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Oral history interview with Madeleine
L'Engle, 1987 Sept. 2

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Madeleine L'Engle on September 2, 1987. The interview took place in Truro, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2024 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. 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. Additional information from the original transcript has been added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution.

Interview

[00:00:05.75]

ROBERT F. BROWN: With Madeleine L'Engle in Truro, Massachusetts, on September 2, 1987. Bob Brown, the interviewer. Concentrating on recollections you have of life on Cape Cod, mainly Provincetown, Truro, as the child of two artists. And don't simply limit yourself to Cape Cod. What about your parents? What can you say of them as you knew them and as artists, particularly when you were very young? Had they been, as I recall—

[00:00:45.80]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, I remember mostly that they were not around much during the day. They'd go off and paint. And they had their studios, and they would work. And we were taken care of by a governess, so they didn't have to bother about us at all, which was great for them. [Laughs.] They just had a good time painting all day. And every once in a while, we'd have a special treat of being allowed into the studio to see what they were doing. And that was always exciting. And my father especially was very enthusiastic about anything artistic that I might want to do. And so we grew up with this kind of—

[00:01:34.16]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your father had come from Florida, right?

[00:01:37.08]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes.

[00:01:37.85]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had he come north to study art?

[00:01:40.64]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes. No—yes. He went to Yale, though, and graduated from Yale in 1906. And then he got a sort of menial job in New York for a while.

[00:01:52.67]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But he graduated from the art school at Yale?

[00:01:55.34]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, he graduated with a degree of naval architecture, whatever that is.

[00:02:00.29]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Graduated from Yale College?

[00:02:01.57]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes. So I don't think he ever used it [laughs], but anyway—

[00:02:08.58]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had his family anything to do with the sea?

[00:02:11.63]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No.

[00:02:11.89]

ROBERT F. BROWN: In Jacksonville?

[00:02:12.93]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No, nothing. No, they were all businesspeople, businessmen, bankers, lawyers, all that sort of thing, which bored him to death. And the only thing he wanted to do was paint. So he went to the Art Students League at night and worked during the day, and went to elegant parties in the evening, too, because he was socially quite proper and met my mother there at one of the parties.

[00:02:39.03]

And then she went off to Europe on a trip. And at that point, he decided he was going to study in Europe, too. So he went over with—what the heck was—Evan Given [ph] and Waldo Frank were on the same trip. They were all going to study together. So he had a high old time in Paris for two or three years, I guess it was. And then he met my mother again over there, and they both fell in love and decided to get married, though her family were totally, completely, utterly mystified by why she wanted to marry such a thing as an artist. They didn't understand it at all. But she was determined. And what Lucy wanted, Lucy got.

[00:03:32.58]

ROBERT F. BROWN: She's the only daughter?

[00:03:34.85]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Was the only daughter in a family of three boys. So she was spoiled to death from the minute she was born. Always had her way. So they were married and started painting happily, and came back here because mother had remembered how beautiful Provincetown was from the time that she had gone to school in Hawthorne's class.

[00:04:00.70]

ROBERT F. BROWN: She'd come down as a very young woman?

[00:04:02.70]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes, as a young woman, and she absolutely fell in love with the place.

[00:04:07.07]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was it that particularly appealed to her, do you think?

[00:04:09.96]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, just because it was a painterly place, because there was a lot going on and she just thought it was beautiful. She really liked it. And it was so free, too. You could do anything. And you could do it even more in those days, I guess. [Laughs.]

[00:04:27.21]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or at least it was a great contrast from her proper life.

[00:04:29.97]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, absolutely. Oh, that was it. And also, the Zorachs were here, and they had made friends with them, I think, in Europe. So, of course, they had to come up here and see what was going on, and they got immediately embroiled in all that stuff, the theater stuff.

[00:04:50.79]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. That was the time of the beginning of what became the Provincetown Players.

[00:04:56.04]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: The Provincetown Players. Well, they'd already been established quite a while before that, but the family first came here in 1917. So at that point, I think they were about to break up and then go to New York, set up the playhouse there. But anyway, it was quite exciting for them.

[00:05:15.00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your parents, had they each shown in the Armory Show in 1913?

[00:05:19.73]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No, they hadn't shown in it, but they went to it.

[00:05:22.96]

ROBERT F. BROWN: They went to it.

[00:05:23.68]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: And oh boy, did I hear about that for years.

[00:05:27.14]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you?

[00:05:27.52]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: That's all they talked about, how wonderful it was and how important it was and everything you could imagine. I mean, it was just absolutely the greatest show that ever was.

[00:05:41.46]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was it, as you recall it, that had particularly struck them about it?

[00:05:46.65]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, the modern—what's the word? No, the modern—I'm sorry.

[00:05:54.07]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Modernistic?

[00:05:54.62]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes. The fact that it was so avant-garde, I mean, it was way ahead of anything that was being done here at all. And they were completely entranced with all the stuff that came from Paris, and saw how really important it was. And so to them, that was practically the greatest thing that had ever happened to them. [Laughs.] It was really exciting.

[00:06:23.45]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your father, they both been in Paris at that time before.

[00:06:28.51]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes.

[00:06:29.36]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had they studied with more conservative artists?

[00:06:32.40]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: I don't know who they'd studied with at that point. That was pretty early. That was long before—well, before I was born. But I know that they always felt that Paris was the center for art. That was it. So in 1923, we went back and lived for two years in France. And my sister and I [laughs] didn't have one bit of schooling. We didn't go to school at all those two years, but we got so much other things out of it, like learning French, and just had an exciting time. It was wonderful for us.

[00:07:19.76]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And were your parents—

[00:07:21.09]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: And my parents went and studied very hard. Well, my mother did, with Gleizes, Albert Gleizes, and Daddy just painted, as he always had. So then we did a lot of traveling, too. We went all over the place.

[00:07:38.72]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did she study with Gleizes in Paris, or—

[00:07:41.69]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: She studied with Gleizes in Paris.

[00:07:45.61]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But then they spent a good deal of time in the South of France.

[00:07:48.47]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Possibly also in Cabalet [ph] because I remember he had a house there—

[00:07:52.62]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Cabalet?

[00:07:53.42]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: —or near there, yeah. And I really don't remember too much about that.

[00:08:02.08]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you were pretty young in those years.

[00:08:03.13]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah, I was eight.

[00:08:05.79]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But there were a circle of friends that they would see now and then, where they'd run into or—

[00:08:10.74]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, yes. Yes. But the ones we saw mostly were the Hapgoods.

[00:08:15.07]

ROBERT F. BROWN: The Hutchins Hapgoods.

[00:08:16.42]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah. Because they lived practically around the corner, and we'd meet at a certain beach almost every day and go for a swim with the whole family. And the maids and everybody would all gather there for a nice swim. And it was great fun. I have pictures of that, too. And that's where I remember Miriam, at that point. But she was 16 then.

[00:08:42.80]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Miriam Hapgood. So you were there two years.

[00:08:44.40]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Two years.

[00:08:45.17]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And without schooling, but you got a lot of wonderful experiences. [Laughs.]

[00:08:48.66]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Exactly. We had an old Model T Ford that my father used to drive all over the South of France. We went up to Saint Paul de Vence. We went up to all kinds of funny little places where they would paint and draw endlessly. And it was such fun because it was all so adventuresome. They didn't care where they stayed particularly, or what they ate or anything. And we all had such a good time together. We did this together. I'll always remember those delightful years.

[00:09:31.43]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you'd been coming to Provincetown before that, even?

[00:09:34.94]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes. Yes, they bought a house in Provincetown in 19—right after the war, in 1918 or something like that, and then began coming up every summer at that point. And my mother had a studio right on the Players Wharf, where the old theater used to be, that Mary Heaton Vorse owned at one point. And Daddy had a little studio in the house somewhere, I forget.

[00:10:05.88]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did your mother in Provincetown study with anybody?

[00:10:09.15]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No.

[00:10:09.64]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Not that late.

[00:10:10.27]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No, she never studied with anyone again after that.

[00:10:14.37]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who were some of the figures you remember from when you first began coming here summers, 1918. Were there any—

[00:10:23.25]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, good Lord.

[00:10:24.91]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —any particular artists who stand out?

[00:10:27.97]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, I remember their old friends, Wilbur Daniel Steele, who was a writer, John Dos Passos.

[00:10:40.50]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And it was all a fairly free and very informal.

[00:10:44.33]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, very. Yeah, very. There were lots and lots of people.

[00:10:49.14]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there much discussion of politics and things like that?

[00:10:52.02]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: I don't remember, no. In the '20s, the exciting things that happened when we got to this house was the fact that there were rum runners out in the Atlantic. Every once in a while, they'd get chased by the Coast Guard and they would dump all their liquor overboard so they wouldn't get caught with it. And it would all end up right on Longnook Beach. And you can imagine what happened then, [laughs] big party at their studio. Everybody from miles around would come.

[00:11:28.69]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So they would have their eyes cocked for any chases at sea.

[00:11:32.42]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, somehow somebody always knew what was happening. They'd go racing down to the beach and rescue all this booze. [They laugh.] I remember that. That was fun. My sister and I used to creep up in the dark and watch inside the studio windows to see what was going on. We were very curious.

[00:11:58.51]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you then started, after you came back from France, would come most summers here to Truro.

[00:12:04.12]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: We did, every summer. Yeah.

[00:12:06.08]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And did you—

[00:12:07.43]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: That was 1925 when this property was bought.

[00:12:11.76]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you feel isolated here?

[00:12:13.33]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Not at all. We absolutely adored it.

[00:12:16.35]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because your friends could come in easily and you could—

[00:12:18.67]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, it wasn't that so much. And we played with the local children—just lived down the road, you see. But it was mostly the sense of utter freedom. They just let us run all day long and we wouldn't have to see them all day, except you must come back and have supper at seven o'clock. "You be here or else," you know. But all day we had to ourselves. It was just wonderful. They never had to worry about us for one second. The hills were wide open. We used to climb trees. We'd take our lunch and the dog with us. We had the most marvelous time, absolutely. It's such freedom. It was just unbelievable. And that was the thing I remember the most. And we absolutely adored this place.

[00:13:05.73]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were your parents working most of the time? They were very steadily at work?

[00:13:09.24]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes, they turned out an awful lot of work, tons and tons of work.

[00:13:16.14]

ROBERT F. BROWN: As you got older, did they begin discussing it a bit more with you or with your sister? Did either of you, or one of the other?

[00:13:22.84]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: My sister wasn't artistic. She was musical. I was the artistic one. And I studied with Jerry Farnsworth in my teens, and he was very good. I enjoyed those classes. For about four years, I went.

[00:13:39.86]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was his approach? I haven't heard before. How would you describe it?

[00:13:44.63]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: He was primarily a portrait painter, but he did landscapes, too. But he loved working with kids because he didn't have kids of his own. And he was awfully good at it. And he taught me the rudiments of painting. But he wasn't at all strict about anything. You were quite free to do as you wanted. And I had an awfully good time with him. It was really nice. And of course, my father was a wonderful backer-upper. Everything I did, he just praised like mad, and encouraged me without ceasing. So that was important to me.

[00:14:30.71]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did your parents send things to exhibitions or—

[00:14:33.41]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, yeah. Every summer, they'd send to the Art Association. Sure, they had shows there.

[00:14:41.37]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, it's often said that at that time in the '20s, maybe into the '30s, there was a bit of a division between the people who were more traditional or conservative, and those who were—

[00:14:50.83]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, yes, there certainly was. My father was in the middle of that fight for years. He was the vice president for many years at the Art Association, and he was trying very hard to go modern himself after being very strictly trained in all the old-fashioned ways. And he got so that he just dropped all that completely.

[00:15:19.93]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But something like we see right there in 1930 would have been—was anathema to the more conservative?

[00:15:25.85]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes. Yes. I think it's his best work. I love it.

[00:15:35.93]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So did it end with people not even speaking to each other? Did it get rather—

[00:15:40.12]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, you know how artists are. They just get mad at each other all the time. There are always fights, [laughs] but it had to grow, of course. It had to leave the old hats behind and go ahead. So that's the way it went. And now, God knows, anything goes.

[00:16:04.58]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. But you recall some of that, because as you were getting older, you were involved—

[00:16:07.56]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, yeah, I was a member of the Art Association, too, for a while there. But I think I only got in because my father was on the board. [Laughs.]

[00:16:16.76]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you decide at one point you wanted to be a painter, then?

[00:16:19.28]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, yeah, I knew that long, long time ago. That was really from the time I was ten years old, that's what I wanted to do. So I went endlessly to art schools all my young life.

[00:16:33.84]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You went to Farnsworth first?

[00:16:35.89]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah.

[00:16:37.35]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Then where did you—

[00:16:40.82]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, I was going to boarding school. Of course, there was no painting there, so there was four years there where I didn't do anything except summers. And then I went to the Parsons School of Design to do something that might bring me in some money, to get a job of some kind. But they were so chichi they didn't really teach me much.

[00:17:03.68]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really? Was it very derivative and—

[00:17:06.77]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, it was all—

[00:17:07.76]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —steered toward fashion?

[00:17:08.91]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah. Fashion and money, and they didn't teach you anything practical.

[00:17:15.59]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you ever go to the Art Students League?

[00:17:17.13]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No. No, I didn't.

[00:17:19.75]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did either of your parents teach you now and then?

[00:17:23.45]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, Daddy would talk to me a lot. I mean, he was really interested in keeping me going. And well, I really did keep going, one way or another. Let's see.

[00:17:46.16]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So through the 1930s, were you basically here on the Cape? Or did your parents settle here permanently?

[00:17:53.81]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: In the summer. No, they were never here in the summer. They were never here in the winter, only summers. And summers were a very busy time, both socially and artistically. And it suited them to a T and suited us to a T. Swimming was wonderful and everything was just super.

[00:18:18.17]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Maybe you could describe each of your parents. How would you say your father—what was his personality like?

[00:18:24.95]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: He was a very sweet guy. He was a perfect gentleman, in the true sense. He was very gracious, and kind, and thoughtful, and never hurt anybody's feelings. And he was a very gentle person. He's a true gentleman. I only heard him fight with my mother once, I think, the whole time. [Laughs.] And she was a very positive person. She ruled the roost, really, in a way. But they had a pretty good marriage. Lasted over 40 years. With his death, that was the end of it.

[00:19:15.83]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But he was suited to be an officer, say, of an Art Association, that he was rather even-handed, then, and he could—

[00:19:21.53]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: He was. He liked to of smooth things over, you know. He was good at that.

[00:19:31.85]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was the Depression quite a different time out here?

[00:19:35.06]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, it was terrible on the Cape. I mean, everybody was deathly poor, really poor. But we didn't seem to feel it very much.

[00:19:45.66]

ROBERT F. BROWN: There were, of course, several young artists who came out at that time.

[00:19:49.60]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah, I know. Yeah, Ed Dickinson was one of Dad's friends. And I remember Dad telling me the story, how he would be walking down the back of the woods in P-town and be along the railroad track, and there would be Dick picking up old pieces of coal from the stuff that the train had thrown out, you know? He couldn't afford to buy any. Things like that happened all over the place. And of course, everybody lived off the sea.

[00:20:29.60]

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Inaudible] great deal [inaudible].

[00:20:32.80]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: One of the best tricks was to know a fisherman, and he'd give you some fish for nothing, practically every day if you wanted it. So that was a common occurrence.

[00:20:48.95]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there a division very much, or was it were they fairly close between the art community and the local people, the fishermen?

[00:20:57.77]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, there was very much of a division. Neither side understood the other, really. And it took years for the barriers to break down. And finally some of the artists began marrying Portuguese, and vice versa. And it was a long time before they really understood each other. In fact, I don't think they really do, still, though the atmosphere is much more friendly than it used to be.

[00:21:30.30]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So some of the fishermen who served as models for Hawthorne's work—

[00:21:33.42]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, absolutely.

[00:21:34.56]

ROBERT F. BROWN: They did that, but they weren't bosom friends.

[00:21:36.67]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No, they were hardly ever friends. And you were never supposed to marry one, which I did later on. [Laughs.] Much later on. That's my son. His father was a

fisherman.

[00:21:58.14]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Were your parents also sending things to New York? Did they think of that as well?

[00:22:02.10]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, yes.

[00:22:02.44]

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were most of the year in New York.

[00:22:04.20]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: They were. Most of the year, they were there. They were there for, say, nine or ten months of the year, and they were here for about five months or whatever, however it works out.

[00:22:12.34]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you live in Manhattan?

[00:22:13.29]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes, right in the center of it. And they were very busy there, too, mostly being social. [Laughs.]

[00:22:24.37]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you recall as a young woman, people in the art world or writers and the like, that you—

[00:22:29.32]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, mostly the Zorachs. I remember they came all the time, yes, because they had kids just our age. And there were probably others, but I can't think who they were at the moment.

[00:22:43.24]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were the Zorachs an interesting and delightful couple?

[00:22:47.46]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: They were wonderful. They're incredibly creative. Oh, gosh, wonderful people, just bursting with vim and vigor to paint and work. And Marguerite was super. She really had incredible talent. And they were very fond of them. They really were. We saw them quite a lot. And let's see, who else?

[00:23:16.48]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mentioned Dickinson at least here was a good friend of—

[00:23:19.67]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Only here. We didn't see him in the wintertime. I don't know what he did in the wintertime. I have no idea.

[00:23:29.05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were there others out here that your family knew? Ross Moffett?

[00:23:32.71]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes, sure. Sure, I knew him very well.

[00:23:37.06]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was he like, as you recall?

[00:23:39.97]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Very sweet guy, quiet. Very self-contained. He wasn't the kind of person that would burst out or talk much or anything. He just went about his business in a very quiet way. And he was very, very nice. I mean, we all liked him. He was a dear.

[00:24:04.10]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about Karl Knaths?

[00:24:05.87]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: He was a friend, too. Yeah, definitely. And he would come out here once in a while to see them. For some reason, my mother used to call—and my father used to call him Otto. Maybe that was his middle name.

[00:24:20.75]

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was his first name, I think.

[00:24:21.53]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: First name?

[00:24:22.61]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, which he dropped fairly early. Probably your father had known him so early.

[00:24:26.64]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah. Anyway, that's what he was known as, Otto. Well, he never brought his wife. He always came alone. Who else was—ay, yi, yi. Well, ask me some more questions.

[00:24:48.49]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, I don't know who might have been there. Was Richard Miller still around at that time?

[00:24:52.69]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, well, of course, he was. Sure. He was very much part of the scene. And the Hawthornes were still there. They used to see them quite a lot.

[00:25:04.35]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you recall Charles Hawthorne at all?

[00:25:06.75]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No. Well, vaguely, yeah.

[00:25:09.87]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But I suppose he was a fairly commanding presence, wasn't he?

[00:25:13.20]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: He must have been, yes.

[00:25:14.55]

ROBERT F. BROWN: As a teacher.

[00:25:15.25]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes, indeed.

[00:25:17.19]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the others were, like, Ambrose Webster.

[00:25:20.34]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: I don't remember him.

[00:25:21.96]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And George Elmer Browne was another who had a class at one time.

[00:25:27.30]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah. They all knew each other. I mean, they had to have, after all.

[00:25:31.26]

ROBERT F. BROWN: I expect you'd get to know some of the younger ones as they came along, like Bruce McKain and—

[00:25:36.46]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah.

[00:25:36.87]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and Reeves Euler.

[00:25:39.24]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah.

[00:25:44.23]

ROBERT F. BROWN: George Yater.

[00:25:45.74]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah. They were all rather conservative in their approach.

[00:25:51.89]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Then Philip Malicoat?

[00:25:53.83]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Philip, yes.

[00:25:55.90]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You must have known him right along.

[00:25:58.10]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes, sure.

[00:26:03.53]

ROBERT F. BROWN: His work often, people said, looks a bit like, some of it at least—

[00:26:07.22]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Dickinson.

[00:26:07.54]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —looks like Dickinson, with whom I suppose he'd worked.

[00:26:10.04]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: He had. He'd been a student of his.

[00:26:15.03]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But it sounds like particularly some of these older people of your father's generation or a bit younger, were perfectly capable of being very much on their own.

[00:26:24.03]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, they were.

[00:26:24.93]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then they would converge, let's say, for the Beachcomber's Saturday nights or something else.

[00:26:31.20]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah. Yeah, they all worked independently from each other. It was an interesting mélange, all kinds of characters.

[00:26:42.30]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And your parents were physically, what, five, six miles from the center of Provincetown.

[00:26:46.08]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah.

[00:26:47.52]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So it was a bit of a—

[00:26:48.58]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, no, it was ten miles, but they used to go in all the time, no problem.

[00:26:55.05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But still, I mean they were at some remove, weren't they?

[00:26:57.45]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah. Well, they liked that. As I said earlier, Provincetown got too crowded. They had to come out here.

[00:27:07.35]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And they were sensing that by the 1920s.

[00:27:10.11]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, yes. They sure were.

[00:27:11.55]

ROBERT F. BROWN: There were just too many artists, too many tourists, too many—

[00:27:14.16]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Too many everything, as far as they were concerned. And also, they thought the attractions were not good for us. You know what I mean? Like the candy stores and the ice cream parlors and the little Portuguese boys diving for pennies and stuff. [Laughs.]

[00:27:33.02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Little too seedy?

[00:27:34.16]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Just a little bit too exciting for us. [They laugh.]

[00:27:40.33]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, then were you away at school when World War II came? Were you in New York?

[00:27:46.21]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: I was working in New York then. My sister and I had a little apartment. We had given up the New York apartment because my grandfather died, and my mother didn't want it anymore. It was a great, huge thing. So that was sold, and they moved to another apartment further uptown that suited them. And my sister and I got a little one together. And we both had jobs in New York at that time.

[00:28:12.22]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you continuing to paint?

[00:28:14.95]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No, but I had a job in a—what do you call it—in a decorating studio where I made designs for window displays and things like that. But that didn't last very long. Along came the war. That was the end of that.

[00:28:36.91]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean the studio?

[00:28:38.02]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: By that time, I was sick and tired of New York anyway. I was determined never to go back again. I never did. That was it.

[00:28:48.32]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you come out here or did you do something else?

[00:28:50.98]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, I was in the Navy.

[00:28:53.05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, you went in the Navy?

[00:28:53.72]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah, three years. Then I came here and settled down in Provincetown.

[00:29:00.85]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was the Naval work at all related to your interest in design?

[00:29:04.34]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No. I mean, I did matte work, for one thing, camouflage for another, things like that. They really didn't know what to do with me. And they made me a Specialist X.

[00:29:16.84]

ROBERT F. BROWN: X? [They laugh.]

[00:29:18.11]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: "Unknown quality."

[00:29:22.36]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you were mainly around Washington?

[00:29:24.23]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes. Yeah, in the D.C. area.

[00:29:26.75]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So when you were mustered out or—then you came down here, to Provincetown.

[00:29:31.57]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: I came here. Yeah. And while I was in the service, I met this man that I eventually married, my first marriage. And we were married in October of '47, and then we went to Mexico and worked there on the GI Bill in San Miguel Allende. Absolutely beautiful spot. We loved it. But that marriage was only four years long.

[00:30:02.49]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who would you work with down there? Merida?

[00:30:06.88]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, heavens, no. Nobody like that. It was just a little school that had gotten government support. And it was full of Americans doing just what we were doing, Americans trying to get by on the GI Bill, which we were on. And you could live there so cheap. It was wonderful. That was great. It was beautiful, no question about that.

[00:30:33.46]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you painted pretty steadily there?

[00:30:35.86]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes. Constant. Constantly.

[00:30:37.24]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What sort of things were you doing?

[00:30:39.22]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, anything I saw. Everything was paintable, just about everything. I nearly went crazy, in fact, there was so much to see and do. Then I came back here, settled down in Provincetown, and eventually remarried, and married this fisherman, who is my son's father. And we were together 15 years. And then I lost him, and came back here to take care of my mother, who by that time was over 80 and needed someone around. So I did that for a while. And then she died, and I've been here ever since.

[00:31:25.91]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you able to keep painting through most of those years?

[00:31:28.28]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, yes. Well, not when Danny was young, because I was too busy being a housekeeper, and a mother, and chauffeur, and cook, and cleaner, and everything else. I didn't have time, really, to paint, so I gave it up for about 20 years. So when I went back to it, I started doing collages, which is what I do now.

[00:31:53.83]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you would have—you started maybe in the late '70s doing those?

[00:31:57.95]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: About then. I don't really remember exactly when it was. Yeah, late '70s. Yes.

[00:32:04.16]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But when you came back to Provincetown after World War II, did it seem quite changed from—

[00:32:10.91]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, very.

[00:32:11.76]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because presumably, supposedly that was a time when a great many new groups were coming.

[00:32:17.12]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: It changed in every way. It really did. I mean, the new roads were built. Are you uncomfortable?

[00:32:24.37]

ROBERT F. BROWN: No, I'm all right.

[00:32:27.35]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: It changed mostly because more people got here more easily. They built new roads.

[00:32:35.94]

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's said the world comes through the middle of Cape Cod.

[00:32:38.47]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Better transportation. It was only two hours from Boston, really. And absolutely too accessible, so immediately began getting very overcrowded, very popular, and especially in the summer. And it just turned into a summer resort. And the artists were kind of pushed out, or they remained in their studios and nobody ever saw them, you know.

[00:33:12.72]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So in fact, the sharing and cross-fertilization was not found to be really.

[00:33:19.90]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No, it wasn't, really.

[00:33:21.58]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Even though there were, in fact, quite a few artists.

[00:33:23.77]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: There were, quite a lot of artists. But there were all kinds of different factions and they all didn't like each other. And there were three or four different teachers and schools and stuff. Hans Hofmann, and Henry Hensche and a couple of others that were all teaching, so they would attract a lot of students. But somehow it was different.

[00:33:50.80]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Also, it was among the time when the first number of art galleries start, too, don't they?

[00:33:56.26]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes.

[00:33:56.86]

ROBERT F. BROWN: There might have been one or two earlier, but not much, was there?

[00:33:59.63]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No, not like—no. That really began booming then.

[00:34:03.56]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

[00:34:06.12]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: And people used to come here from the cities to buy. This is where they found it. I mean, Milton Avery was here, and a lot of good people were here.

[00:34:20.07]

ROBERT F. BROWN: I was told one thing that facilitated that, there were still a couple of old, nice, respectable boarding houses or something of that sort.

[00:34:27.12]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Not anymore.

[00:34:28.12]

ROBERT F. BROWN: The collectors could come—well, in the '50s, say, and the '40s.

[00:34:30.85]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah.

[00:34:31.08]

ROBERT F. BROWN: They could stay very comfortably and have a nice seaside vacation. At the same time, then go to the studios.

[00:34:36.99]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: That's right.

[00:34:37.60]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Something which no longer exists.

[00:34:39.16]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: They can't do it now, certainly not.

[00:34:41.16]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you had apparently part of that brew was that was a rather successful time for a lot of artists, I guess, even though they maybe didn't get together,

because a lot of collectors did come.

[00:34:51.09]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, sure.

[00:34:55.82]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you were doing—you were involved with some of that, were you? Did you continue with the Art Association?

[00:34:59.27]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Not at that time. No, I dropped out of it, because I wasn't I wasn't really painting then. It wasn't until later.

[00:35:08.86]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, did you know people like Hans Hofmann or someone?

[00:35:12.57]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No, I never went to his classes. I didn't know him at all.

[00:35:16.28]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about one of the galleries I know—Nathan Halper?

[00:35:20.12]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah.

[00:35:20.69]

ROBERT F. BROWN: He died recently. Did you get to know him?

[00:35:20.96]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: His wife was a very close friend of mine, Marjorie. And I used to see them quite a lot. In fact, I rented one of their apartments one winter. And I liked them both very much. They were great. And they ran quite a successful gallery for a number of years. Then it got to be too much for Marjorie, and they had to give it up. She also sold the house some years ago. It was on the water. Now they moved back, or she's moved back. And Nate died about—

[00:35:55.26]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Three or four—

[00:35:56.13]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes, two or three years ago. He's sorely missed.

[00:36:03.33]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you were devoted mainly to domestic life.

[00:36:08.19]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: At that point.

[00:36:08.49]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, your father lived 'til '57.

[00:36:11.52]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes.

[00:36:11.97]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So how did he receive all this? Or did it bother him? He was over here.

[00:36:15.28]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: He was here. He didn't really pay any attention to it.

[00:36:17.50]

ROBERT F. BROWN: He didn't have to be embroiled in any of that.

[00:36:19.80]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No. Not at all. He'd send over one work a year to the Art Association. That was it. He was not interested in showing. He never was. I think maybe he had two or three shows in his whole lifetime. And my mother was more ambitious. But he wasn't. He was retiring. He painted really just for his own self. He turned out an awful lot of work, though, fantastic amount. Have you been to Julie Heller's gallery?

[00:36:54.36]

ROBERT F. BROWN: No. This summer?

[00:36:56.20]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah.

[00:36:56.52]

ROBERT F. BROWN: No.

[00:36:57.30]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, she's got a lot of the stuff, awful lot of it. Because last year we had to clean out my studio, which was my mother's old studio. There was a closet full of stuff in there that had been there for eons. And Julie went through all of it and took about half, because we had no place to put it here in the house, except in the cellar where there's some now, right next to the furnace.

[00:37:24.39]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Well, he'd not kept the dealer over the years.

[00:37:30.48]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No.

[00:37:31.18]

ROBERT F. BROWN: No. So he wasn't steadily sending things down.

[00:37:34.60]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No.

[00:37:36.39]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had your mother?

[00:37:37.29]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Not really, no. She didn't bother, either. It just was too much effort to get people to come here and all the folderol you have to go through. They just didn't want to. So there's a great deal of work still here. Though she did have—this might interest you—an appraisal made of the stuff that she had in New York. She had an apartment of her own. And after Bill died, she had everything appraised that she had, and this is the list of it and the prices at the time. And that is the only document I have of anything. Have you ever heard of

Elizabeth Bartholet? [RB says yes. -Ed.] So that's all her work. And there was a whole bunch of slides taken of everything, but I don't know what's happened to them. They've vanished.

[00:38:36.70]

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is your mother's work?

[00:38:37.78]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No, this is Dad's.

[00:38:39.52]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your dad's work?

[00:38:40.12]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah. Mostly watercolors and drawings. I don't see any oils in that.

[00:38:46.44]

ROBERT F. BROWN: These were things that were in your mother's apartment in New York.

[00:38:48.84]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes, and she donated them all to these various places, the Museum of the City of New York, and the Lincoln Center for Dance, and—

[00:39:01.14]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Fogg Museum, Corcoran.

[00:39:02.81]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah, a couple of other things.

[00:39:04.72]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And Cooper Union.

[00:39:05.80]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah. So she managed to spread them out quite nicely, which she took off her income tax.

[00:39:17.89]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. But she was able to do that for years.

[00:39:19.57]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes. Yeah.

[00:39:21.10]

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's very good. Yeah, this is 1967.

[00:39:24.86]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: So what I have now that's left really is kind of the dregs. It's the bottom of the barrel. There isn't really very much left. Except what we have in the house.

[00:39:37.73]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you think it was perhaps happier for your family that neither of your parents pushed to sell their things and didn't make painting sort of a business proposition? Do you think it was a nice—the fact that they painted because they wanted to paint?

[00:39:50.30]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: That's right. They were not interested at all in the business end of it, and they wouldn't have known how to handle it anyway, I don't think. Neither one of them knew anything about business. Daddy was a dreamer and mother was ignorant. I mean—

[00:40:06.03]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of that sort of thing.

[00:40:07.17]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: She was brought up so genteelly that she didn't know anything.

[Laughs.] You know what I mean?

[00:40:14.04]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So the community around here was a community, for them, it was for ideas and socializing.

[00:40:21.43]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah, conversation, arguments.

[00:40:27.46]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why did your father get involved to the extent he did with the Art Association?

[00:40:31.69]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: I don't know how that happened.

[00:40:33.13]

ROBERT F. BROWN: I suppose he thought it was a good thing for some reason?

[00:40:35.05]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yeah, I think he just sort of found himself in the middle of it. And he knew all the people that were in it, so just seemed like a natural thing to do. So he did it. That and the Beachcombers were about the only two things he did, really.

[00:40:58.49]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What do you think of this area now? You started back working around '77 or so, 1977. Did you begin to get re-involved in the art scene?

[00:41:09.09]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes, I showed. I showed. I showed at Julie's gallery two or three times, at the Schoolhouse Gallery for about four years. And those are the only two places, really. I didn't push myself, either, particularly.

[00:41:24.29]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But have you in recent years gotten involved with the Art Association or any of that?

[00:41:28.74]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No. Well, yes, I did join up last winter, and I showed twice there. But then I got ill, so I wasn't able to do anything more. So I don't think—I probably will not join up again. I haven't done anything new lately, not since last fall.

[00:41:47.05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you think the—what is your assessment of the future of Provincetown, Truro, Wellfleet as art colonies?

[00:41:56.42]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, it'll go putzing along, but I think it's going to lose its oomph. I think it's going to—because the good people will all be dead by that time, and the younger ones just don't care. And they're really not very good. So I don't think—I think they'll always be somebody here, but I don't think it'll ever be as important as it was.

[00:42:20.69]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You don't think some of those young ones coming out of the Fine Arts Work Center show promise? [Inaudible] [Cross talk].

[00:42:27.06]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, I couldn't say, because I haven't really seen any of their work, not this year.

[00:42:31.58]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And they don't necessarily stay either, do they?

[00:42:33.48]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No. Well, they stay a year or two, and then that's it. I don't know what happens to them. But I do think it's an excellent idea. And I think that these people certainly should be helped and encouraged. But what actually happens after they leave here, I have absolutely no idea. Well, the art business now is something else again. I mean, they're all out for money. That's all, as far as I can see. And the cost of buying a painting is unbelievable. I don't understand it. It's just—

[00:43:21.32]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you think we'll get out of that sometime, or not?

[00:43:23.40]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: No. I think it's up there. It's going to stay. Kind of discouraging, because I think it's a false premise. Something becomes fashionable, up goes the price, sky high. And then everybody else tries to emulate that, and not many of them are really worth it. There are very few that will really last. I don't think they will. See what Miriam thinks about that. I think she feels the same way. I do like her work. It's just so serene and simple and beautifully done, nice colors. She's a great gal. I'm so glad she's my friend.

[00:44:31.90]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you strive for—what do you strive for in your collages now? What would you—

[00:44:37.78]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Fun. [Laughs.]

[00:44:40.09]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Fun [inaudible].

[00:44:41.26]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Fun of doing it. And also, it's a creative thing. I mean, I just enjoy putting it together from nothing. I mean, it's just paper, you know? And yeah, it's fun. It's a lot of fun. I don't really care whether I sell it or not. I'm not trying to make a statement of any kind. I mean, it's just a nice thing to do, and it appeases my artistic soul to do it. [Laughs.]

[00:45:15.30]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that's what you always tried to do, isn't that right? And that's more or less what your parents were up to as well.

[00:45:19.84]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes, sure. I'm just lucky that I don't have to work for a living. I don't have to work in my art for trying to sell it. I could never have done it. I'm just not that type, no way. I'm not a—

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[00:00:05.06]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: To have been able to live this way for so long, you know, I'm 72. And, well, there were a few rough years in Provincetown when I was living on very little. My husband was a lobster fisherman. We had hardly any money, but we got by.

[00:00:29.95]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But this kind of freedom that you've, generally speaking, had, hadn't you—

[00:00:34.36]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Totally. It's a rare thing, isn't it?

[00:00:38.15]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Wonderful. And you've kept that something. You've kept that work. You probably saw a lot of your contemporaries or even people of your parents' generation who didn't know quite how to handle so much freedom.

[00:00:56.67]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, they were here for a good many years doing what they pleased. But then they would get sick or old or something. And I don't know what happened.

[00:01:06.48]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, were most of them pretty productive, do you think?

[00:01:11.31]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Oh, yes, they were hard workers. They really were. You might be interested in talking with Tessim Zorach, who lives up in Maine.

[00:01:28.81]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm, I've not met him. I talked to his sister, who is Dahlov.

[00:01:33.58]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Yes. You didn't meet him at the conference?

[00:01:35.73]

ROBERT F. BROWN: No, I didn't.

[00:01:37.50]

MADELEINE L'ENGLE: Well, anyway, he's got all kinds of great reminiscences.

[00:01:41.32]

ROBERT F. BROWN: I wonder if we've done that.

[END OF TRACK AAA_lengle87_5130_m]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

