to hear that. He'd turn his back and he would not say a word.

BETTY HOAG: But he wouldn't hold it against you. He's a great person.

EDWIN EMERY: I like him very, very much. There's something about him that you can't take away. And he has been quite an influence here too.

BETTY HOAG: Has he.

EDWIN EMERY: In the early days, before I remember stories of the school they had down on Maine.

BETTY HOAG: The Art Student's League.

EDWIN EMERY: It was almost like early Bohemian days in San Francisco from what I've heard, where, you know, there's a bit of salami and a bit of whatever it was and it was kind of –

BETTY HOAG: Entertaining.

EDWIN EMERY: {illegible on original transcript}

BETTY HOAG: You missed all of that because of course you came here too late.

EDWIN EMERY: That sounds like something that you – well it's fun to be young.

BETTY HOAG: Yes. Do you feel that any of the artists – you said were so young on the project – that any of the artists who were older on the project influenced you?

EDWIN EMERY: No, no none whatsoever.

INTERRUPTION

BETTY HOAG: You were beginning to tell me something very interesting about it. Would you mind repeating that?

EDWIN EMERY: If I can. Well, I'd say around 1932, maybe a bit before, it probably, I imagine – well Los Angeles in particular would be the most easy place in the country to live. You lived quite easily, you'd have twelve dozen oranges for twenty-five cents and things of that nature. And San Francisco was considerably different, much tougher. New York was out of the question. The migration of people came from that region and a lot of them wound up in the middle of Fresno in trouble but many of them winding up down here found life really very pleasant with a simple little job, not too much, you could do what you wanted to do much easier. You could get a very credible car for a hundred and fifty dollars and go anywhere you wished and…

BETTY HOAG: The salary from the project wasn't very much but it seemed like a lot at that time.

EDWIN EMERY: Well it was what – ninety-six dollars a month? And eighty-nine for artists grade two, ninety-six for artist grade one and the magnificent sum of one hundred and twenty dollars for Mr. Parkinson.

BETTY HOAG: Oh really?

EDWIN EMERY: And he was always dying at the end of – so with the responsibility he was able to have about twenty-three dollars more a month.

BETTY HOAG: But as you say, it made a lot of difference at that time.

EDWIN EMERY: Life was very pleasant, very easy. In a sense, but the war fixed all that.

BETTY HOAG: What happened to you when the war came along?

EDWIN EMERY: Well I was working in a defense industry and I was, either fortunately or unfortunately I did very well at it, real well.

BETTY HOAG: Were you doing production illustration?

EDWIN EMERY: No, well, I did a little production illustration but I found that I could financially much better not doing it. I was particularly fond of the __________ thing. The odd part about this production illustration – I think it came into being through the idiots who could not read blueprints. They had to see a thing sort of in the round so that they could say "This is what it looks like."

BETTY HOAG: I know I did this at Boeing during the war. I remember this was for all the housewives.

EDWIN EMERY: That's how it came into being I think, through these fools; they couldn't see a thing in the flat and they see in this with the, you know, might be forty-five degree perspective ad this was something like remedial reading.

BETTY HOAG: I remember once I wanted to show part of a wing section that had an L shaped piece of metal that went down the side of it so I made it, you know, drew a picture of a little card at an angle on this section and then in the corner I had this at right angles so they could see how it fit on and the man in charge came up and said, "Betty Hoag, do you know what's happened?" and I said, "No." and he said, "Those darn women down there have made a hundred or something aluminum cards and were trying to fit it on."

EDWIN EMERY: Isn't' that awful. Lord.

BETTY HOAG: It's amazing that were came out and won the war.

EDWIN EMERY: Things like that may have lengthened it a little bit I suppose.

BETTY HOAG: What were you doing?

EDWIN EMERY: I started almost immediately doing tube bending.

BETTY HOAG: Tube bending?

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, which is all these thousand of different size tubing that go into a plane and some of it is the size of macaroni and others are four or five inches around, some of it is enormous and stainless steel and aluminum and every type of material, even square tubes. So after nine months of that I was able to – I evidently had a little flair for it. It takes a certain mathematical mind that I may have had and I worked very well at it and I had charge of the girls down there, about seven of them and I moved from there to another place in Glendale, almost got in a jam for job jumping but it was a very much important job and it went on until ….

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO

BETTY HOAG: You were just starting to tell me what happened to you after the war began and we had you in the war industry.

EDWIN EMERY: Oh yes and I had changed jobs from on to the other and got in a little trouble for it

but nothing happened for it particularly. I was working in a capacity in which I was more use I suppose and I had a two B, I think it was two B or something of that nature, a deferment and it just passed me by. I guess probably during the three years or whatever it was, probably four years, I think I worked on parts of everything conceivable, Boeing, everybody. In other words, they would farm out, you know, subcontract and the things the nasty things didn't want to do or the things that somehow felt they could get along without doing and do something more worthwhile, these little bits and pieces, all sorts of things. Some of them were really comical, little elbows the size of a piece of macaroni and then things of monstrous size, ten feet long with three or four bends on them – I had to ________ every one of them. They had to fit a certain – you know, be within a tolerance of – which was a little tiring, repetitious but I suppose a lot easier than a lot of poor devils had it. So that went on until we reconverted to making bicycles and we sold, I don't know, this outfit – I made the first bicycle for them and then they –

BETTY HOAG: That was their peace time –

EDWIN EMERY: They made their __________ from this and they had everything in there. They must have sold ten thousand bicycles in Texas alone. So finally, I think, through manipulations I don't know, it just fell apart, somebody was absconding with the money and everybody was left high and dry. Then I answered an ad and started picture framing. I had always, almost anybody, be it Don or Gary, you framed your own pictures somehow. You do it badly, you do it wrong, but you do it because you have these pictures, you're an artist and you do frame them.

BETTY HOAG: Had you known Joe Sutter on the project at all?

EDWIN EMERY: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: He was a professional framer wasn't he?

EDWIN EMERY: Sutter was a very, very good technical man. He knew how to ________ and probably anything pertaining to fine old world framing he could do. He was one of those old Swiss fuss budgets, you know, that everything had to be just this way. He was very unbending but he knew his trade and he was a real old timer type craftsman. He was just off when I came on the project. He was probably off in 1939 so I knew him but …

BETTY HOAG: He was one that died last year.

EDWIN EMERY: I didn't know. He was a hardy old fellow too.

BETTY HOAG: So you started framing just on your own?

EDWIN EMERY: No, I worked for a commercial house downtown for a long time, all the way down within sight of the City Hall. It was just frankly commercial framing handled by department stores, small gift shops. It was a rather small outfit; we were all practically in one little room. The owners worked with us and then it branched out and became bigger and bigger and became quite successful in a way. I think it could be called a successful business; they have about seventy-five people working for them. So I…I don't know – it was the day of Kennedy's funeral. There were a lot of businesses around town which closed. It was a Saturday. Or, if it wasn't his funeral it was the day after he was shot. And I happened to be walking around the village and I went by _________ and he was in there, he didn't know what to do with himself, Harvey Black. And I said, "You can't get in, the door's closed." He said, "Come in anyway." The door was unlocked, I didn't know it. And he said, "What are you doing?" We knew each other and so he began telling about the frame shop and he

wasn't satisfied with who was there and so forth and he said "If you know of anybody that might like to do the sort of thing let me know." He didn't ask me directly. I said, "You may be talking to the fellow right now," I said, "I don't know." But, I said I'd mull it over in my mind and see him in a couple of weeks. So it finally developed that I went in there and this fellow had given notice that was in there and it's been alright, it's been a lot of hard work, too hard, too much effort put out for something I'm terribly fond of really. It's useful and has a place in the world but it's a lot of time that artists have put in with things that they're doing because they have to do something to make their living. You put so much effort and time into something when you'd rather do something else. It's not solved I don't think even by saying everybody gets two hundred dollars a month to do what he wants. This would not work.

BETTY HOAG: You're coming right into the question I usually end with, that is, what you think the value of the project was. Usually the artists say, today was wonderful because they didn't have to, but you certainly don't feel that way.

EDWIN EMERY: No really. I don't think that it brought out enough because I think they were all leaning on an existing thing too much. I still think subsidization is helpful, it has helped in some ways but I don't think it … it was the answer but I think everybody all leaned on it instead of sort of – well you have to lean on it to some extent but I don't think we pushed it enough myself. Some of it may honestly have been bad management, really.

BETTY HOAG: On whose part?

EDWIN EMERY: Timid management on the part of both. Timid management really. I think they didn't have the nerve to just take the bull by the horns and just do something. They always were wondering what he's going to say, the man in the back and so forth. They were always a little fearful. It passed along to people who could see it and feel it and it was passed along considerably.

BETTY HOAG: Was this political pressure they were afraid of?

EDWIN EMERY: I think so. They were continually in fear of saying anything or hearing anything anti-Roosevelt. It was terrible, really quite fearful. Because we were dependent, in all honesty, I said many times, if we are accepting from our government we should at least support it because you know it's being put out by these people and I said, "I don't think the other party would have ever done this, this much," I said, "So just be fair." They didn't even like to hear that. They didn't like any – no letting of your hair down, no exposing, no honest comment, they were afraid. And they passed it on to us. Feitelson particularly passed it on because he was just a worry wart. Very much so.

BETTY HOAG: You said earlier off the tape that he was quite timid.

EDWIN EMERY: He sees shadows, he's pursued all the time but he's not pursued by anything. But that's his nature, either that's European nature or maybe that's Lithuanian type or something. Maybe they are all pursued by shadows.

BETTY HOAG: They have it in their background.

EDWIN EMERY: Like English people who have no fears at all because they run everything and they say "hang it all" and they're not afraid. They're reserved but they don't tend to fear at all. They don't have these inhibitions. And if you are in a position of some authority _______ it can pass along. I remember one time in a war plant, here I was just a – not entirely lowly worker but – one girl who the night before had – they neglected to tell her that she was not to come in, that they were laying

her off, so she comes in. And this poor timid second in command, he was standing near me at the time ____. I didn't even answer. I went over to her, I took her by the had and I said, "They let you go last night but come in and if they can't afford for you to work this one day – put your little card in and punch it and go to work. They let you out tonight, that's all. He was going to let her sit in the anti-room. It was so silly. He said, "What's you do that for?" He said, "I'm going to get…." He was worried about it. Nothing happened. It was just – in other words it seemed when something happened down there was no positive let's go the shortest distance, let's do it just straightforward. They were scared of senator so and so who represents somebody. I don't know.

BETTY HOAG: Well it's interesting because there's so much to talk about whether Johnson is going to do something. The other thing which many of the artists have mentioned but you haven't was the camaraderie that was established by the artists in the area. Did you feel that? The fact that they were working together and getting to know many of the other artists that they wouldn't have otherwise.

EDWIN EMERY: Well, working together was as a rule, quite pleasant. Everybody seemed to really work together. Again, I think, when it didn't succeed too well or wasn't too smooth it had to do with the so-called brass that caused us to be confused. There was the thought, "Is it going to be open tomorrow?" Which was silly because it didn't happen for years but they were going to closed it, these rumors would start. It was just like a grape vine. Ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. It was a peculiar atmosphere and I think that it was not enjoyed as much as is should have been. While we were there none of us really realized that it was a lot of fun and it was only until possibly later – you look back and you say, "You know that was really a lot of fun." And we didn't realize it at that time.

BETTY HOAG: Maybe that's always true. I wonder if we ever really do appreciate what we have at the time.

EDWIN EMERY: And also, they'd have these interviews on how you spent your money which was always to me the most marvelous thing.

BETTY HOAG: You meant the artists together?

EDWIN EMERY: They would have some underling from the higher up brass who would come in and "you spent so and so for this and …" And everybody worked it out so you came out just – well, you didn't have anything left.

BETTY HOAG: Did they supply your materials or did you buy your own and then turn it in?

EDWIN EMERY: They did supply the materials. In fact, much of the materials were bought at Gilbert and Flack, the store I'm working for now. They were together as partners years and years before they used to fight all the time so they separated and Gilbert had a store here at that time.

BETTY HOAG: In the same block?

EDWIN EMERY: Seventh street, one block away. And Gilbert got the entire contract for the supplies, quite a lucrative contract. Large canvases and paint and powdered color and glue and name it – brushes, an enormous amount. The mural project you would find out how many were shot and worn and you would be able to replace them.

BETTY HOAG: Did he go out of business finally? He isn't there anymore.

EDWIN EMERY: I don't know. He may have even grown old. They used to have quite a good control

of – at least the one that I know of – I know there were in these things were immense amounts of things __________ sticky fingers, but I think this was very well controlled. Things went out and they knew where they went. This was the one efficient portion of the whole thing. Photography, there was a photograph department and it's ___________ expensive.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, with Paul Parks in charge of it. I wonder what's happened to him. He's somebody I should get in touch with.

EDWIN EMERY: He must be around somewhere and he must have an immense fund of information. He was taking photographs of the murals in color and so forth. Where all those are I don't know.

BETTY HOAG: All the photographs that the artists have loaned for microfilming have his name on the back. Can you remember any other stories about it for the tape at all? Any of the people we haven't brought up?

EDWIN EMERY: Some of it probably would have to be cut out. It was funny. Parks had a fellow working for him – this happens probably in any government agency – had an old man. He looked like you know, put a broom in his hand and he'd look more reasonable. He was an F.B.I. agent. And you would just swear he should be sweeping the place up.

BETTY HOAG: Well, he had been put there to watch somebody.

EDWIN EMERY: I think so. But this was a reasonable thing just like a man does this to protect his interests or the government and in this case _______. This was strange and most unlikely, absolutely, completely unlikely. And loyalty oaths, we finally got to that point that they were really, the _____ all things that the government was afraid and as the war gets closer they start – you have to salute the flag in the morning.

BETTY HOAG: Oh really? At the project center?

EDWIN EMERY: And we, you know, we used to have this and finally somebody became aware that –

BETTY HOAG: It looks like a Nazi salute.

EDWIN EMERY: Some of us would do this and ____________. "No more of that stuff." Worry, worry, worry.

BETTY HOAG: Well, apparently you had to sort of punch a time clock as far as being there.

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, the time keeper was extremely accurate. That was you had your little card and they knew when you went in and went out. You only worked literally sixteen days a month. Five and three. Five days one week and three days the next. So that there was a good deal of time off. From the standpoint of what you received and the amount of time you put in it wasn't bad. Really. It compared quite favorably with a lot of private industry where they worked six days a week. So it was two days and one week off in which you could do what you wished and then you'd start another five.

BETTY HOAG: Well that sounds good. No one had told me that before.

EDWIN EMERY: I have an old time card. I forgot to bring it too. It was one of those "artist grade" whatever it is.

BETTY HOAG: I hope you do have other things too that we can borrow for microfilming.

EDWIN EMERY: I don't have much, no. So very little is kept of that kind of thing. I kept this time card just for the sake of – it's in good condition, it shows the hours and I think it shows the five and three on there. This was very accurately kept. In other words, I believe the man who was in charge of taking time there could get a job anywhere because it was very, very carefully kept up and a very good procedure followed and they were quite careful about it so that nobody was getting anything they didn't deserve. Petrocom, you Bob Bom, was in charge of that for maybe two years.

BETTY HOAG: No I didn't know that. _________.

EDWIN EMERY: He was good. He was a good organizer and he was running a department and he ran it well, very, very well which is most important to me that's half of this thing. Despite this art freedom or you know let's have our bare feet you still have to have somebody who really can run a thing and make these little parts work together. If you don't nothing happens. And there was here and there a looseness in that respect. It hurts the worker, the artist as a worker because he's at loose ends, you know, he's not controlled. A certain amount of control is necessary, not restrictions but "This is what has to be done now let's try to get it … let's move along."

BETTY HOAG: That's always true of anything involving groups of people.

EDWIN EMERY: And Don Totten and Jerry Murray for a while were put in charge of one of these murals and they were very happy-go-lucky, easy going but very poor organizers. So it was fun, ill-organized but probably the most fun, if you wanted to put it down as pain or pleasure but they were terrible organizers and the discipline was loose because they're not severe.

BETTY HOAG: Not that type. Do you remember any of the exhibits that they had of work?

EDWIN EMERY: Yes Jerry had quite an interesting show. In fact before I was on the project he had a show in the gallery below Seventh Street. A rather nice little, fair sized little gallery and he had quite an interesting show, very derivative of Gaugin but some of himself in it too.

BETTY HOAG: Oh just his own work? This was not a project show?

EDWIN EMERY: No. They were done, I think, on the project. They were done as part of the easel project.

BETTY HOAG: Well, as an art teacher he's probably passed on a lot of his ability to _______.

EDWIN EMERY: He could if someone would, you know, be receptive to him. And he, many times I think he's stopped painting. Last maybe a years or so ago. He went into quite definitely abstract things, completely representing nothing except emotional shapes maybe and his color sense is very brilliant. He would ask me, you know, would like my opinion on these things and what did I think of this. And I told him and he would know too – if you hit a thing that's wrong and he also knows it's wrong you get a confidence that you're not just saying, patting him on the back. And at one corner he'd be real doubtful and turn it upside down and it still looks funny – the whole thing was quite a meeting ground of honest criticism, you know if you see something that's wrong it's wrong that's all, you feel it, I feel it. But he has I think as good a color sense in the sense of undecorative color that I've run into really. There are quite beautiful combinations of mental thinking in terms of color, which Don doesn't hate, I know. Some people don't. Mine is quite different. It's much gloomier. And it's more…

BETTY HOAG: Well, that's surprising because you're not a gloomy person. At least you don't seem to be.

EDWIN EMERY: Well, I don't seem to be but I think I am because it is very, it's morbid; my color is quite morbid and it's rarely that I'll use something completely straight and clear, very rarely and it's a preoccupation continually… I know if you stare, if you look at something long enough, not just to fatigue your eyes or tire your eyes, the thing pains you and the difficult part if it is I think whether it's something that's happening as you grow older or what but nothing seems to be constantly remaining the same and it's difficult, it becomes very disturbing, the thing is before your eyes literally changing, changing in it's shape and sort of what it has to say to you and it gets – where are you going to capture it? Which part? You know, it's coming and gone. It's very peculiar.

BETTY HOAG: Well this is what along the – are they pop artists who do just one line out of different colors so your eyes get moving?

EDWIN EMERY: Oh, this illusion.

BETTY HOAG: Yes, they say if you look long enough you begin to see something else. Well if that's true of a simple geometric pattern like that then when you get into something really interesting it must be increased.

EDWIN EMERY: That's a physical thing you're speaking of.

BETTY HOAG: Aren't you speaking of a physical thing?

EDWIN EMERY: No, no it's mental, your emotions. The thing itself is continually changing, you might say, it's form, not radically but it's not remaining constantly the same. None of these things seem to be static. They all, any object or the same goes for people and so forth. If you've read, I don't know he's done some writing – very little that makes any sense or clarity – Cezanne used to set still-lifes up and it would take him hours to set a still-life and he would put underneath these things coins and tilt them.

BETTY HOAG: Just to make that much difference.

EDWIN EMERY: Yes, he would tilt this thing. It was just the description of one of these things it's just tiring to read it because he'd find these folds and he would put things under them to alter them, before he started on it and then on top of it he would do this peculiar…it was like some…I always felt it was like an atmosphere that isn't here, it isn't there, it's something else. It's peculiar. It's not our air it's not an illusion and it's…I don't know, it's very strange. To me it's still quite unexplainable, completely. He'll have, of all things he'll have a ____________ right in the center of something he'll have a highlight, like an academic painter would put on, a pure and simple little highlight, for no, just seemingly for, almost like comedy and thereafter the so-called light shadow – it'll be mixed. It won't be reasonable and then this is lost, this is different. The more you look the more mixed up you are. And they have many books, hundreds of them, explaining all of this, and none of them …

BETTY HOAG: No one has ever caught the real reason? Well, he's certainly the artist's artist.

EDWIN EMERY: He's real strange. He's still something, I don't know, even the great Picasso and so on and so forth, many of these people who supposedly stemmed from the last so-called semi or approaching Cubism. I still think, I think as bright and as brilliant as they are I don't think they reached as, they didn't reach a continuation; they started something themselves __________any of these things are easily explained, all these painters; you can even explain Picasso. Light and

shade is reasonable sometimes or the distortion is reasonable but you go back and try, even in a book with illustrations.

BETTY HOAG: You go back to Cezanne and you never can?

EDWIN EMERY: You can't say "Well this is what happened" because the next thing is completely different with no shadow at all and there's something like a blob and then these highlights always throw me. I can't understand how he could put highlights on when it's the most primitive so-called thing of bringing a thing forward, you put a little light and everything else goes away. Strange. Funny, Whistler, you know, the comrade. When he first saw a Cezanne he said, "If I was a mother and this mother had a six year old child and the six year old child did this he should be soundly smacked." He said, "An aluminum table cloth or a metal tablecloth, apples you can't eat…"

BETTY HOAG: You know unless you can think of anything more on the project I guess we should end our tape.

EDWIN EMERY: You've spoken ________ Feitelson. Oh he's ____________.

BETTY HOAG: I think we should add the bit about his enjoying ice-cream with ketchup on it. I think that's worthy of going down in art history.

EDWIN EMERY: A man who has never been ill in his life and eats out of greasy – anything. I think he would, just the first restaurant he falls into he'd eat. It's marvelous.

BETTY HOAG: Always thinking of other things.

EDWIN EMERY: He must have given you a great deal of information.

BETTY HOAG: Oh he did.

EDWIN EMERY: Because he was, I don't know he was not always, his first job was evidently the assistant to Wright.

BETTY HOAG: Yes.

EDWIN EMERY: And he stayed that way all the way along.

BETTY HOAG: Mr. Emery I thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW

Last updated... May 16, 2005