



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Audrey  
McMahon, 1964 Nov. 18

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Audrey McMahon on November 18, 1964. The interview was conducted by Harlan B. Phillips 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.

In 2024 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. The original transcript was edited. Additional information from the original transcript has been 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

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: While we were talking initially, you raised questions about memory, which I think are important for you to indicate here, because it's part of the story that this particular tape will tell.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: More particularly, an estimate of your own memory—

AUDREY MCMAHON: —which is so bad. It couldn't be worse, and it's particularly bad in that it selects apparently [inaudible] in a round about way things it chooses to recall. For example, you mentioned Mrs. Woodward a moment ago, and I hadn't thought of Mrs. Woodward and had you not mentioned her, in context I would have said to you, Who is Mrs. Woodward?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Isn't that interesting.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Isn't that dreadful! It's really shocking.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, I think it shows that you, in part, were seized by what was the immediate, [cross talk] what was familiar, and she was remote—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: She was remote—Mississippi background.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, and also somewhat superimposed, you see, to the whole problem. The problem as we approached it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Exactly.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But our approach was so very informal. But to come back to my memory, it's faulty and anything I say is to be taken with very many grains of salt, and if it's important, verified factually for my sake as well as for anyone's else, because I really don't count on complete recall or even partial recall. I know the things I remember are the things that hit me emotionally most, of course—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —as anyone else does, you know?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But to remember these things seriation and to remember them actually with any degree of accuracy is way beyond me.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, I would simply make one editorial comment that what you have said about you applies to almost all people.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, that's very comforting [laughs]. It is really, it's very comforting.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: By its very nature what we're doing now is in fact a reinterpretation of what transpired.

AUDREY MCMAHON: I see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It's not history in the straight sense.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Right, well, that's a help.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Because I wouldn't expect you to remember days and dates, hours and whatnot.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh good [laughs].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But there were forces alive.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And they affect administration, they affect work.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: They affect ideas, they generate excitement all by themselves. Let's see if we can get back to, you know, yourself, the most important thing is what's in the air. And nobody jots this down. I don't know that anyone has a record.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, no, well, you see, what happens is that things take place one right after the other or one on top of the other, and you're so much a part of the picture, you're not even aware it's taking place.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Exactly.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And it doesn't have an impact on you until it hits you in some vital way as through your interests, or through your environments, or through your work, or through your affections, or in some way of that sort. So you really are part of a thing before you know the thing exists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.] It's already born, you know.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, it isn't there, but it was there.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That sort of thing, exactly. Precisely.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. Well, initially I indicated that we might take '29 as a key year, although it may not be a key year. But looking back on it, it does mark a departure in this sense that the rest of the United States was gradually catching up to the point where modern artists had been all during the '20's.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: In effect.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes. Well, I wouldn't know about that because I was not too aware of—well, yes, I was actually aware of what was going on in the rest of the United States because I had some rather incredible experiences in the far West, you know, where—would you be interested in these?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Certainly.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, I was asked by the Long Beach Art Association—this is mentioned merely as an example.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: I was asked by the Long Beach Art Association to come out to Long Beach, California. I don't remember at whose expense. I think maybe I may have been

making a trip anyhow in connection with traveling shows for the College Art [Association]. It's possible. But it may not have been—no, it must have been. I must have been in Los Angeles or in San Francisco. Anyhow, I was at Long Beach to help them show an exhibition out there, select one from things that we might have or assemble one for the following year. I was always very eager and interested to do this, because we didn't get a terribly keen reception in the Middle and far West for modern art or for original works.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:05:32]

AUDREY MCMAHON: As a matter of actual fact, do you know that during the years preceding 1929, we sent exhibitions of original paintings to colleges, where the professor or teacher of art had never seen an original in his life? Had never, it was not known. They would write back and say, "Are these prints?" And I would have to write back and say, "No, they're oils." "The original oils?" "Yes, the original oils." Well, so it was very stimulating to be asked by a small gallery, and I went there and, on a Sunday morning, which was the only time available for some reason, we had this conference, and I shall never forget this conference, because there were eight or ten of us sitting around to decide what they would show.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And I offered them little Dutch masters, and they didn't want them. And it was something we were bringing over with Valentiner authenticating them and writing the catalogue and so on, and we were very proud of it, and no, they didn't want it. So I was disappointed but I thought, Well, maybe they wanted something American. And yes, they did. So then I suggested a mixed show, you see, and no they didn't want that. And this went on for about two hours. And do you know what they wanted?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: What?

AUDREY MCMAHON: They wanted a show of Long Beach artists, but they wanted a New York organization to put it on.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Inaudible.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: And that is what they wanted.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Isn't that interesting!

AUDREY MCMAHON: And it really was. And they didn't have the slightest interest in anything we had to offer, nothing, nothing. It's just too foreign.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Exactly! That's the interesting thing. Too foreign.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, yes. And I looked at their things, and their things were pleasant, conservative watercolors, various degrees of competence. I'm sure some were excellent.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: But by that time, I was so distressed—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: —you know, and I had no place there whatsoever, nor did we ever do anything for them.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: I mean, we didn't have anything to do for them, because this was not the sort of thing we did, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: So.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, in this particular period what was the range of contact that you

had with the modern artists, the modern American artists?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, a lot. Because we did a great many group shows, and the majority were American, you see. And we were a real outlet. Do you know that at one time we had a hundred shows traveling? They were not very good, some of them and many of those hundred were just photographs, or prints, and so on, by no means a hundred shows of originals.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: But we did have a majority of contemporary American artists, which some one-man shows, very few of those, group shows, media shows, you see, subject shows.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: One way of making this kind of art eligible would be to have portraits of children, portraits of children and animals, and so forth, you know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Portrait shows—those were very acceptable. And then we managed to mix media; you had portraits, and sculpture, and bronze, and oil I recall one that sort of thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And then we had a large number of group shows of American artists, just plain group shows. But those were later, you see. And they came when the—we started with the colleges. After all, we were the College Art Association. But the smaller museums, you see, also had nothing. There were and—I'm sorry to say this—still are many museums in the smaller centers, nowhere near as many as there were fortunately, where there were no real possessions. The museum owned little or nothing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

[00:10:00]

AUDREY MCMAHON: They had walls and they showed things from the town surrounding neighborhood and what they could rent or borrow, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: They might have [inaudible] the gilded booties as a donor and so on, but they didn't really have works of art, you know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs] yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And there were more of those then than there are today—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —by far. But I don't even know what there is today in that area because I'm out of that field and I don't travel very much in these smaller places now. But in those days, this was the rule rather than the exception, so those small museums also became people who wanted our shows—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —which were rented for a fee. I think they ranged from \$10 to \$150, something like that. And there were one or two that were more, like big European shows.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Then we got more ambitious, you see. And we would get together very large European shows and American shows, and one year when the Carnegie at Pittsburgh didn't have a show, we put one on at Radio City here to open Radio City. I think that may

have been in '29 for all I know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And it was a big international show, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh yeah?

AUDREY MCMAHON: A contemporary—all contemporary so that I was in a good deal of touch with—now we had committees that passed on the quality of these things. These things would be submitted—artists were invited to submit and then—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: They were?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh, yes. And we scouted this all the time, and there were a lot of us that did the scouting, all kinds of people from all over.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And then people and artists learned about it and would volunteer, you see. And most of us traveled continually and looked at works of art every day of our lives. And we must have been 25 or 30 youngish and young people who did nothing else practically.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: I probably did the least of that because I edited publications for the College Art also, but there were lots of others who did that and far better fitted than I. They were artists themselves or related to artists—wives or daughters, mothers or sons, or something of that sort.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Then we got to the point that professors and curators would recommend people, you see. And we had quite a large committee that passed on these things. We went through many vicissitudes with that. And we had people like Ernest Peixotto on the committee at that time, for example, which was something less than entirely helpful because of his own rather reactionary point of view, but okay. And then we had very modern people. We had Max Weber. We had people of that sort, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, actually we had some of the very best people, we showed Kuniyoshi in those days, you know; and we showed Weber; and we showed Alex Brook; and his wife, Peggy Bacon, his then-wife; and all these people that—and you know, that wonderful Arshile Gorky—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah, and all that sort of thing, you see. We showed people that for many years afterwards were not shown except then later through the WPA.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And this is perhaps a reason why I got this later involvement, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Or at least a partial reason.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It seems you had a finger on the pulse of distribution.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, we were very close to the artists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You were?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Very close.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: As an institution?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Both as an institution and personally—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —all of us. We all knew nobody but artists and writers. I didn't have a friend that wasn't either an artist or a writer, and that was true of all of us, and we lived with them, and they lived with us. And when they were broke, they came and lived in our houses, you know, in our apartments.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: [Coughs.] We were all terribly interested in art, and it was—either it was the vocation of the people who were working together or was an advocacy. And while College Art was set up originally, and it had again reverted to an organization for teachers primarily and scholars and is somewhat in archeological. In the years of John Shapley—I don't know if you've seen him by any chance?

[00:15:05]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, I haven't.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, he was the president of the College Art during all those years. He now teaches—I believe he's either with Asia House or he teaches here somewhere, yes, I believe so. His wife is curator of paintings at the Mellon Gallery, yes—Ellen Shapley. And she was an assistant of Berenson's. But in those years, they were both at Princeton—no, in those years they were both here as a matter of fact that was before the Princeton era, and John taught at NYU.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And he was my husband's predecessor at NYU. My husband taught at NYU, history of art and art appreciation, and in due course became head of his department there. And John Shapley was president of the College Art Association, and he and Phillip were close friends. And I came to the College Art Association at John's request and on the condition—my condition, that in addition to doing all the editorial work on their Eastern art—they had an oriental paper, which Horace Jane—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I see.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —who is now a consultant in Sarasota—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —newly, and was at the Metropolitan with Fran Taylor, and before that in Philadelphia.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, I agreed to do all those things, and run their annual meetings, and be the clearinghouse for all the young hopefuls who had papers to—graduate students, which was Walter Cook's, you've heard of him?—great love and so on. In addition to all of that, I wanted my own two things that they agreed upon: I wanted to have contemporary art shows and I held out that. We got money from the Carnegie Foundation to start us on that; and I wanted a contemporary magazine, *Parnassus*, which I originated and which I ran—I have a copy right here now.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: —until I left, until I went on the WPA when somebody took it over.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Now it still is extant as the *Art Journal*, but in different character entirely—no, not the same.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Inaudible] yeah. Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But those were my—you see, those were my great loves, and I said, Yes, I would do this rather chore job provided I would be allowed. Well, presently the tail wagged the dog, and I'm afraid I never did any of those other things as well as what we were doing, which is doing our art shows and running our magazine, which were fine.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But this was a conduit or a means of bringing contemporary art, spreading contemporary art.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, that was the purpose. And while in the beginning we sold nothing, we didn't offer anything for sale, because that concept was new.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: I was with the College Art and did those shows long enough to see the sales made. In fact, I set out shows where each exhibit I had to buy one piece, or they couldn't have the show, you see. I myself bought one from every show for a while. I no longer have these things but I did for a while. But I do have, I bought that from a show, that Souerbie [ph]. That one is from a show I brought over Souerbie.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And it was my pleasure to do these shows from France where I had spent many years as a student.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And so this was mine, and other people went in other places, you see. And then we even got so far as to have some small lending libraries of prints, and the idea of royalties on prints had raised its head.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: It never got off the ground, but at least it had been conceived, discussed at meetings, and was known to us.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And we stopped all of these for two reasons. To the best of my recollection, we stopped because the archeological contingent at the College Art became very dissatisfied with me. Because I was neglecting, shamefully, their end for which the College Art had been established. And they were deluged with what they really, I don't believe, felt was art.

[00:20:09]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: I dealt with people who couldn't look at a painting. They could only look at a photograph in that area. They used tape measures and that sort of thing. Their evaluations were literary evaluations, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And they became very unhappy about the trend that the organization had taken. They were quite powerful people in the colleges, and I can't recall right now whether they asked for me to resign or be removed, or whether I got so unhappy about the obstacles that I resigned and so on. But we had already started our work with the other artists. Oh, I think that was what did it. And I think that was the straw that broke the camel's back, because we were giving over a great deal of our efforts to that, which, of course, was not what we were paid for, you see; nor what we were supposed to do. And all of us were more interested in that than in anything else.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, this is staring facts in the face, you know.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, so I don't remember. I think it was a mutual consent thing. I think



my husband and I talked it through, though he was an art teacher, he was always on our side. And I think we agreed that I could do more of what I liked and better for that people I was interested in and myself—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —in something more contemporary.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And so this was satisfactory to all of us. But the College Art is still in existence and very flourishing and has reverted to its earlier concept. And I'm a life member; they made me a life member, and I get all the publications and am most interested. And I bemoan the fact that the magazine, the contemporary magazine, is not really in my way of thinking—a truly contemporary magazine, but what can you do? It serves a big purpose and it's very valid, so that's fine.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure, it does. I'm interested in the origin of the aid for needy. This was just an identification, you know, of the fact that there were artists who were needy.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, you remember—have you spoken to Fred Daniels?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, I haven't.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh well, you have to. Fred Daniels is now with the Sheltered Workshops in Brooklyn.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And he was the man that, so far as I know, that originated the—what was it called? CID? I don't remember those initials—in Albany, which was aid for the needy artists from Albany, the first state involvement.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And he and La Guardia and Grace Scausland, who is now Grace Lindquist with whom I'm now associated, were our courts of appeal, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh!

AUDREY MCMAHON: And so as far as I'm personally concerned, I went with Frances Pollock to see La Guardia to see what could we, the College Art—this was about two years before I resigned from the College Art—what could we do to help the artists as an organization, what could we do in New York. And I think we were given a very small sum of money like \$15 every other week to pay a salary—I believe it was that. And then there was some supplementation from Albany through Fred Daniels' program, which was contemporary with what we did. It started at about the same time.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, and this was designed at least for art—the needy contemporary artists?

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right. Now I don't know at that time whether it went beyond the graphic arts because I have no knowledge at that point beyond that, none, you see. Because I was doing this along with my other job, and as an organization we were doing it as a matter of civic interest.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

[00:25:00]

AUDREY MCMAHON: And John Shapley, who was never on the side of the people who thought this was not something that should be done, was always aiding and abetting us to go further and help more people and all we could and give as much time and as much assistance as possible—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —because he was very civic-minded and very interested in the artists, and somewhat of an artist himself.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm. I guess it suggests continuity that crept in—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —because you were centrally located here in New York, and you had these continuing contacts with the artists.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Apparently, this must have been why because this contact with artists by them was an extremely live thing. And actually, the very first artists, who came in, who applied when the WPA was established—now I'm not sure of my facts there, you see. I think I may be getting them muddled. We had applicants there, but I don't believe if it was for the WPA. I believe it was for the precursors of the WPA.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I mentioned that earlier before we turned this on, the advent of the Gibson Committee—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —which may be another phase, a local phase—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —with larger, this CID—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Very shortly after the beginning, it was really, as I remember, the first formalization of the whole thing. That's what Grace Scausland was so active with, and it was really the first formalization of this very informal kind of assistance that was given.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, but it shows a deeper thinking than one would imagine [cross talk]—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh yes, there was a great deal of planning there.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure, sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And a great deal of realization of what was going on. Of course, no one of us had any concept as to how broad or how deep the situation was.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: We for one thing—well, as I knew hundreds of artists—didn't know, didn't dream that there were thousands. No one of us had this, or maybe someone, but no one I knew had this really—the understanding of how much was happening in this country that really was going on in a very viable way that was being hurt by the Depression almost irreparably.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: We didn't know that. We learned this along with, you know, we learned most of what we did in the doing—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —after the fact.

AUDREY MCMAHON: After the fact. I learned all I knew for a long time about this type of administration. The only administration I had ever done prior to the WPA was to run the College Art Association, which, while it was a big thing when we had annual meetings and hundreds of people—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —and while you have to have certain administrative abilities to run a magazine, especially one that's on the newsstands, which this was limited distribution but still on the newsstands. It was self-taught, and before that I had no experience of this sort at all. I had just been a writer.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

AUDREY MCMAHON: I had no other experience, no administrative experience and was plunged into one of the largest administrative jobs I know of, and certainly the largest one I've ever held—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —as the stream went by [laughs].

AUDREY MCMAHON: As the stream went by. It was fabulous. So I learned all you do about such things in the doing, you see. And to me government directives, which was so terrifying to many, they were lifesavers, because I had no idea how you did any of these things until people showed me how.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm. Tell me this. When they set up—I guess it was Roosevelt who set up the Federal Emergency Relief Administration—I'm not aware at the moment that it made distinctions between needy and needy artists.

AUDREY MCMAHON: I don't know. All we had were needy artists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. This was through, I think this was still back in College Arts times. The FERA was one of the first—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, the FERA was prior to the WPA, and I don't believe it made any distinction.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: None.

AUDREY MCMAHON: None. But through some channel and I can't tell you what, we only got artists. Now whether that was channeled through City Hall that La Guardia's set up, Grace Scausland could tell you much more about that than I.

[00:30:00]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: I think they had to do with the channeling. She's a purely administrative person and I think they had to do with that.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So the discretion as to where to send the people?

[Cross talk.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: As to where to send the people, but of course, if they had sent us a needy plumber, we would have had no knowledge at all, whereas here we knew the craft.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: We could pass judgement on was this an artist and we dared pass judgement on whether it was a good one.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I see, sure, sure. But then I think the FERA was halted somewhat by the CWA.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And under the CWA Edward Bruce, I believe in Washington designed a short-lived nationwide—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, are you thinking of the CWA with Edward Bruce or the PWA with Edward Bruce? Edward Bruce had the PWA in Washington—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, but this was—

AUDREY MCMAHON: The CWA was the—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —Civil Works Administration.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Civil Works Administration. And was that Edward Bruce also?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, yes, as I understand it, the Civil Works Administration was a design thing by Mr. Baker and others to allow for the professional people who were lumped together with the needy under FERA.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Ah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And they also fixed the minimum wage, 25¢ an hour or something like that.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right. Well now, I didn't remember that, but now that you mention it, I remember, yes. Before that we got just the artists because somebody—some channel picked them up and sent them to us. But after that they were channeled officially. This was still College Art days.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: We had the CWA. We must have had two or three years of administration of that, we must have, yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, let me—I guess it's the WPAP, isn't it?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, with Bruce, which was centered, I believe, at the Whitney Museum—Mrs. Force.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That was not the WPA; it was the PWAP.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: PWAP.

AUDREY MCMAHON: The Projects Work Administration Program, wasn't that it?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And that was not specifically needy.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: In other words, they were needy because everybody was needy pretty well, but they didn't pass a needs test.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: They were not on relief, which ours were.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, and that I think is the distinction.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And that was the distinction. And, of course, there were many other distinctions made that were, to my way of thinking, artificial distinctions. It was then felt that those were quote, unquote, "better," artists, but actually they were better known artists rather than necessarily any other qualification.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It's a good distinction, yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: They could be as good or they might be better, or they could be not as good but they were better known, and there had been a little more lucrative results, and also they were older. We got younger people in the main although we got many older people.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But we had such people as Nakian for example on our project, and you can't get a better artist than Nakian or Noguchi no matter where you look, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: This just doesn't exist. Now Kuniyoshi was never on our project. He was on Bruce's project and he was one of our artist advisors for our project.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I see. Yeah, yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And we bridged that gap in that way. But there was a good deal of feeling, and you will find people in giving their résumé of their lives, they may—an artist may rarely admit that he was on the PWA. But he will never admit in a newspaper when he gives a history of himself that he was on the WPA. Never. I look at these write ups today, the contemporary artists of great repute give to the papers. People I've known all these years, and I knew when they were just starting. Some few who had never painted and came to us as frame makers and learned to paint with us, who are now very successful.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And some who were already excellent artists, young, and some were already middle-aged and very good, and who have made big names for themselves, and who are heads of museums and heads of art departments, who are big-selling people, the biggest, and do you think they ever say they were on the WPA? No. Never. And I just am brokenhearted every time I see this because it seems to me, I would be proud. I say it on every résumé that I put out.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: I'm very proud of what happened then.

[00:35:24]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, you know—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Will you have a little brandy? Can I put that on the tape, or is that taboo?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It's marvelous. She'll probably be thirsty transcribing this.

AUDREY MCMAHON: [Laughs.] And she'll say, Yes, but where is it? [Inaudible.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It's the only way she—

AUDREY MCMAHON: This is some Remy Martin from Paris I brought back myself.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, she can only get this by some elusive process of osmosis.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right [laughs].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It's very good.

AUDREY MCMAHON: It's much better than that coffee made by that trick coffee maker. That's not very good.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, it was, as you put it, frankly an experiment.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, it was, but you know I don't think it makes very good coffee [laughs].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, some experiments don't turn out well.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, that's true.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Edward Bruce's project only lasted—

AUDREY MCMAHON: And Juliana Force—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, she was the local, I think, or this regional—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, and she and I had great rivalry.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh!

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh my, yes! Because [clears throat] she knew a great deal. She was a very brilliant woman, and she had enormous sensitivity and so forth. But she really did believe that that was the cream of the crop that the others were just by-blows.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I wondered, you know, in a search for names, she isn't a figure to me, one that I've ever met or knew, but was she properly named Mrs. Force?

AUDREY MCMAHON: You mean was she forceful?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: She was fabulous.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Was she really?

AUDREY MCMAHON: She was absolutely fabulous. She was one of the most extraordinary women I've ever met. Her will was law. She was a product of an older day in that she was brilliant, but this brilliance was not yet so universal or sufficiently universal among women so that she was so unusual—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I see.

AUDREY MCMAHON: You see, that she brooked no interference. Now I don't—she was undisciplined.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: She was a pioneer with a vengeance.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, but she did so much. The trouble—the one thing against Mrs. Force that I think is a common criticism that I feel is that she backed her people to the hilt, but she had a limited group—she backed, for example, Alexander Brook enormously, and certainly she couldn't have backed a better artist. But there were many others who tried, and tried, and tried, and tried, and it meant—it was a matter of life and death to an artist in those days to show in the Whitney.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And there were all sorts of brilliant artists who never got to show in the Whitney for a variety of reasons.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, you know, I've heard about her ability to buy paintings, and that she would buy, say for example, eight Brooks when she might conceivably have spread it among three or four—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, she blacklisted and blackballed people in her own mind. I mean, she just didn't care for them, and that was it, and it was a matter of personal taste. Now when you buy art, it is a matter of personal taste.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure, it is.

AUDREY MCMAHON: So her museum was an extension of her own taste. The Whitney money was given to her to spend.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I see.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And she spent it. So she had a perfect right to do it, except that it's a contention of mine, and was then, that you don't own any work of art yourself whether you buy it or not.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And therefore, you haven't got the right to quite that much arbitrary selectivity. That's a personal point of view.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, I don't know because that doesn't run with the land either [laughs].

AUDREY MCMAHON: No, that's true.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That's a very interesting insight into Mrs. Force. Though I suspect the Whitney Museum was a center for contemporary art—

[00:40:00]

AUDREY MCMAHON: It was a wonderful center for contemporary art. And it was the greatest inspiration to those artists whom it helped, and it helped a great many artists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And there was nothing else like it anywhere in the United States. So that really, we can't and didn't have a Luxembourg, you know. We had nothing. So we did have the Whitney Museum, which was wonderful. It was marvelous. But it was terrifyingly limited: Hopper and Brook, you know, and people like that—Demuth.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Of course, Demuth is wonderful, and I doubt that we ever would have heard of Demuth if it hadn't been for the Whitney Museum. So it did a great deal of good. I don't want to belittle it in any possible way, but it left so much undone when it could have done more. That's all.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, and I think it reaped this too later on during the years or months of the PWAP, because the Whitney Museum was made a focal point for pressure—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —in the form of organized artists who either wanted it extended or continued. I remember it was nipped in the bud, I think, within—the notice went out that in four months it was going to terminate.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Now there were continuing projects, however, and I wonder who fell heir to those.

AUDREY MCMAHON: You mean of the PWA?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That were not finished within four months, were not even finished within six months.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh no, they were longer than that.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Much longer.

AUDREY MCMAHON: It was a year and a half, I think.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, let's see. The fact that they had worked into the law in Washington a 25¢ minimum wage whetted the financial appetites of sharecroppers in the South who left the farms as sharecroppers and went to the villages for this minimum wage. So Southern senators got very angry with President Roosevelt.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And since the balance of power in that early period rested on the seniority of Southern senators, he simply scuttled the CWA, which was the parent organization, and the PWAP, which was the art part underneath it.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But this overlooked the fact that there were works of art that were in process, murals and so on—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, they were all terminated.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: They were terminated?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes. I recall that—because I recall that they were terminated, and we

had nothing to do with terminating. But there was some sort of supervisory machinery established, because they were terminated, because I would be invited now and then to see one when terminated. And they terminated seriatim.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, they must have been housed once again under the real parent organization, the FERA?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Maybe so, I don't know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well—

AUDREY MCMAHON: We grew farther and farther apart. [Clears throat.] The rivalry diminished. We became strong and very active because we had so many facets to our program, so much imagination went into it, so many people brought so many imaginative offerings, and everybody could get a hearing, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And any idea was worth trying if it had any validity.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And need for our product was apparently—actually the market for the product was there too. And you know again today you see that there is a market for art when it's stimulated.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Because it's gone a full circle but now it's bought. Then it was given. But there was a market.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: This is not to say that everything we turned out was good, far from it, but a lot of good work was turned out too.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But we became so busy with our teaching in Bellevue, which was experimental, and also in all the schools and with our Institute of American—what was the—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Index.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —Index of American Design, which was so fabulous, which was Cahill's baby, and with our Design Institute, which was Joe Marble's heir, which was built somewhat on the Bauhaus tradition, which was never as great, and came to an earlier end, but still had made some contributions. Then with our collateral projects, we had so many collateral projects, and with the enormous amount of [clears throat] a demand for our murals and so on, that we never had time to think beyond the day or the moment that came.

[00:45:22]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: How did you—how were you effectively projected into the WPA?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, what happened was that I got a letter from Harry Hopkins—I'm trying to think just what did happen—talking to me about the national job, and asking me to come to Washington, whether it was Jake Baker that suggested this or whether it was Harry Hopkins himself. Harry Hopkins had been in social work.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm, in New York State.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, and I had met him through some one of these activities, and someone must have said, Talk to Audrey McMahon about who should head up the Project. I don't know. In any event, I went to Washington for a conference—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —and spent a week or ten days there, and we conferred a lot about



who might become the national head. That's the only connection I had with it at the time. It was purely an advisory thing [clears throat]. And I had suggested several people—I'm afraid I don't remember who they all were, but three or four people before suggesting Eddie Cahill. One of the ones I suggested, as I told you before, is Francis Taylor.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: But I had made other suggestions prior to that. Well, Harry Hopkins was very interested in getting Fran Taylor, and I came back and tried to get him. And he was not willing to leave the museum. He was then in the Philadelphia Museum.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And he didn't want to leave the museum. He was tempted. He asked for some certain time to think it over and then he decided, for purely personal reasons, that this was not for him. I don't know what those reasons were [clears throat]. And then I asked several other people's opinion, and someone suggested Eddie Cahill to me. And the minute they suggested Eddie Cahill—he was at that time with the Newark Museum—and the minute they suggested him I thought this was a natural. I knew him but I had not thought of him.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And I suggested him and I don't know if other people also did, they may well have done. And he was appointed. Well, he and I had many talks, you see, before he went down, and he asked me if I would take this area if and when he went to Washington. He told me, He would go and would I take this area. So I said, Yes, of course, I'd love to.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Because I would love to. [Laughs.]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: This was an extension of your interest anyway, Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah, and then along with people like the director of Chicago or San Francisco and several others, I was made an assistant national director. We were a group, and we didn't do very much in that area; we helped more in the beginning in establishing the procedures—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I see.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —which all of us had some experience through the current relief agencies that were in the various areas. So we worked quite hard and at some length for some months on and off in setting up administrative procedures and so forth, which, of course, became totally changed in succeeding years.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: But they served to get us on the road. And we worked through Eddie Cahill with Harry Hopkins through Jake Baker with Harry Hopkins. But we also worked with Harry Hopkins, who was a wonderful person to work with, and it was a pretty much of a spontaneous type of thing. And we didn't all get there together, you see, this was not possible. Once in a while there was a big regional, mostly they were regional meetings. I don't recall a national meeting. There may well have been one.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: I may have been. I may not have gone. This is where my memory—it was not important, and I wouldn't remember it. But Eddie and I, for many years, were very close, and he would come up and confer with me, or I would go down and confer with him there. And of course, understandably New York was one of the major regions. We had the greatest concentration of artists here.

[00:50:08]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And this was his home besides. So we became very close colleagues

certainly and surely for all of our WPA days, very close friends.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm. Well, you know, his experience with Dana—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —didn't exactly ill-prepare him for this.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Mm-mm [negative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, because Dana's tastes were —seemed to be catholic in terms of his catalogues.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And certainly, in terms of what little writings he left behind—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right, that's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —or lectures which would indicate a—

[Cross talk.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: Eddie had a very catholic taste. And he also had what was even better than that, he had a kind of a jolly, a good, earthly, jolly understanding of what makes artists tick. But beyond everything he had a really vital interest in Americana.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And his interest in the American artist was, oh, like your interest in your family or your priority for your own country. I mean, he cared about this.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

AUDREY MCMAHON: So he was really, a very good person for this, I think.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, he's been described to me as a man who knew how or who simply could be one of the boys with the boys.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Always was. Always was. Always was one of the boys with the boys, no problem. Everybody called him Eddie. He sat around with them and talked with them, and they all knew him well. And I tell you another enormous quality—in all of the years we worked together I never had a directive from Eddie to do or not to do anything as far as this Project was concerned that had to do with the artists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Never. This had been given to us to do here in New York; we did it. And he never interfered in any way. If he came into the picture, it was because we asked him to, and we asked him to a lot. So it was a really very good association during the WPA years. It didn't maintain that particular quality later, because we had many basic misunderstandings later. But during those working years, it was a very kind relationship, and I have good memories of what Eddie did. He did yeoman work for us. It was wonderful, wonderful.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think in part it's the design of the Federal Project itself, this particular project, would seem to bypass, for some reason, the local discretion of the local political leader of the organization that in relief. That is, the Federal Project Number One was in a sense centered in Washington, quotas were established that somehow—

AUDREY MCMAHON: It didn't bypass local—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, that is—the allocation of funds could not be touched necessarily by local political people.

AUDREY MCMAHON: No, they could not.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: They couldn't say—

AUDREY MCMAHON: And they resented that bitterly and they made life very hard for us as a result.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, but the design was so that these professional people or these artistic people, whether they were writers or creative people or artists, could do what they loved best, you see.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, it was left to us to determine—well, no. With Eddie we decided on our uncertain criteria, certain general criteria: how would we know, for example, that an artist was a professional artist? Well, a group of his peers, not on the Project, not eligible for the Project, would be a committee. But that group would be of my selecting, for example. I would be a member of that committee and any of my staff that I might designate [clears throat], but we would not outweigh the group, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I see.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, now we agreed on this, but I cannot tell you at this date whether Eddie suggested this, or whether I suggested, or whether I just did this, and Eddie approved it—I couldn't possibly tell you, but this is how it worked.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:55:04]

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, now certain artists did not have to conform to this because if they were on relief and needy, they had a terrific record of production that spoke for itself. For example, if one man had three one-man shows, you are not going to question. You may not like his things at all, but never mind, he's a practicing artist.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: So that we had to do that, because no matter who you got to serve, you got people who couldn't stand certain art expressions, and if they're going to do it purely on a subjective basis, they would have ruled those things out. Now when it came to murals and so on, we were up against a much tougher situation because we had the city fathers, we had the Art Commission, which had to accept every single work of art that went into a public building. So what we did there [clears throat] was to persuade Ernest Peixotto to be on our committee of original selection so that if we could see that the work of some artists was going to be totally unsuitable in their eyes, we could put him on something else where their judgement would not have anything to do with his product because there was no point in breaking his heart and butting our heads against a stone wall, and there was plenty of work for everybody.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure, and this made sense as a business.

AUDREY MCMAHON: It seems to have, seems to have. So—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think what you're saying in a sense is that while Project was in a sense centered in Washington, the discretion to tailor-make the program was left to the discretion of the region?

AUDREY MCMAHON: The Project was centered in the region. It was not centered in Washington. The administrative head was in Washington, and the procedures went forth from there and the ukases went forth from there. And when projects had to be cut, it was Eddie who took the brunt of it, who had to notify us what we had to do, and when there were grave criticisms leveled, it was he who had to tell us that this change might have to be made or that. But the Project was centered here, and don't you ever think that we were able to function without our local administrative administrators. Colonel Somervell closed the Bellevue teaching project.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: He did?

AUDREY MCMAHON: He did. He closed it between the exit at Bellevue and his car as we were walking together, he and I—he said, That closes. Now if I had wanted to jeopardize a great many other things, and invite his investigation into them, I would have fought that. But since only about 20 artists were functioning there, and I had plenty of other places to

take them, and we had done a three-year-experimental job or so, three or so years there, and the psychiatrist who used our work— what was her name? Schindler—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Schindler, yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: — had gotten what she needed for her books and so on, and since it was diagnostic work and not treatment work, there was no harm to anyone to accept this although we were very bitter about it. We decided that that was the better part of valor. Less people would be hurt. But he did it. No, I walked the tightrope during the whole Somervell period and before him, Ritter.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, Ritter is a—

[00:59:29]

AUDREY MCMAHON: No, I walked this tightrope. You see, what I was, was a buffer state really between these two quantities: the purely administrative, which had very little concept as to what we were really about; the obligation to see that we didn't do anything that was improper, misuse the money, employ communists knowingly, disturb, deface, do anything obscene or pornographic, which of course, we never had leveled that. That was one of the better things. I never had any problem there; overstep the bounds with all our strikes, which we were of course in continuous state of siege and so on, that side; and the artists who wanted more, more, more. And when the Artists' Congress got moving, would pressured me and I was a buffer state between them and the administrators only because if they had gotten at him, since he didn't know what they were talking about at all, they would have been clobbered.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And I knew this, and so I constituted myself and my administrative staff a wall, you see, and we got for them what we could and made ourselves their voice. But, oh, it was exciting as all get out, but it was very tough. Don't ever think that was an easy job.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, not at all. That is to say, they were snapping from both sides.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And unreasonable snapping from both sides.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, I remember one funny instance which is sort of indicative. One day when I was at Columbus Avenue for some reason, Somervell had sent for me, and I was there. When I came out there were two picket lines against me, and one were the conservatives that suggested that "McMahon be sent back to Moscow, where she'd come from;" and you know, I was born right here.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And the other one, the [Artists'] Congress, which said, "McMahon has armed guards," which of course, I didn't have and so on. And they met and marched back like so.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.] [Coughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: And of course, I left, and they disbanded, and my home was picketed for months. We had to come in the back way for months. And I got dispossessed—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —usually by the Artists' Congress, usually by the more aggressive side, although sometimes by the conservatives also.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: I can't possibly think for a moment that I was popular. I'm sure I was not. Now in retrospect I can't go out without meeting several artists. I'm very popular—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I bet you are.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —because now we're all such good friends, but I know that I must have been much hated at the time, much. I wasn't aware of it then.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You were too busy.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Much too busy.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm. Once you had the notion that you were going to run this region—it included all of New York, New Jersey?

AUDREY MCMAHON: I didn't know that, I didn't know that. That then became something that Cahill and Hopkins and Baker and so on, laid out.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And then we were merely called in, or at least I for my part, and I was given what really is a mandate, you see, to run New York City technically and administratively. And I don't remember—no, New York City and New York State, technically and administratively and then New Jersey and—did I have another state? For a while Pennsylvania, or the eastern part of Pennsylvania. I didn't go into New England, no, purely administrative with local people.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Ben Knotts was in Pennsylvania and—no, I didn't run New York State. Yes, I did. But I had local—there wasn't very much happening in New York State. We had Ludens [ph], Jean Ludens, in Woodstock, and different people, but as far as the scattered artists were concerned they were part of the central situation.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm, yeah.

[01:04:58]

AUDREY MCMAHON: But I had really—my technical responsibility was limited really to New York City, Woodstock, a few of the metropolitan area, and Buffalo, I would say. And a few artists hither and yon.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, but it was enormous, you know. This is vast!

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure, it was.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And in Jersey there was someone else in charge, I don't remember who it was, under me.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: There was a woman out there, I believe.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Was there? I don't recall, I just don't remember. I remember Ben Knotts was in Philadelphia. But we had quite a large project in New Jersey.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, Michael Lenson, I've talked with him.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But I don't recall who the administrator was.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Carolyn Trainor.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, well I know Carolyn Trainor—I don't remember that well.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, but once you had some idea as to what this region was, what did you do? Turn around the find a staff?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh, yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Where did you get your staff?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, I had some of the people. I had Harry Knight from the CWA, and Diller.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Diller Alton [ph]?

AUDREY MCMAHON: I think so.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes. Oh no, not Diller. Harry Knight—Yes, Diller, and Carl Trainum.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Carl Trainum .

AUDREY MCMAHON: Those three I had and those three were the—and Mildred then Holtzauer, and she didn't go to Washington right away. She was in New York first, and then Eddie Cahill wanted her for him to help him on the national level, and so she left us. But for quite a while she was with us and helped here. And then I had some other people who have vanished from the scene completely, who were with us in the College Art, who wanted to come over—and then the CWA and so on, who wanted to come over and do this. So I had the nucleus of a staff, you see. Well, we set the project up in accordance with procedures that Eddie and I worked out, you see, and that we were given, and that he worked out with other people other than that, but he and I worked out originally that would work here and got millions of directives from him and from Ritter and from everybody. They were usually heaped like that on the desk, and I got staff right here. But Carl Trainum was a superb administrator.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Was he?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh, superb! He did a great deal of the administrative hiring, and Harry Knight was an extraordinary man because he was a mediocre painter. His brother was a better painter than he, Fred. I have a Fred Knight on the wall there.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, do you?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, but Harry was an interesting person. He would tell you that he knew nothing about administration and in effect technically he didn't, but he was a natural administrator. And he took to this like a duck takes to water, so he set up all the committees.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Did he?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, all that, you see. And it was done beautifully with great sensitivity. He was a very sensitive person with enormous sensitivity, with enormous understanding, and with enormous humility, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That is rare.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes. Oh, he was a rare person. And then Diller who was a far more intransigent person, you see, but with impeccable taste at that time, you see, set up the purely technical committees. And those two worked very well together, Harry and Diller, you see. And they were a fine unit, then Trainum was my assistant. Harry and Trainum were my assistants, well then Harry, Diller and Trainum became my assistants. And they were my guides and counselors, too. And I really learned from them and with them. Then we set up our technical committees, on all of which I served ex-officio, and when something was beyond my scope or knowledge, I merely sat in and learned. And after I had been there for a year or two, I knew too, you see, along with the rest of them. Then there were areas of what was within my scope and knowledge and in those I was effective from the beginning, naturally, because I had these many years of training before in the other work.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

[01:10:29]

AUDREY MCMAHON: Eddie Jewell, for example, was enormously helpful unofficially.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Was he?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, he was my close, close friend, you see. And Eddie Jewell had helped me collect the travelling shows, you see. He had helped just as a friend. He liked to do it. He and I—we used to go fishing together and we also collected art works together, you see. And there were people like that around that just helped. They were challenged by this,

and it was above the call of duty really, because Eddie Jewell was a very busy man. But because he was an enormous admirer of Francis Taylor, and Francis Taylor helped me. Because he was a close friend, you see; he was then at Worcester by then—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —to which he returned later, but that time he was at Worcester. And when I had a very knotty technical problem, I took it to him. Marceau also helped. And Howard Jane—Horace Jane was invaluable in those years. And all these people whose job it wasn't helped, you see, and John Shapley helped. And all these people, who really had nothing to do with it, who didn't get a cent for it, who weren't on any committee, just helped. We sat up into the wee hours of the night and looked at hundreds and thousands of submissions, you see. And we judged the artists that you see. The relief people judged their eligibility. We took them when they were eligible and we judged them solely by their work. But everybody who claimed he was an artist got a job with us but not necessarily producing art.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: That was the point. He might sweep out the office, he might become a janitor, or he might become a technician of some sort, or a frame maker, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Or if he were better than that, a teacher—maybe of small children or whatever he might become, or a painter or a sculptor, which he might well be in his own right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure, sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But he had been designated as an artist and he was therefore eligible for some assistance on our program, by our program while it was unlimited. And it was our job to see that we did not abuse this and that we placed him where he would be productive. And when they were not productive, they were put into other areas of work. And this was hardest to achieve with the best artists, not with the less good.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But people like Harry Gottlieb, for example, deluged us with work. He just deluged us with brilliant, just fantastic. Harry Gottlieb did his best work with us, the best work he's ever done, superb work. Those lithographs he did of the kids bathing—he's never done anything like that since, never.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Just brilliant.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, you know, look at it from their point of view, this is a steady shot in the arm compared to what it had been.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, you see, we got people that were prone to try to abuse it. As I say, those would be the more arrived artists who had in their hearts a resentment, of course, you see. I'm not going to mention any names.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, but I understand—

AUDREY MCMAHON: But we had our difficulties with the best-known people who felt that whatever this wage was, you see, it was so petty compared to what they felt that their product was worth. And the standards which we set for production were fairly high, and they were not inclined to give us this much. Now we were also allowed a certain group of artists who were not on relief, you know that.

[01:15:13]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: This is the non-relief professional, advisor, or supervisors—

AUDREY MCMAHON: —supervisors. But they had to produce also, and this was—we used

this to be a spur professionally to the young and up-and-coming artists, and it worked. But we had Guglielmi. I think we discovered—I think Guglielmi discovered Guglielmi.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, I think so. And then the others, many others. And then again, we had artists who were paid nothing, who had a certain competence when they came this and this, they couldn't function under this, and they disintegrated. But the great majority, the great, great majority, found a way of life. And while many of them were not great, great artists, and many of the murals, as I now see them, I don't think they were very good, many of the things were absolutely brilliant.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And this place, this Project is to me like a tunnel, like a long, dark tunnel with a light at the end. I think it was wonderful.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The total product is illuminating.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right. I think it was wonderful.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Thousands of children were taught, you know, before the artists—oh, you know one of the great things that was accomplished in New York by the WPA, and has lasted? And that is for the first time in the history of the schools, art was taught by artists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And the colleges agreed that you didn't have to have a master's degree to teach drawing and painting. Well, this was revolutionary, believe me, but today it's par for the course.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: This lasted, and you could have a thick foreign accent and still be a good teacher of painting, or drawing, or sculpture.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That in itself is a contribution.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Enormous. You know, I can't tell you—before that old maids taught drawing and painting from diagrams in books. It's really true—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —maybe not in New York but certainly farther afield, and in New York to a certain extent too.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: But this brought the artists into the school, into contact with the children, and today only artists in settlement houses and in places where young children are taught, teach drawing and painting. Nobody else. They don't take anybody else.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Musicians teach music, artists teach art.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, it's not so remarkable, but it certainly didn't exist when we went into business.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: It wasn't there.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Was the pressure steady from the artists as organized? You know one



thing that has always troubled me is how do you account for individualistic artists, these individuals really, collectively organizing? Because organizations are in the air at that time?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Organization was in its infancy, but it was very active, like infants are.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes [laughs].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And the pressure was sporadic. It was not constant.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: It was sporadic, but it was violent. And they were very undisciplined. They organized but it was the most disorganized organization that you can imagine. And they did some things that today that would be considered highly unorganized by themselves.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: I mean highly unorthodox. For example, the time when they held us captive, you know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: For example, that extraordinary—well, that today wouldn't be, couldn't be. No group would be permitted to hold any other group captive.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But they held us captive. And the lie-down strikes, and the sit-down strikes, and when they lay on top of the—

[01:20:02]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Somervell's office.

AUDREY MCMAHON: The files and in front of my car and things like that, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And the picketing of people's homes, like my home was picketed, that wouldn't be done today.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: They do regard today—organizations regard the private individual's private life as his private life. Organized labor is much more disciplined today, and they've won more battles by this discipline than they won then. But they were teething, and we were teething. I had never heard of a union before, and I didn't really know just what a union was, you know?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And a model's union—this was not to be believed, you see. But we had terrific strikes, and models were the least disciplined of all people. And they didn't know how to go about anything, so they just went about it as the spirit moved them. And since they used their bodies to pose, they also used their bodies to strike and lay down on the floor. And there they were and stayed. But the pressure was pretty serious, and it got worse and worse as the art projects began to be curtailed, you know. And the feeling against the administration was very strong. I never had terribly intense feeling against me expressed. I'm sure it was there.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: But it was never expressed. I couldn't possibly tell you why. It was always sort of understood that this against us was *pro forma* that it was really directed at Somervell, Ritter, and so forth the administration. And that we were to convey this. We were to make it known.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: They would do anything necessary whatever it took, but it was for the purpose of making it known [in other quarters where there was no, no communication, there was no communication whatsoever. Actually, I very often felt that I was the only person who -Ed.] spoke both languages, even including Diller and Trainum and everybody else, because all those lads became completely subjective. Their face was turned toward the artist totally, and understandably this is a sympathetic side.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right, sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: I had to have two faces: one turned towards the people who gave me my instructions, which I had to carry out—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —until I made some very bitter complaints in Washington myself and got freed of a great deal of Somervell's supervision, and a lot came to me directly. I made some very, very brave complaints, and they were justified. They later proved to be totally justified.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Because we were strangled there for a while.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, the press reveals a series of numbers games which you played in the sense that 39 percent must be cut the next week—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And 29 percent, in short, they overplayed their hand.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And this office was, so far as I'm aware, invaded, you know, the pressure was brought to bear on him. He asked for a hearing and didn't know how to conduct one or conducted it in a kind of military fashion.

AUDREY MCMAHON: He conducted it in a military fashion.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Listened to the man and then dismissed him though he wasn't entitled to stand around and hear what might conceivably have said.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You know, totally undemocratic—

AUDREY MCMAHON: And then we would have, for example, one of my people in for a hearing and I was not allowed to hear what they said. This person would ask for me to be there, but no, I was not permitted. But then Somervell himself would tell me what had transpired, but, of course, I could never be sure that this was really what had transpired—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —partly because I didn't believe him, and partly because he interpreted according to his own limited views, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Then we had Paul Edwards, you remember Paul Edwards?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Paul Edwards, yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: I think he succeeded Somervell.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And Paul Edwards, who now lives in San Juan, has his business there, was easily the best of our administrators. No administrator is good.

[01:25:06]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.] This is kind of interesting!

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, I don't know how you can be a good administrator of this kind of an undertaking. You are at loggerheads because you have to remember that you yourself are getting directives from people who are only seeing charts and plans and numbers. And it's your job to carry these things out, and they are receiving criticisms and so on. So they give it to you, and it's your job to channel it on. No administrator is good. He's bound to be the butt; he's bound to be hated. But Paul Edwards and I were able to get along well and stay friends to this day. And Paul Edwards and Carl Trainum became close friends, and when the projects closed, Edwards, who got a job in San Juan, a government job, and brought Trainum as an assistant. And Trainum is now a very wealthy man and is retired from his own businesses in the Virgin Islands. But he got his start that way.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: But Paul Edwards was a very sensitive administrator, and he was least strong, but he was by all odds the best.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I suppose in some ways it depends on whose ox is being gored, doesn't it?

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But you see, just as I say to you, "No administrator is good," so it would not surprise me if some artists said to you, meaning me, "No administrator is good," you see. That's why I said, I'm quite sure I must have been hated the way I, in turn, hated with a mass hatred that was below me. I hated the people that I had to butt my head against and all their world that maintained a politic approach—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —because I had to deal not only with Somervell, but with hundreds of his men and women who represented him. All of whom were just carrying out orders and doing their best, and each one in turn being a buffer between Somervell and me.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: It was this kind of a thing, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.] It was a game of musical chairs.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, it was really terrific.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: A shifting scene, yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But you can understand that it had to be that way because what we had to do was to reach thousands of people, and we did.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: What I'm not quite sure of: was Somervell placed in this position by Hopkins or had Hopkins moved on by this time?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh no, it wasn't Hopkins. I don't know who put the—would it be Hopkins? Oh my no! He hadn't moved on—it's not to be believed. It isn't to be believed.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, except the sensitivity which the Washington scene may have had to Congress—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —and not especially because of the artists, but Hallie Flanagan, for

example, started the *Living Newspaper*.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: *One-Third of a Nation* had gone to such heroic historical accuracy as to quote some senators correctly.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, I know. Isn't that dreadful?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Which is marvelous in the sense of the flaming sword she was.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's for sure. She was so wonderful.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But not wise in the sense of an administrator.

AUDREY MCMAHON: No, no.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Because it meant the death of that particular project.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, I know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, it may have been—what? Leaning before an expected wind that caused the introduction of the engineer type of mentality as—

[Cross talk.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, he had Ritter before that. Why would he have Ritter? I can't imagine.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: I mean, it just doesn't seem possible.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, it doesn't.

AUDREY MCMAHON: No, no, it was a succession. I think he was forced. I think his hand must have been forced. He must have been obliged to take a purely strong—I think in Ritter he took a wealthy man—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —where there could be no question of graft and so on. Well, there wasn't any question. I think Somervell was indicted for a graft, wasn't he?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

[01:30:00]

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, I don't know, I don't know. I know there were two unfelicitous choices, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: I don't know whether the artists felt that I was an unfelicitous choice. I suppose so, but less because [clears throat] I worked with them on so many projects—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —that it was much less. I initiated so many things that they thought of because they thought of them, you see. All this was unknown to Somervell. I mean if I went to Somervell with an idea, that was its death. I had to go in a very circuitous way. And there were many—there were a couple of years there where Somervell and I ostensibly were friends. I made a big effort—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: You see, I never could get on at all with Ritter, not at all, and why they kept me here I'll never know, why Washington kept me in spite of that, but they did. But I

decided, I determined to get on with the next administration. And when Somervell came in—well, of course, first of all I should say that Ritter never bothered us the way Somervell did.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: His was a much remoter administrator. It was arbitrary and it was Germanic, but it was remoter, and it was catholic, but it was remoter—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —so that we weren't troubled as much by it. It was more troublesome when it came, but it came more rarely.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: But I determined that on behalf of the Project I would get on with the next administrator. And it must have been two years before Somervell, and I ran afoul of one another openly. He liked me, he said. He had dinner at my house; he and his wife and my husband and I did things, certain things, together. And we entertained them; they entertained us. There was at least lip service. He was very courteous to me for a long time. It was not until he became harassed, and until certain series of strikes where he played me so foul. He had me be hostess once to Mrs. Roosevelt when he knew, and I did not, that he was going to raid the project, which was then on Project headquarters, which was then on one of the East streets.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: He was going to raid that and have the models, who were lying down in a strike, pulled out by his police. And he had one so badly injured. I don't know whether it was fatal or not. And I never forgave him, and it was war from then on. It was war before, but it was war with gloves on, then it was war with gloves off—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —from then on.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But he promised me that he would not—I said, You won't go into that project even though they are striking there tonight because I can't be there. You see, I was always there if anything happened. And he said, No, I won't do anything whatever. And he said, But if you will take care of this for me because Mrs. Somervell and I have to be away, and we can't receive Mrs. Roosevelt, and we must have a hostess and so forth. And I said, Well, it's an honor to receive Mrs. Roosevelt, I'd be glad to but I just want to be sure that nothing will happen. The next morning, I went in there and what a shambles [inaudible], and a bloody shambles is what I see. So that was war from then on. But even before that, things were worsening. And as the strikes got very, very, very virulent against us; him and me, he—when he saw that we were not on one side—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —I then went to the other side in his mind, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: So—and then when he started this witch hunt for the communists on the Project, I fought him to a standstill on that on. You know, I refused to do—I very often didn't do what I was ordered to do. I didn't, by any means, always do what I was ordered to do. I counted on time, tide, and normal forgetfulness to get me by with a lot of omissions.

[01:35:07]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And I would stall a lot on things I had to do. Sometimes I had to do them in the end. Sometimes they went by the board. But of course, there were times when I just had to. And then, of course, when he was gone, there were periods in between him and

Paul Edwards when we got our directives directly from Washington to lay off X number of people. This was the beginning of the end.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And I stayed to the end of the projects. And I was the administrator for all four away at the end in the last three or four months—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —because of my deep conviction that this was so wonderful. And I thought somebody—it'll be worse with somebody else, I'm a scapegoat now. I'll be a scapegoat. It'll be worse with somebody else who doesn't care about these people.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: So I stayed with it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: What was the—

AUDREY MCMAHON: So did Harry Knight.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, yes. Well, was Eddie Cahill helpful in difficulties?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh, heavens yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I mean with difficulties.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Eddie Cahill—oh, in difficulties? No. Eddie was the technical head—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —of the Project only. He had no administrative responsibility for us, I don't believe. And while we would go to him, and he would always talk with us what was happening, he very—he would never do anything. Well, once in a while he appealed to Harry Hopkins, yes, but in the main, no.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

AUDREY MCMAHON: In the main, no. I'm afraid that what the situation must have been was that Eddie must have known these things were coming through and had fought his fight before ever they left him and could no longer do anything.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: He would no longer be effective.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, it may have been—what is it?—we'll live to fight another day.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, I do also feel and I gathered the beginning of our differences came toward the end of the project—projects, when Eddie really, to my way of thinking, didn't help enough or at all.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, I've heard him described in the—on several occasions as a man who was marvelous informally, but miserable in a formal situation like a speech or a talk.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, he was a very bad speaker and all that. But I'm not speaking of that. I am speaking of fighting.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, in the—

AUDREY MCMAHON: It was not a fight—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No. This is a—

AUDREY MCMAHON: —you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —another aspect—

AUDREY MCMAHON: It was not a fight. Now, I don't know people would have said some very dreadful things to you about me, but they will never have said that I wasn't a fighter.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: I am quite sure of that—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: —because I fought tooth and nail every inch of the way.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And so the—they won't have said that. I'm quite conscious of that, you see. They will have objected very often, because I didn't see it their way or whatever, or because when I did carry it out, I carried it out.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: No, I don't know any other way of doing a very distasteful job than just go ahead and do it, you know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And of course, if you're going to be an administrator of a marvelous thing like this, you are going to take the bad with the good because you won't have the good unless you take the bad, you know. It's not always going to be duck soup, and building, and building, and building. The day of reckoning is going to come, and if you have any sense at all you know this. I knew this when I took the job.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: I didn't have to be told that. I knew that what had a beginning would also have an end. And that the beginning would be wonderful, and stimulating, and marvelous, and creative. And that the—at the end, I would be the goat. I knew it, but all right, there would be all those other years and things one could do—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —so it was worth it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Sure.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, I did talk to, let's see, Jeffrey Norman—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh, yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —who became a kind of roving, or at least went up to Woodstock—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —when there was some clash of personalities some place.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And he said, "You weren't running a hospital, that's for sure."

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.] "And it's impossible sometimes to resolve clashes which are personality things."

[01:40:05]

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: "There's no way of collecting evidence one way or another."

AUDREY MCMAHON: No, and besides we were not judges.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, and nor would—nor did the law contain the process whereby this was defeated.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Nor should they. I mean, we—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —had been a form of vigilante—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —otherwise. And this—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —we could not be—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: What we had to be sure of in that Woodstock situation—there were some people who were reactionary, and then there was the Ludens contingent that was purportedly liberal. Well, they didn't—I don't remember the name of the man who was so opposed to Ludens, but I knew it quite well at the time. And I'm sure he had much on his side. However, the preponderance of feeling was for Ludens. And Ludens seemed an earnest person, and I offered him not to be the head and just to be on the Project, because he was a very quiet sort of person.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And I thought he'd be happier that way. And he said, No, having thrown my hat into the ring and knowing just why—and I think it was a racial thing, you see. It was an anti-Semitic thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And he added that this was never voiced by him or by me. It has never been voiced until today, actually.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But he said, Having thrown my hat into the ring and having gone this far, it's a matter for me of my own feeling that I want to see it through. And he said, So I will, if it's all right with you, I will. And I said, Well, if you want to, you do. [Inaudible]. It took courage.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: It took courage. A lot of courage. And it took physical courage.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes, the drainage is terrible.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The toll in the course of—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —the daytime is enormous.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Just terrible. But I'll tell you, he never did his good work again. Never. His work suffered immeasurably.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.



AUDREY MCMAHON: Before that I thought he was a most promising artist. Not anymore, no, never again.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, you know, it had its effect. It was bound to have its effect—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —in varying degrees on a whole host of people.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh, of course, of course, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Unprecedented opportunity to do what you wanted to do, you know—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —and then, having the new adjustments to make—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —to the new.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right. And, you see, you had both more liberty and more restrictions than you were accustomed to in your life. And you had this liberty and these restrictions in areas that you didn't—hadn't before; had either liberty or restriction. And that you had not yet seen as areas with liberty restrictions. Sometimes the program went ahead of the development of the individual, and the development—the individual had to run and catch up with it—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —you see, the artist matured on the job. The unions matured on the job. I matured on the job. And all my administrators who were young people—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —and eager young people, mostly artists, matured on the job. And here we were all growing at the same time as this mammoth thing was growing. It wasn't administered by a group of older people who had had precedent, experience. It was a peer management, that we were peers.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: We were all—most of the artists were either my age or older than I, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And they're all around now. Well, some have died, but largely they're around now, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And this—it was this group that learned and grew while learning, and I certainly, as I told you before, had such slight administrative training, you see. Now maybe I would have done much better, and maybe they would have done much better, if they had had a person—if I had had more training, or they had had a person with more training. But they would not have gotten the enthusiasm, the belief, the courage, and the unending 24-hour-a-day effort. It was nothing for us to work three and four days without stopping, no nights. We all believed deeply in what we were doing. I'm positive that everyone of us, even Carl Trainum, who was the least involved, believed deeply in what we were doing. Certainly, I believed in it passionately.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:45:13]

AUDREY MCMAHON: And I believe in it still as passionately.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs] you know, it's an interesting thing. I think it made believers of a lot of participants. I mean, I've talked to an artist here and an artist there. Well, Michael Lenson is a case.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: He's a flaming torch for this—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —and looks for, anticipates the government, as the people doing something—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —to sustain that.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And is, to the—to the extent that he's sour at all, he is sour at the fact that preparedness, the struggle between the Committee to Aid America by Aiding the Allies and the America First Committee sort of swept us into a sort of eddy—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And Hitler and Mussolini were on the march.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And, you know, suddenly this marvelous creative excitement—the glass blowers in New Jersey—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —you know—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —reconstituting an industry that has been dormant, let's say, for 17 years.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah, and the silk screen people.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Exactly.

AUDREY MCMAHON: It's fabulous. And no matter where I go, I run into artists that were with us, and they said, "Those were the wonderful days." And then I say, "What are you doing now?" "Well, I'm working along the lines I did then, but now, I've done so and so and so and so, and I've built on that." And no one of them today—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —says this was bad. Many say it was bad then, but no one of them today—at least no one has said it to me.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: No one of them today. They all remember what was good, because what was good was so alive, and they've all profited from it—everyone. And look who is in various jobs today who was on the Project then.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Look at—look at the people. I mean—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —it's fabulous. And of course, now this is a good many years after

they've finished those jobs. They've retired from then. This is now past. This is ancient history, but think what it did, just think of the upsurge of art in the United States. You can't tell me this didn't come from that. It did, you know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, you know, it was like a—

AUDREY MCMAHON: It was a naissance, not a renaissance.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure, the same switch that saw artists go from Romany Marie's to the Jungle Shop—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Naturally.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —saw art go from—they wanted the local show—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —out in—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —Long Beach—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Long Beach.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —until they—

AUDREY MCMAHON: —until it became—

[Cross talk.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —part of the WPA which was—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, weren't they wonderful?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's what Mildred did.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: With the creation of Federal Art Centers—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —which none had existed before.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right. You see, and that's why Eddie wanted her because she and I had done this in New York, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And she was wonderful at it, just marvelous.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And of course, technically she was far better trained than I. She had less administrative training, even less [laughs]. But technically having been married to an artist, and so forth—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —better training than I. It was really—and a beautiful eye. She had a wonderful eye, a wonderful person. She was marvelous.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, listen there's this enormous record that was created throughout the land on the Index of American Design.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, it was.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: This was a special kind of thing.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, and it's beautiful in itself. It's so interesting. And it's very much like primitive American painting and early American craftwork. They were so simple, stark really, and they are basically beautiful. This is rendering. And—but it's—each piece is basically beautiful. Each piece that was accepted by the Index of American Design can bear a microscopic examination. And is as well executed in itself as a square inch of an old master, technically.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: They are beautiful technical efforts. Naturally, they're not creative things. They're renderings, but they are superb—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —technically. And this put to work all kinds of people who really had no creative ability, but enormous technical skill.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right, right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And it's marvelous. I mean, and you can't get that kind of rendering by any other methods.

[01:50:05]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Your camera won't do it. Nothing else will, and it does marvels. And look at Berenice Abbott—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Of course.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —and *Changing New York*, which I had right here—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —on the right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That's marvelous.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And all the photographic things that were done, I mean, just so much was done it was so marvelous.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, well, of course, when I talk about it, I'm just so enthusiastic about it because to me it marked a real high spot. It was a wonderful privilege and a great experience to be able to live with this.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: It was terrifying and dreadful in many areas. It was the hardest work any human being could be called upon to do, because we had absolutely everything to do and learn at once, to create, to build. We moved in, we sat up shops. We would set up a shop today and open it tomorrow. We gave shows. I remember the day that Mayor La Guardia came to one of our shows—and whose work was I showing? Was it Gorky? I think it was Gorky. And La Guardia, whom I adored but who really knew but nothing about art said, If that's painting, I'm a Tammany politician. And I said, All right, Mr. Mayor, then you're a Tammany politician.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: And some newspaper picked that up—You can find that one in the press, you see—Then he laughed, of course, and then we were always very good friends. And he was always very good friends with the artists, but he didn't really know very much about it. He thought that because he played the—what was it—trombone, or trumpet, or something —

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: He loved to conduct.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, that he was an artist. But really, you know, this was a limited talent, shall we say, at least for the arts, but he was a great appreciator.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Indeed, he was.

AUDREY MCMAHON: He really was. And a wonderful person to have while this was enduring its growing pains, you know. I doubt that anyone else that we've ever had since would have been as tolerant.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think you're right. Of course, that time was made for it too.

AUDREY MCMAHON: The time was made for it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: The time was made for it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, it threw him to the surface.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's true. That's quite true.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But it was really a wonderful time to have lived, and a wonderful time to have worked, and a wonderful thing to have been a part of, with all of its headaches, and they were legion, that head ached from morning till night, and from night till morning.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, you know the handwriting was on the wall quite early in some ways.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: For example, it was symptomatic in those miserable articles which were published in the *Mirror*.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Almost an advance thing.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But you know they are no worse than the kind of attack that all the social welfare agencies today get from the *World-Telegram*.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Of course.

AUDREY MCMAHON: It's the same sort of thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But the attacks from the *World-Telegram* do not spell the doom of the agencies, whereas the attacks from the *Mirror* were an indication of the doom. And there was that difference. We knew we were doomed. We were bound to be doomed, and if we were any good, we had to hope we were doomed because we were an emergency manager and a tide-over program. If we made more of it, and we did, more power to everybody who put his two cents worth in. But what we were was a tide-over program and a way of doing it without killing hope in people—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —you know?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But still, what happened to us was that we lost sight of the fact, every one of us from the artists through the administrator, lost sight of the fact that we were temporary and a tide-over because we couldn't bear to have it stop.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That was the real thing, you see. But we were doomed from the day we were created, like man is doomed to die. You know, we were doomed.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Likely forces had already appeared.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Martin Dies was riding high.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Martin Dies—well, we were next on the investigating. I had been called to Washington for investigation, but I never was investigated. I underwent the aldermanic here before that—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —in New York, you know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, oh yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But Hallie Flanagan was investigated, and I was next. And she said I could sit in on hers, so I would learn the ropes because I had been put down as the next one. And then, somehow or other through the grace of God, he was called off, and I never was investigated. I was scared to death, just petrified.

[01:55:22]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah. But these were the new forces.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, these were new forces.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Isn't it hideous to think of them as new forces?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I never even thought until just this moment of what a hideous expression I used, because you see this was the period of carving out the right to organize, among other things.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: This wasn't settled until 1937.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: So this whole period was a kind of restless one until men could band together and bargain collectively.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, who became the whipping posts?

AUDREY MCMAHON: We did.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Hallie Flanagan.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah, that's right. She did.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It wasn't—

AUDREY MCMAHON: She took it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure. It wasn't until after the Wagner Act was passed that retrospectively they began examining certain unions.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But the Wagner Act was passed, it was sustained in the Constitutional test—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —artfully by these young Harvard attorneys—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —in the government. But until that time, Dies had to have somebody to holler at and scream at: the Writer's Project provided him with a fruitful field for exploration.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: As did the Theater Project—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, that was [cross talk].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —as did the artists.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You see.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Of course.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And you had a couple lists for the fact that there was Harrington, again a military engineer.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, all right, he's got—he has—he had a what—a social job to do and was ill-prepared to do it.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, the wrong people were certainly put into those jobs, and, of course, this right to organize was something that we didn't understand. I didn't understand in the beginning either. I had to be taught that the—they—that workers had a right to organize.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: When they organized in their first union—I don't remember what the name of the group was organizing—and presented their demands to me on a collective bargaining basis I said—if I remember correctly, I said, You elect a spokesman, and he and I will discuss this. I was absolutely green. I had no idea, and I didn't think I was being unfair or anything, nor did I wish to curtail anything. [Aircraft sound] I just thought we'd get further if two people talk to one another. They would elect whom they wanted. I was already elected since I was designated, and we'd see what we could do.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, they have come back to that to some degree because they do have their spokesman, but at that time they didn't.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: You know, they used to all come and—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That's right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —see me. Thirty, 40, 75, 100, 300, 600—all, and all of them spoke as they wished. They learned too—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —the art of collective bargaining.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And we learned it at the same time—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —you see. We learned it also.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But this was a frightening prospect to what might be termed The Establishment.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

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HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And, for example, the first sit-in demonstrations were in your own place—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —not in the Ford Motor Company and—

AUDREY MCMAHON: No.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You see.

AUDREY MCMAHON: No.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: For example, if you look back, the first verbal assaults on foreign affairs come out of the Artists' Union.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You know—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —Hitler and Mussolini—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —long before—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Long before—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —the rest of us even discovered that they existed.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But of course, they are—the artists are these seers of politics, of the political world—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —and not the party politics. And so they should be. They are—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —the sensitized people and they should have that [inaudible]. And they should be avant-garde. And they are—and we should not—nobody should, they should not, we should not resent them. We should be glad that we have feelers in our people. We should listen and watch. We don't have to follow and accept.



HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But we should be glad for that. It's so stupid to be so limited and to— but, of course, The Establishment believes only in the status quo.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, I can understand the Congress, you know, who kept it under tight snaffle with a—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —deficiency appropriations practically every year—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —where you had to go and fight for scraps and so on.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Ellen Woodward did a fantastic job in this sense, although—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —I can't relate her as a person to Cahill, Alsberg, Hallie Flanagan, and so on. I mean, there must have been wholly outside of her experience that she was a Mississippi person from that kind of culture, a lady and so on.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You know, this must have been a strange group of people. But when you read her testimony, it's a steady assault to obtain deficiency for funding.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, she believed in this.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think she did.

AUDREY MCMAHON: No matter what her outer appearance and so on were, she believed in this, and she did this because she believed in it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Again, one wonders if she was the ideal person to have done this, but she was there, and did it, and she—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —was the one and she believed in it. There was little communication between—little real communication between her and Eddie Cahill, so little basic communication, but it was interesting that she could communicate with us on our level quite well.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, that's like a mother with her chicks.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: "These are my kids."

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right. And she really believed in this, and I never had any difficulties there, none whatever, never, you see. And once I got inducted into the ways of the unions, and they learned a little restraint, that it wasn't necessary to throw inkwells. And so on which was the way they started, and all of that, that you could just have five people talk to five people, and that they might come out with something. And that, even when you didn't, it might conceivably be the administration's hands were tied—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But it wasn't always ill-will. [Harlan B. Phillips laughs.] We were able to get somewhere. And, of course, I did present hundreds of appeals to Washington, not always to Cahill, because they were not effective, but to Hopkins and to Baker, and sometimes to the President directly. And sometimes we got what we went after or a part of it, but less and less as time went on.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And we knew what was ahead. We all knew. We knew. And there were lots of defections, you see. I can't blame people who left. It was a grueling thing to close down those projects.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, boy.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The termination is a—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh, it was a bitter thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Always a bitter thing. You cannot do a dirty job cleanly.

[00:05:03]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.] That's a good way to put it.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, you really can't.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You really can't.

AUDREY MCMAHON: No.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: So—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And moreover, you know, the national interest had turned its eyes elsewhere. There really wasn't, at that moment, interest in preserving it beyond those who were involved in it.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It couldn't have been marketed as something for the nation to support because it was thinking in terms of bombing of London and—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And also, prosperity, financial prosperity, and more profiteering was around the corner. And there were enormous defections among the art—the graphic artists' rank themselves because they could get jobs and well-paying jobs—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —elsewhere. So that all told it was a group of diehards and malcontents, plus a group of idealists—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —and those of us who stood by who—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —wanted to keep it going for the [inaudible].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No, no.

AUDREY MCMAHON: I think we all knew it couldn't be done but we wanted to go down fighting all the same, you know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.] That's one of the, you know, the noble things that even though you stare the end—in some ways it defines artists is why—while administratively I can sort of tip my hat to Hallie Flanagan for, you know, just unleashing the flaming sword. Still, it didn't prove out given the context.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Inaudible] One had to make the adjustments—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, what—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —that was the nature of the game.

AUDREY MCMAHON: What we felt actually about Hallie—all of us loved her personally—what we felt about her was that she was doing a beautiful individualistic job, but she wasn't helping the total—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —program by this individualism, and that that was a selfish thing to do. And now I don't think anyone censured her at that time for it because we all felt she couldn't do it any other way—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —knowing her as we all did so well.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: This was an extension of what it is she was.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And she was chosen to do it, and if they chose her to do it, this is what they were going to get—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —you see. And she was going to live a short life and a flamboyant one, and so was the project—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And it was going to make its mark now or never, you know, or die in the effort. But the artist, unlike the actor, spends days, weeks, months, and sometimes years producing his work.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: He is unlike the musicians that we had because they were not composers. They were virtuosi, you see. He is more like the writer.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And the artist and the writer are creative in the true basic sense of the word that they draw from within themselves that which they produce. And the craft is only the medium of that production.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And this can sometimes be years in the being born, and in the developing, and in coming to light, and he cannot afford flamboyance.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: He cannot. He will never produce. In order—he's got to nurse that flame. His is not the externalized flame of the actor.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: It's quite different.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure, it is.

AUDREY MCMAHON: They are virtuosos. Theirs to show off and to show, and demonstrate, and the musician also. It's marvelous, of course.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: But it's an interpretation, but—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —the artist and the writer is a creation.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And this comes from within the man and is born with him and comes out slowly and pains fully—painfully and painstakingly, and he cannot jeopardize it with one wild gesture. He just cannot.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That's the end. That's the curtain—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —for him.

AUDREY MCMAHON: It's the curtain for him, you see; too much of himself goes into each thing, you see, because he has not—he's not interpreting you, or Beethoven, or somebody. He's interpreting himself.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right. It's interesting. I think from the way in which some people were almost unaffected by the clash, you know, the nature of the Project—organizations, the meetings, Stuart Davis—the one you have hanging out there in the other room.

[00:10:12]

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It's very difficult to relate that man's product to the fact: a) that he was a leader of the Artists' Congress, he went to eternal meetings, he, you know—

AUDREY MCMAHON: I don't think it's difficult.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, I mean I don't see it in his work.

AUDREY MCMAHON: I do.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Do you really?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh, yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: We must go back and take a look at that.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, that is a—is a work of that time, that's 1929 that—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: That's 1929?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And I see it, of course—if you will remember what art was like in 1929—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —this was as revolutionary as he was.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure. Except the thread of his development has continuity, which is what you were saying [cross talk].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, that is what I feel—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —the thread of their development always has continuity. They may go in a variety of directions, but if they cut that thread, then they cut the continuity.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: It's like cutting the life-giving—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —source. It's no good. It's no go; whereas the actor can speak in a flaming way, he can produce a white American down at Sheridan Square. And he can next week be in some classical play.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: He is no less true to his art.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: But the painter is untrue to his art if he—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —is as versatile as that, as superficial as that.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: He's untrue to himself.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: No, Stuart Davis was a red-hot rebel in all ways at that time. He matured, he grew older, he grew less rebellious. And one of the truths I've learned in my life is that there is sometimes, rather often really, nobody more reactionary than a rebel of yesterday because for the very reason that to take the stand he took required so much determination, and such digging in of the heels in that inflammatory position that then the tide passes him by, and he remains where he was. And this happens all the time. You see, this is not always true.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: But it happens a lot. So you'll find that your very rebellious hotheaded young person of that time still painting or creating in that way. Not having moved on with some other trend, not any longer feeling as rebellious or anything, but having accepted life

as it is, and having his own status quo.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: The rebellion of yesterday wrote the status quo of today—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —you know. But then again you have the more visionary person who moves along [coughs]. He is apt [coughs] not to produce quite as much. He's so busy feeling and going along with the trend.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: But the guy who produces is apt to take a position somewhere that he believes in firmly, profoundly as "my truth," and stay with it. And you are apt to pass him by. I'm apt to pass him by. [Harlan B. Phillips laughs.] It's really, if you look at artists' work, you'll see that it is in large measure. So now it's not been true with certain people. David Smith—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —not true with David Smith.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: David Smith, by the way, made the bases for my—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, did he?

AUDREY MCMAHON: —various pieces—yeah. At that time, he was just a craftsman.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, and he made me all sorts of little slides for Mexican heads and the —and the base, not for the Noguchi, but for that Pompeian—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —piece down there—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: —you see. And other pieces of that, so he liked to do that kind of work. And he—but he was a visionary. And it was David Smith that saw that Rivera was a great artist, Joe Rivera. This was David Smith's discovery. When he himself couldn't do it yet. Now, he's—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —come into his own—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: —marvelous thing.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes. That's interesting though—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —isn't it? That is—despite the collective organization and so on the—those who survived maintained their intense individuality, didn't they?

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, the individuality of the artist is that inborn thing. And he, in part—in part, it was hard for him to organize properly because of that intense individuality. He was

a pretty poor union member because he couldn't really obey his leader. He would fight with his leader as much as he would fight with me, you see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mmm.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And this is no good, of course [laughs], you know. This undoes everything.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: But there you never gave up their individuality.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: No.

[00:15:33]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And that's why the, you know, this is the good thing in this period, too, because look who stands around today as the leaders. They went through this.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right. Well, the wonderful thing about it also is that, in spite of everything else and partly because of this intense individuality, they could not be broken. No Somervell, no Ritter, no McMahon, no anybody would break those people. [Harlan B. Phillips coughs.] Now, I never wanted to, but I've often had to do things which were what they were, but nobody will break a person who has his roots in expressing what he feels is his mode of expression and doing it that way and no other way. You won't break him, no. You may delay him. You may sometimes make it impossible for him to show here, or to be successful there, or to be employed there, or and so on, but you're not gonna break him.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: No.

AUDREY MCMAHON: You can't break him, which is wonderful.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, that commitment is too deep.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That commitment is too deep.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, you can only massage it—

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —at best.

AUDREY MCMAHON: At best.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, you can give it fertilizer. You can give it food. You can help it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Appreciation, warmth, the sun of understanding. This is a good climate and for it. Look at Mexico.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: I mean, as an example, you see. And also, look at the Art Project. I mean, six people working together for a common goal, each in his own way is better than each person working alone not knowing that the other one exists. The Art Project also did that for the artists.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: It made them realize how many of us there are.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The boat is awful large.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's right.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But Davis said that.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Is that right? Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: "The boat was awfully large."

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah, well, that's wonderful.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: That's wonderful, because there is nothing like knowing that you are not alone.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: You know?

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And they did—they hadn't known this. They were such strange, such rara avis before, because nobody looked at it, nobody cared about it. His—the wife probably said, Why don't you do something useful? The in-laws probably deprecated it, and he couldn't get—make a living at it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: And yet the art schools turned them out in droves every year to starve, or to find other modes of expression, you see. Because there was—now they found other people who were doing the same thing were starving the same way, were trying to succeed the same way and so on, and doing their own work in their own creative way, and that there was validity in doing the thing the way you wanted to do it.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: With the way you thought was right for you. This is the great thing, I think—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —you know. So this unquenchable thing is so wonderful, and there's no real reason at all why our country, which has been so great in so many ways, shouldn't be the greatest country in the world in art too.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Right.

AUDREY MCMAHON: No reason. We have everything it takes, everything. And it seems to me that that will someday be shown to have been a drop in the bucket only, but a very important drop—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yes.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —I think.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah, well—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Anyhow, I believe it [laughs].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Well, you know, I'm awful grateful to you to have shared with me some



of the—what is it—

[Cross talk.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, I don't know if I've given you anything.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: The heat and the excitement that you still feel about this.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh, I do—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It's a—

AUDREY MCMAHON: —for it. I told you I was passionate about it then, and I am now.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You sure are [laughs].

AUDREY MCMAHON: I've never—yes [laughs].

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And your early misgivings when we were in the kitchen, the fact that you might not, you know, remember.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, what happened was that when you started to talk, then I started to remember.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Inaudible.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: And then my feelings really took over, and I don't think I've given you anything. I've certainly told you nothing you didn't know, I'm sure. All I will have given you was the fact perhaps that an—that an administrator can also be someone who is in love with the administrated object—the administered object.

[00:20:18]

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But you've given me insight into process—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Oh.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —as you knew it—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —there. And it is part viscera, part—

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes, it's—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —issue—

AUDREY MCMAHON: —part viscera.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —part art—

AUDREY MCMAHON: There is no question—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: —part thinking.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —no question.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Now, I'm perfectly sure that if Mildred had been here, or one or two of the other people who were so close to me in those days that I would have remembered much more, and many other things would have come to the surface.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Because, of course, it was wealthy in many—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Oh, sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —happenings. This is where I'm faulty, you see. I have to—my memory has to be jogged or prodded, and then I recall the thing. But what I recall most vividly now is the intense belief that all of us had in the validity of what we were doing, you know.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AUDREY MCMAHON: And in the marvelous opportunity that was being offered and, of course, this made a love affair for me with Roosevelt and Mrs. Roosevelt that endured until they died.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: Sure.

AUDREY MCMAHON: You see.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: But this ties in with the opening remarks you made about the nature of memory. What you've been doing in effect is exercising a judgment on a judgement already exercised.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yes.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: You see.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Yeah.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: And I understood that this was the way it would come out. And we have, I think, probably students who perhaps are better trained than we are will find more in the way of insight and flavor both to you and the Project as it was operated here in the city.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Maybe so.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I think so.

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, good.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I'm—and then, I'm grateful to you [inaudible].

AUDREY MCMAHON: Well, thank you.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: [Laughs.]

AUDREY MCMAHON: It's been a very pleasant—

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: It's good fun.

AUDREY MCMAHON: —very pleasant remembering.

HARLAN B. PHILLIPS: I had lots of fun.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]