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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Oscar Collier,
1994 June 22

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

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Oscar Collier on June 22, 1994. The interview took place in Seaman, Ohio, and was conducted by Stephen Polcari for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

Tape 1, Side A (45-minute tape sides)

STEPHEN POLCARI: This is Stephen Polcari with Oscar Collier for the Archives of American Art, June 22, 1994, in [Seaman], Ohio. We're now looking at some works by Mr. Collier.

OSCAR COLLIER: This is a painting I did before getting involved with the Indian Space thing, when I was living at 153 Avenue C in Manhattan.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, Avenue C? East Village.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. Yeah, right.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Early East Village art scene!

OSCAR COLLIER: We called it the Lower East Side in those days.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yes, I know. In those days, yes.

OSCAR COLLIER: Avenue C and East 10th Street. We lived in a Gertrude Barrer and I lived in a an unheated railroad flat, which cost sixteen dollars a month.

STEPHEN POLCARI: [opens fizzy beverage and spills it?-Ed.]

OSCAR COLLIER: Don't worry about that; I'll get a tissue. [pause] And, extravagantly, we had a telephone.

STEPHEN POLCARI: You had a telephone?

OSCAR COLLIER: Which cost eighteen dollars a month. [laugh] Because the only kind of phone you could get right after. . . . World War II was still going on, and we took the flat in about 1944.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Was housing difficult in New York in 1944? I mean, it's always been difficult in New York.

OSCAR COLLIER: No, it was easy then because so many people were away because of the war and because economic activity was restricted because of the war. And there were empty. . . . Actually, it was Robert Barrell who suggested that we. . . . We said, "Where can we find a place to live that's cheap?" and he said, "Go to the Lower East Side." So we just took the Eighth [Street] crosstown to the end, which was East ____ . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: [chuckles] Stepped outside.

OSCAR COLLIER: . . . and that was Avenue B, which didn't look so good, so we walked over one block to Avenue C, and above the tavern on the corner there was a for-rent sign and a very nice Polish woman, whose husband was the super of the thing, showed us the flat on, I guess it was the fourth floor walkup and it had been empty for years. So they promised to paint it-clean it up and paint it-and they did, very nicely. So we moved in and right across the street was a junk shop, so we bought all our furniture there. And, curiously, we also found some very attractive and interesting primitive paintings in that shop.

STEPHEN POLCARI: [adjusting microphone] Primitive paintings? Do you folk. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: No, it was genuine American primitive art. Not primitive in the sense of. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Tribal art. No, naïve.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: You mean naive.

OSCAR COLLIER: Naive art, right, yeah.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So this was 1944?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. Well, I have prepared a little chronology if you want to wait till I grab it.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, okay. Well, these interviews they're sort of . . . they have an overall beginning/middle type of thing, but there's really no structure to them. And we can just begin at the beginning. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: . . . and then sort of go on from there.

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, it might be interesting just to get on paper a couple of things-I mean, on record, [anyway]. The Collier family, according to my great grandfather, arrived in the USA in 1796, and I don't know much about my mother's family except her father, Percy Moore, was in [Mound, Mountain], Mississippi, in the 1900 period. I was born on February 26, 1924 in Waco, Texas.

STEPHEN POLCARI: February 26.

OSCAR COLLIER: February 26, 1924, in Waco, Texas, in my grandfather's house. At that time. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: I'm sorry to interrupt, I just want to double. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

OSCAR COLLIER: Anyway, my mother and father then lived in Mumford, Texas, which is in the east central Brazos bottom area of Texas near Bryan, where Texas A & M College is. And my father had about 555 acres of flood-prone black land and raised cotton and corn on it. We had a very interesting sort of cultural condition there. My grandfather had brought over a number of Italian families to act as tenant farmers, and during the Depression they had money under their mattresses and bought up a lot of the land that large landowners had lost during the Depression. So many of my schoolmates were the descendants of these Italian families. We also had a sizable black population and there were also quite a few what we called Mexicans-that is to say, people who had come from Mexico or native Texans who were of Mexican descent.

STEPHEN POLCARI: What we call Hispanic or Latino nowadays. The names keep changing.

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. Yes. So my friends as a child were members of all of those cultures. There were very few of the original descendants of white settlers left.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Because they had given up on it?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, no, because they had owned large plantations and had borrowed money on them, living it up in the twenties [chuckles], and lost them in the Great Depression. My father and my uncle were practically the only ones in that area that did not lose their places. My grandfather had been. . . . My grandmother's family had been among the original settlers, and my grandfather had been a schoolteacher and he married or bought up the other heirs and had a very large plantation there. And my uncle owned what they called Collier's Store, for general merchandise which still exists. There was a cotton gin and....

STEPHEN POLCARI: Your family still was there then?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, my cousin Frances [_____-Ed.] still owns-bought out my father when he retired-and she still owns all that land. So Collier's store is still there and operating.

STEPHEN POLCARI: It still remains primarily farming? And it hasn't really changed?

OSCAR COLLIER: No. Well, it's changed in the sense that all the blacks have left. Like when I visited there recently, one black family was there. There's a giant. . . . When I was a child, everything was done by hand with mules, and _____, and even tractors, and so a lot of labor was required. Now she has a giant barn full of machines. The head of the one black family is a field mechanic. He runs the machines, and his children help him, and they grow different kinds . . . something called milo-corn, over the whole vast thing, one crop for the whole thing, and they do it all by machine. So the blacks are all gone. There are no Hispanics left. However, the Italians who have smaller farms are still there in force, because they and their children still farm on their places.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Did the blacks go north during the great migrations after the war?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, I don't feel . . . don't know exactly. I'm not exactly sure where they are. I mean, first they went to Houston and Dallas, and then we lost touch with them. So I presume that they scattered all over. But were some very nice black families there that. . . . The local blacksmith was independent financially. I have to

say that Mumford was not an intolerant place. I mean, my father and his friends turned aside the drive of the Ku Klux Klan to organize any sort of scare tactics for the blacks. So the blacks actually voted, some owned land, and there were black farmers, the blacksmith, there was a black teacher, there were black workers on the railroad, and so on. So I did not witness, as a child, any extreme kinds of prejudice and we had a very peaceful community. My father and I never got along very well, but I have to say that he was a skilled diplomat in keeping the peace. Yet some of his best workers didn't hesitate to criticize him if they felt he was doing something wrong, and he'd listen to them and often they were right. [chuckles]

STEPHEN POLCARI: [For] him, he stayed in business. He listened.

OSCAR COLLIER: He [didn't] stay in business for that reason [though]. So I have to say that I was raised in a family where tolerance of all kinds of other people. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: And variety was very strong in a farming community.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: It was a small town, though?

OSCAR COLLIER: It was tiny. It was very tiny.

STEPHEN POLCARI: What do you think the population was?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, at that time population. . . . My mother took the 1940 census and I think it was like two hundred and fifty people. So truly tiny. I went to grade school there, and then I went to high school in Hearne, Texas, which is where they had a consolidated high school where people came from all over the place. It was. . . . [However, I was] sort of culturally isolated. My family had been extremely well off before the Depression, and, of course, we. . . . I can remember going to play tennis with the other plantation families. I mean, there _____ [might be] _____ as a child. Then, of course, in 1930 all that ended, and we were really poor during the Depression. We always had plenty to eat and everything, but we were cash-poor. Every nickel and dime counted enormously, and my father was able to hang on, and my uncle was able to hang on. But two or three of my other uncles did lose their places, and my grandfather, who had been extremely rich before the Depression, lost everything and he became bankrupt. And the only thing he was able to save was his colonial mansion in Waco. He had been a trustee of Baylor University because he had given them all the money while he was affluent. And his daughter married a Baylor University professor, a Professor Henry [Channon, Cannon], who was a Rhodes scholar and a professor of Greek and [Aramaic], who was teaching at this religious college. So during my childhood I associated with the Baylor University professors who used to come down to shoot quail or dove or whatever.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Shoot dog!?

OSCAR COLLIER: Doves.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, doves.

OSCAR COLLIER: Quail and doves. Some of them had very fancy hunting dogs, which they brought with them. So anyway I graduated from Hearne High School.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Sounds like. . . . I mean, the Depression days obviously were very difficult, but an outdoor type of thing, in the country, swimming holes. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh, yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: I mean, just non-city and probably not very much influence in terms of an interest in art. Your parents weren't interested?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, my mother had a small interest in art. My uncle that was the professor, his wife, my aunt-my father's sister -was a painter. She first had four children, and then, when they got a little older, she resumed painting. And at the time she died in an automobile accident coming back from an art exhibition, she had won a Texas state prize in a competition at Austin. She was I wouldn't say a great painter but she actually had some art skill. Her children became . . . they introduced me to art books. They had quite a few books of the Impressionists.

Also I had a . . . my mother's. . . . Well, I won't go into the complication. My father and mother were not related, but other members of their families had also married, and so there was an older woman who we called Cousin Elma, who was a widow and had no children, and she took a considerable interest in me and she was much more open and radical, compared to all the other members of the family, to new ideas. She used to clip out from Life magazine all the art reproductions-surrealist things by Dali and so on-the more shocking the better-and mail

them to me.

STEPHEN POLCARI: But she knew you'd be interested. How old were you at that time?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, I was about eight or nine or ten. I can't say that I displayed any artistic talent as a young person.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Did you draw much?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, my drawing was confined to practical things like depicting battles of ships and airplanes. [laughs]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yes, I'm familiar with that, yes.

OSCAR COLLIER: And things of that sort. When I got to high school and studied plane geometry-I was intensely interested in plane geometry; it was the most fascinating thing I've ever studied-I began to draw elaborate constructions made out of cubes. So that, I guess, was the first time I made any effort to draw. My cousin also was very interested in photography. He was in high school at the same time. He later became an aerial photographer. So I guess his interest in photography helped me along a little bit. But I was more interested in politics and literature as a young person.

STEPHEN POLCARI: You mentioned that you have an aunt who was interested in politics and who took you around.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, my aunt Lillian Collier, who also lived in Mumford, was very active in Democratic Party politics. And she was also the president of the Federated Women's Clubs of Texas. She used to go and testify at legislative meetings in Austin, and when I was. . . . In Texas at that time you could have a drivers license at fourteen, so I would drive her in her ancient air-flow Chrysler, which could travel up to a hundred and ten miles an hour from. . . . [laughs]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Did you ever go a hundred and ten miles an hour?

OSCAR COLLIER: Once when she was asleep. [both laugh] Getting back. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Amazing you found a road where you can go a hundred and ten miles an hour.

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, the roads between Mumford and Austin are mostly flat and straight-not entirely-but they are long, flat, straight, and coming back after a legislative meeting at eleven or twelve at night there was practically nobody on the road. I realize now it's extremely dangerous because there could have been an animal on the road. But there was practically no traffic.

STEPHEN POLCARI: How old were you when you. . . . Oh, you had a license so you were fourteen. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Fourteen or fifteen. Well, before that there were no requirements for licenses. The way I got an auto license was that they had put in the requirement and everybody who was fourteen or more could apply for one and get it, so that's how I got my first license. [laughs] But before that, any age you could drive. I learned to drive in a giant alfalfa field with a Model T Ford when I was maybe four years old. My visiting cousin took me in this big field and it had just been mowed, so it was large and flat. He started the car and said, "Drive." And so I steered it and drove it. [laughs] So I learned to drive very young.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Amazing, yeah.

OSCAR COLLIER: But it was not very. . . . I mean, he put it in low gear, and four miles an hour was about the maximum speed an old Model T could go in those years.

So it was cheerful. I mean, my cousins from Mississippi-my mother's family-would come and visit. And then I had some cousins my own age who lived in a wonderful lock keeper's house up on stilts by the edge of the Brazos River. So there were many cheerful parts of my childhood. I guess, the. . . . My mother, however, was never truly happy living deep in the country without any money. I mean, she had come from an affluent Mississippi family and she was a sort of Southern belle, and, well, she and my father got on quite well. . . . Also I think my arrival blighted my father's life. He often told me that my birth ruined my mother. [laughs] And he was very jealous of the fact that she breast-fed me and so on. So my father and I. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: How many. . . . Did you have brothers and sisters?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yeah, I later I had a brother, who was bottle-fed, and who got along perfectly with my father. [laughs] Anyway, I graduated first in my class at Hearne, a class of about fifty, and as a result got a scholarship for one year-a state scholarship for one year. The family was still cash-poor. This was in 1940. So I went to Waco

and stayed in my grandfather's house. He had divided his colonial mansion into dozens of apartments, most of which were occupied by Baylor University students and a few of the larger ones by Baylor University professors. So I stayed with him and boarded there and went to Baylor for a year. And while I was there two interesting things happened. One, _____. . . . There were three important influences then. The Rockefellers had given Baylor some money, and a man named Paul Baker, the professor of drama, had built an experimental theatre, which had chairs in the middle and stages on three sides-so swivel chairs in the middle and stages on three sides. So I was very interested in the Baylor theatre and helped out behind the scenes in that. And I met a young man a year ahead of me, Virgil Beavers, who was studying scene design and costume design, and we became friends. Through that also they brought down Lynn Riggs, a playwright, who wrote *Green Grow the Lilacs*, _____ in *Space*, and *The Plainsmen*, the [grace] movies, *Garden of Allah*, and so on. He gave a class called *Preparation for Writing*, which was a very interesting seminar class. Riggs and I became close friends, and I took him down to Mumford to the farm and everything. The fact that he . . . I didn't really realize that he was gay, but I think my parents did and they were sort of alarmed by the whole thing. Then also there was a man named Edmund [Kinzinger, Kinsinger] who taught art there. Kinzinger was a German. He was sort of shellshocked from World War I, when he was very young and _____.

STEPHEN POLCARI: As a German soldier?

OSCAR COLLIER: As a German soldier. He came from some sort of extremely minor German aristocratic family. He had gone to Paris and had studied art in the ateliers of [L_____] and Matisse, and he had a kind of modern style of painting in pure colors mixed with white, and no browns, only rarely black. It's hard to describe the style. It was sort of simplified, cartoon-like. I won't say _____ _____. Very simplified figures. He had also run the summer school at the Hans Hofmann School in Europe.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So he was well-versed in modernism, if he. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. Oh yes, extremely well-versed in modernism.

STEPHEN POLCARI: And he was your art teacher at Baylor?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, I didn't have any money to study art, but nevertheless I wanted to take the classes, so I bartered with him and I posed. . . . Baylor was a very puritanical school so they couldn't have nude models, but I posed with my shirt off. [laughs]

STEPHEN POLCARI: You were ahead of your time.

OSCAR COLLIER: In exchange, I was allowed to attend the class. I posed for a painting class in order to get a drawing class in exchange. So that was my first introduction to art. Also Virgil Beavers painted, and I watched him paint. He liked to paint with the palette knife and that fascinated me that you could paint with a palette knife.

STEPHEN POLCARI: What was his style, subject?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, he painted. . . . Well, of course, from a practical standpoint, as a scene designer and costume person, he had learn to draw in order to be it. But as a painter I would say he was influenced more by van Gogh and the post-impressionists than anyone else. Virgil came from an educated family in Corpus Christi that had immigrated there from the north. His father was a doctor. And so he didn't have the sort of cultural restrictions that a lot of the Baptists at Baylor University had. So he was a good friend. And at the end of the first year at Baylor-I mean, I was sort of unhappy with it and he had become sort of unhappy with it-he decided to go to the University of Iowa where there was then a Professor Bullit, who had a very good theatre school. And I decided I would go, too.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Bullit, he was a friend of Grant Wood.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, B-u-l-l-i-t. *Dark of the Moon* was first written and produced at Iowa. And that's, I guess, one of the lasting achievements of this theatre school, but anyway he was a nice man. So I said I would go, too. So we hitchhiked together from Waco, Texas, to Iowa City, and I arrived without a transcript or any money or anything. And I just said, "I would like to enroll and study art." And I guess because people were already drafted and there were fewer college students then, they simply said, "Fine. We'll send away for your transcript. You can enroll. We'll give you a job washing dishes in the cafeteria. We can't give you any cash, but you can get some other job." And so I got a job as a waiter to get a little cash, and Virg and I took an attic apartment together, which was very cheap. And Philip Guston was teaching art there. He was still a [social conscious, social conscience] painter at that time-and a muralist.

STEPHEN POLCARI: We're talking about 1942 now, I guess?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. Yes, that's right. It's the fall of 1942. Guston. . . Oh, and when Beavers and I arrived, the first thing we saw was two young women, one dressed in a bright green raincoat and the other dressed in a bright red raincoat. They were people who had come from New York to enroll in the University of Iowa. And one was Gertrude Barrer-she was the green-coated one-and the red coated one was Elizabeth [Ribkin], a young woman whose family had been very closely connected with left wing Communist politics. Elizabeth was also . . . she had known [W. E. B.-Ed.] Du Bois, the black historian. She knew Cab Calloway.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Cab Calloway because of Du Bois, [wow]!

OSCAR COLLIER: And so on. She and her family were very interested in black political rights, [need I say]. And she was sort of a Communist. But Gertrude, on the other hand, although she was a left-winger, she was not accepted into any of the . . . the Communist party, or the Trotskyites, or the Socialists or anything, because they all considered her politically unreliable, in the sense that she expressed her opinions very freely and was unwilling to adhere to any party line.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Sounds unreliable to me.

OSCAR COLLIER: [laughs] Anyway, we met these two nice-looking young women. Oh, here's a picture of Gertrude as she appeared while we were married. She was beautiful as a young person.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Ah ha! Oh, my god. I don't want to rush the narrative, but go ahead.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, and. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: So she was there, just as an art student.

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, right. She had been. . . . As she explained herself, her mother was very interested in getting her daughters and son into the arts, so she had enrolled Gertrude's brother and Gertrude in music classes and eventually got them into Julliard. Gertrude was an extremely talented singer. I mean, she had a wonderful voice. I mean, a [Lotte] [Lehman]-type voice, a [Kirsten] [Flagstadt]-type voice almost. It turned out that she had extreme stage fright and as a result. . . . In addition, the stories she heard of the life of a singer were not encouraging. She just didn't feel that she could put up with the kind of life that a singer might have to lead. So she abandoned music-as a profession. She continued to play and I must say I had really wonderful, magnificent private concerts from her. She would prepare a whole concert and perform it. It was really . . . like an exquisite experience. Anyway, her mother had given her some money, and she had saved it and she had a bank account of some substance. So she was financing her own education, Elizabeth's education, and she also was financing two sort of left-wing refugees, their educations. All at the University of Iowa then.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Had she met. . . . Had she brought these refugees into the University of Iowa?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, I think she heard of the University of Iowa through them. She had met them in New York. They'd wanted to go there. I think one of them was already there and the other, the younger brother, wanted to go there.

STEPHEN POLCARI: How did they hear of a place like Iowa? New Yorkers haven't heard of Iowa.

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, there was a doctor there named [Aldarf] [Harkess], who was a Hungarian researcher who'd been brought there by the polio foundation, then called the March of Dimes, to do research in polio. He was an orthopedic expert and he had theories about the patients could regain use of their limbs after the disease was over. He described himself as a Communist who was also a Catholic. [laughs]

STEPHEN POLCARI: That's not unusual. That's a French combination.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: And [I'm] an Italian combination.

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. So how these people heard about Iowa I don't know. I mean, I heard of it from Virgil Beavers. I had never heard of it. Oh, except that I knew that Grant Wood had taught there because of my aunt's clippings from Life magazine. [chuckles]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, a regional school. Iowa City, the University of Iowa.

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, I guess I knew of it also in the sense that it had. . . . I guess I confused it with Iowa University, where there was some writing activity going on. And I skipped saying when I was at Baylor I also met two students who influenced me a lot. Scott Greer, a poet-part Choctaw Indian, part Irish, I guess. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: An Irish Choctaw. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. [chuckles] He had started a little literary magazine called Crescendo. He had been influenced by an older student, J. C.-or Judson [Crews, Cruze]. Crews is still around as a poet. Crews published many literary magazines. He corresponded with Henry Miller, even back in those days, and he was sort of accepted by a number of avant-garde type writers of that period. And my life was sort of intertwined with Scott Greer's life and Judson Crews' life for a while. Through Scott Greer, I corresponded with Kenneth [Bobois, Beaublah], who was then in New Orleans running Iconograph New Orleans, a mimeograph magazine, which was mostly a poetry magazine. But I sent him some sketches I did; he published them.

STEPHEN POLCARI: What are the dates of this?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, this was in . . . I guess the first thing I published in Iconograph. . . . Well, here's an early issue of Crescendo. This is the '43 issue. I must have given them, given the stuff in '42 [in the '42 issue-Ed.] to Scott Greer.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Is this yours? The cover?

OSCAR COLLIER: No, I didn't do that. [microphone is knocked over, or recorder is turned off temporarily; audio quality diminishes still further-Ed.] This particular issue is a later issue where I'd already met Gertrude, because she had something in here, too. Let's see, there's something of hers, and there's something of mine. [That's pretty primitive, as you can see]. [laughs] Anyway, but through Scott Greer I corresponded with Kenneth Bobois and contributed to Iconograph New Orleans.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So that was the magazine before the Iconograph in New York?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. He had run a magazine in New Orleans-a mimeograph magazine-and one of the things I was thinking [that's] contributing to [the Archives.]. . . . There it is. This is a complete file of a Iconograph New Orleans, which has a few things by me in it and it's really an interesting. . . . This is a little woodcut. It's really an interesting magazine. Has some quite good poetry and a little bit of criticism in it.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So this was 1941, when you were at Baylor?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, I first was in touch with Kenneth in '41. Well, '41, '42. In other words, starting in '41 with fall and then in winter it was '42. Then I sort of was out of touch with Kenneth while I was at the University of Iowa. I was only at Iowa actually for a few months.

Oh, well, that's back to Iowa. Guston at first was reluctant to let me enroll in the art classes because I had really no background in art except that one sketch class with Kinzinger, and also he despised Kinzinger's work. Kinzinger had gotten a Ph.D. in art at the University of Iowa, so he knew him and hated him.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Was he a regionalist, this Kinzinger?

OSCAR COLLIER: No, no. Kinzinger was an internationalist and at that point Guston was a regionalist, a social-conscious regionalist.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, a socially ____.

OSCAR COLLIER: Also, Kinzinger was not really a very good artist. I mean, he was a wonderful man, but he wasn't really a very good artist. He had good intentions, he understood art very thoroughly, but his execution was not inspiring. I mean, you wouldn't be ashamed to hang one of his paintings on the wall but I seriously doubt if you would ever have bought it.

STEPHEN POLCARI: I'm not familiar with him.

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, I mean, he's disappeared. I mean, his work has disappeared. So that I can't say that his art was much of a contribution to the history of art. It was all very derivative. But I do think that he was a good teacher and a pleasant man to know. Anyway, Guston finally reluctantly said I could attend the art classes on a trial basis, and I painted a painting of the attic room and showed it to him, and he said, "Okay. You can be in the class. That's good enough." So that was. . . .

I met. . . . I don't think that anything ever happened to Saul [Wishnipowski, Wishnapowsky], the outstanding student in the class. I never heard his name again after I left Iowa. But Gertrude and I were. . . . Gertrude didn't take Guston's classes. She just took some life classes. She didn't want to have any instructor. She just wanted to draw.

STEPHEN POLCARI: She just wanted to draw. Is this your first serious art effort? At Baylor and then Iowa.

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. Well, Iowa was the first serious effort. I mean, I saw Virgil when he was painting with the

palette knife. I went out and bought some paints and a cardboard panel and painted with a palette knife, too, and proudly showed it to everybody, though the paint wasn't dry. But nobody was much impressed, and I have to say that it. . . . Well, I don't still have it, but it wasn't really worth saving. [laughs] Nevertheless, it was fun. So I guess that my real art instructor was Gertrude. She had studied at the Art Students League with [Harry] Sternberg and [Will-Ed.] Barnet. She was very interested in prints, the early etchings, [especially, particularly] early on. She was influenced by Rembrandt and by other people who drew well with lines. She wasn't influenced by Rembrandt's painting but by his drawings. She was social conscious. She was interested in printmaking by [Honoré] Daumier, and Käthe Kollwitz, and so on-were her early influences. So watching her draw, listening to her talk about drawing, was the first real art instruction I had, I think. I always learned more from watching other artists work than from any other way.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Even more than with Guston? And Guston was so out of it with social realism and [then, in] this mural for [the WPA]. Did he emphasize mural painting ideas in class?

OSCAR COLLIER: He actually was working on a big mural. I mean, it was a mural on canvas which was going to be applied to a wall. I mean, I did watch him work on the mural. He would work on the mural. He'd go around and see what you were doing in the classes and talk to you, and then he would go and work on his mural, which was this giant thing at the end of a very enormous studio. And as I remember it was like industrial workers and railroad gates closing and locomotives-the typical stuff. It wasn't too bad. _____ it was pretty awful, too, I mean. But I did see him work. He didn't hesitate to work in front of his students and he didn't feel diffident. He felt very self-confident. So then it became obvious. . . . I had become eighteen, and I had to register for the draft. It became obvious. . . . Oh, and Gertrude and I started a little love affair. And I didn't take it very seriously but our friend Elizabeth came to see me and said, "Oscar, Gertrude thinks this is very serious. How can you do this to her?" [laughs] And so on. And so finally I decided I would marry her. I was under age for Iowa, so we slipped away and went and took a perilous and fascinating journey to [Tahoka, Pahouka], Missouri, where you could legally marry when you were eighteen. And we got married. And came back and. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: How old was Gertrude?

OSCAR COLLIER: She was twenty-one. She was a little older than I am. So we came back, and then when we came back there was a draft note-I mean, what I knew was a report-for-the-draft notice waiting-so rather than open it-the landlady of the apartment knew that I was away-we simply left for Detroit, leaving the notice there. And I whispered to my friend Virgil, "Tell her that you don't think I'm going be back and she'd better return any mail." So we went to Detroit where Gertrude's brother had gone. He'd married and abandoned music and taken a part interest in a clothing store. Now I hadn't met Gertrude's parents or anything like that, and I guess they learned by mail with great dismay that Gertrude was married to me.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Someone they hadn't met, yes.

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, not only that but a goy, I mean. Well, her parents were not at all religious in the sense of celebrating Jewish festivals and stuff like that. Nevertheless they truly believed that Jews were better than anybody else, so this naturally _____, I think. So we went to Detroit and found a place to live, near the Art Institute, which. . . . There was an eccentric architect who designed buildings in which one floor would be Baroque, the next floor would be classic, the third floor would be Celtic and so on. And I got a job. . . . I thought I would get a defense job in Detroit. I worked with the Dodge Company making tank parts. However, since I utterly lacked any. . . . I mean, I had mechanical aptitude, but I had no skill. So the job I got was what's called bench-hand, which meant that I sat in front of a machine and put a part in it, pressed a button. The machine then did something and I pressed another button, the machine disengaged. I removed the part and put it on a rack to go to the next person along the line. Anybody could have done this job.

STEPHEN POLCARI: War work! Because that was 1943?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. We met in the fall of '42 and went to Detroit and stayed there for several months. Now while in Detroit we met a few. . . . Well, I was working in the afternoon shift and arriving at eleven, twelve o'clock at night at home, Gertrude met a few people through the art museum. She met sort of a Bohemian colony of a gay young man, a young woman who was a part-time prostitute, and a sort of interesting couple named Johnny and Carol [Blako]-who, while they associated with these people, were actually lovers and married-and their friend Ralph , who was a sort of a very flaming gay and appeared [to be almost] popular to be that way. Gertrude, as a joke I think. . . . She had learned about Kenneth Bobois and had corresponded with him. She was very interested in him. So as a joke she financed Ralph going down to New Orleans to meet Kenneth. When Ken saw Ralph he was. . . . And Kenneth, while he was gay and made no bones about it, on the one hand he did not flaunt it. He didn't feel that people should be. . . . He felt their sex life should be private. He had had a longtime relationship with a young man who had, alas, died and he had not formed a new relationship after that because he continued for many years to mourn the death of this young person. And while he might have briefly engaged with somebody or another, he did not have any desire to make any other lasting commitment . . . nor

did he wish to even see any people regularly. So he was dismayed by Ralph and promptly sent him right back. [laughs] But that put Gertrude and Kenneth together. And then finally I notified the draft board and I tried to get out of going, but they kept after me and finally I decided I couldn't do anything and they gave me a note to report for a physical which, of course, I passed because I was in fine health.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yeah. I know those physicals, yes.

OSCAR COLLIER: Meanwhile, Gertrude became pregnant. So there was a question of what should she do while I was in the army. So first I took her down to Texas to meet. . . . Oh, her family had come to see us in Detroit and I had discovered that her father was an extremely prosperous, successful manufacturer of ladies underwear, which startled me because I didn't even _____. . . . I had never thought before that there must be somebody who manufactures ladies underwear. I mean, I guess I imagined that it magically appeared in the stores. [laughing] He was, I thought, an intelligent and interesting man, but he was somewhat coarse and crass also. Her mother had many pretenses to culture, but actually had been the poverty-stricken child of a poor rabbi in Poland as a child, and had to support herself as a trained nurse, until finally she advanced some and got _____ and become sort of a. . . . He had _____ and been married and everything went well for the family in the financial sense, although they quarreled terribly and were not all that great as parents. Anyway, I was startled to meet them. I mean, they were completely unlike any. . . . I mean, I had known Jewish people that I liked a lot in Texas. I mean, the ones I had known had all been, you know, like highly cultured people-intelligent, well-educated, and prosperous and often had been. . . . You know, they were among the pioneers of Texas, too, I mean. In other words, we felt they were socially equal to us because they were also pioneers of Texas.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Were they in your town?

OSCAR COLLIER: There were two Jewish people in the high school class I was in.

Tape 1, Side B

OSCAR COLLIER: . . . had a dry goods store. Also my father had almost married a Jewish woman from Waco where there was a Jewish group that went back to the foundation of the town. In other words, all the Jews I'd known in Texas were sort of descendants of old residents, and they were fairly acclimated to being Southerners and Texans. And they also all had solid social positions in these small to middle-sized town cultures. So anyway it was startling to meet recent immigrant New York Jews who were in the clothing business. [chuckles]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yeah, it was probably culturally different, yes. [chuckling]

OSCAR COLLIER: On the one hand. On the other hand it didn't affect my feeling about Gertrude at all. And she sort of got them to go back to New York, and then we went down to Texas and I introduced her to my family. My family had a very bad reaction to the fact that she was Jewish. They wanted her to conceal it-which she was reluctant to do. So it caused a big quarrel in the family and so we simply left.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So there wasn't going to be fulfillment in in-laws [in, and] relations.

OSCAR COLLIER: Right.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So they were going to be separate [families].

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. So we left and went to Waco for a while. I introduced Gertrude to Scott Greer and Judson Crews and to Kinzinger and his wife and daughter [Deedee, Didi], who was a friend, and then we went back to New York and after two or three days visiting her parents we took a furnished apartment on 61st Street near Columbus Circle and both went to the Art Students League for a [little] while.

STEPHEN POLCARI: You and Gertrude?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. We enrolled in Will Barnet's classes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Any particular reason why you chose Will?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, because Gertrude was interested in having access. . . . She didn't want to be in his class, but she didn't want to be in Sternberg's class either because she was tired of Sternberg.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, she had studied with him before?

OSCAR COLLIER: She had studied with Sternberg before.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Before she went to Iowa she had studied with Sternberg.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. Right.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Had she ever studied with [Thomas Hart.] Benton?

OSCAR COLLIER: No.

STEPHEN POLCARI: No?

OSCAR COLLIER: No, she only studied with. . . . As far as I know. I only remember that she studied with Sternberg and then later with. . . . well, she might have studied briefly with Morris [Kantor]. And, you know, at the Art Students League you might sit in occasionally on anybody's class.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yeah, you could change very frequently.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. So, anyway, the reason she wanted to be in the Barnet class was to have access to the printmaking equipment, to make etchings, and in order to do that you had to enroll in somebody's class who taught printmaking, so that they could see that you didn't ruin the equipment when you were using it, and perhaps offer you advice, and so on. So she just made some etchings. I mean, she didn't really study with Barnet. However, Barnet took a great interest in me and. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Why is that?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, Gertrude felt that it was a kind of sexual interest. I myself never felt that. But she felt angry and jealous of his interest in me. And I have to say that he never did one thing to justify such an attitude. I mean, he took to meet his wife and children, helped us find an apartment—a cheap apartment on. . . . Oh, well, no, that was later. But we did meet his wife and children and behaved, I thought, in a. . . . I guess, I don't know, he seemed to like me. I mean, it didn't seem odd to me that somebody would like me. I had had friends before. And I had always gotten on well with instructors, teachers, and so I always, for some reason, I guess because I knew professors from youngest childhood, I always got on perfectly well with them, and they were always willing to accept me as an equal rather than look down on me as a student. I don't know why this is, but it's probably because I just knew them. . . . I was raised in an atmosphere of all those ____ Baylor professors.

STEPHEN POLCARI: [They, You] probably just felt relaxed and comfortable.

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. And so they always accepted me and were perfectly willing to talk to me as though I were unequal, although they often knew more than I did. Nevertheless, they were happy to listen to my ideas about what I did know.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Will was pretty young. Will Barnet was pretty young at that time.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yeah, he was still pretty young then. His children were quite young, and so he was. . . . I was a little interested in surrealism at that point and I did some drawings with double images in them. But realistic type drawings with double images, I remember..

STEPHEN POLCARI: Was that a. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh, you know, I would do a tree with buds budding which were a little phallic, and stuff with that. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: [Tchelitchew] or. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, I had seen [Tchelitchew's] stuff. I hated the color in his work, although I admired his drawings.

STEPHEN POLCARI: There was a big Dali show in '41, but you weren't in New York at that time.

OSCAR COLLIER: No, but I saw the Dali show at the Art Institute of Chicago. . . . I mean, the Art Institute in Detroit. It traveled there. I didn't really like the Dali show, though. But again because of the color. I hated the color. I was intrigued with his ideas, but the color did not. . . . I mean, it just turned me off completely. In fact, it gave me a headache to see this whole show. I guess the stuff I liked best at the Art Institute of Detroit, they had a wonderful Expressionist collection at that time, German expressionists. I liked their stuff. And they had some good Mexican school things. Diego Rivera, Siquieros, and Orozco, and so on. I liked those very much. I liked the expressionists. To look at, I liked the expressionist work the most at that time.

STEPHEN POLCARI: What is it, the fierceness of emotion?

OSCAR COLLIER: The freedom of which they. . . . the way they felt free to depict things simply and all over the

place and the freedom of subject matter, too.

STEPHEN POLCARI: You mean, spatially and. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. Well, like, [Max] Beckmann's work. There's a lot of space, open space, in most of Beckman's work. And the Mexicans, well, I realize now that there's a lot of flaws in their sense of space, to say the least, on the one hand. On the other hand I liked the freedom with which they moved things around, made things big and small as they wished, and put things of incongruous subject matter next to each other without any hesitation, and so on. I liked the literary quality of Mexican art a lot. Well, of course, I was always impressed with van Gogh's work, too. I mean, I learned about it from Virgil Beavers. I continued to admire it at that stage.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Did you have any art history courses before then. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: No.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Or did you just pick that up on your own?

OSCAR COLLIER: Again Gertrude handed me Elie Faure's History of World Art, the ____ ____.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, right.

OSCAR COLLIER: Four volumes, or something like that. And I read it. And that interested me, although I didn't subscribe to all his theories and I didn't like his lyrical style of writing so much. But that caused me. . . . I had been a compulsive reader from earliest childhood. I mean, I read everything in the Hern, Bryan libraries. Even in high school I was reading T. S. Eliot, I was reading Aldous Huxley, I was reading Carl Jung. I tried to read works of philosophy-without perfect success, I hate to say it. But I was an omnivorous reader. So when I learned about reading about art history [I had, I] just read a great deal of art history in books. And, of course, Gertrude and I went, naturally, to all the museums in New York including the Museum of Natural History and so on. Although we were not at that stage so interested in. . . . I admired the works of Picasso, but I had no idea of imitating him at all. I truly enjoyed seeing them, particularly. . . . My earliest interest in Picasso was in his drawings. It wasn't until later I came to appreciate his paintings. I mean, first I admired his drawings.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yeah.

OSCAR COLLIER: Anyway, then finally I was drafted and Gertrude moved back with her parents and I went into the army.

STEPHEN POLCARI: This was '44?

OSCAR COLLIER: No, well, remember, we were still in. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: '43, when you went to New York?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, right. I was drafted in '43, in, I guess it was July. When I was in Texas, one thing my parents had done was ask me to. . . . They'd heard of a program called the Army Specialized Training Program. They said, "Take this test, and maybe if you have to go in army you'll go to college." So I did take the test. Naturally since I was academically proficient I did well in it. I was sent by the army. . . . with 99 New Yorkers is I was shipped to Fort Hood, Texas, not too far from Waco. [laughs]

STEPHEN POLCARI: This was coming home for you. For the other 99 New Yorkers it was a little strange.

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh, it was awful for them because it was July. You can't imagine how hot it is in Fort Hood in July. It was 110 [degrees.] many days. And we were given accelerated basic training.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, basic training in 110 degree heat!

OSCAR COLLIER: They were falling down like flies all around me. Now, of course, all of these boys were ones that had passed this test. I mean, they were all either first-year college students or graduated from high school with honors and so on. They were all super bright. So they really suffered, I must say. Anyway, at the end of that, I was curiously returned to Baylor University by the Army Specialized Training Program. Meanwhile, Gertrude had given birth to our daughter, Greer. I managed. . . . wangled permission to live off the post-I mean, the post being a dormitory at Baylor University-and rented a little house nearby and Gertrude came and we lived together and of course I reported to classes every day.

STEPHEN POLCARI: You reported to classes every day?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: This was 1944 then?

OSCAR COLLIER: No, it's. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: . . . it's still '93? [meant '43-Ed.]

OSCAR COLLIER: No. Yeah, I guess it's. . . . It's the fall of '44 and the winter. . . . I mean, the fall of '43 and the winter of '44. And so Gertrude got to know Scott Greer and Judson Crews and people at the Baylor Theatre and the Kinzingers and saw all the people I'd known there. Lynn Riggs, of course, had departed because he had only been a brief three-month course. And then I discovered that Scott was hardly trustworthy, because he tried to seduce Gertrude, which she immediately rejected. [laughs] That sort of made me mad, but I got my revenge later by writing a little thing that was about [living]. . . . Scott later. . . . Well, I won't go into that now.

But then, abruptly, after two quarters in training at Baylor, in which I was studying basic engineering, I took a test to study medicine-which I passed. But the results did not come in time to forestall my fate, which was that the ASTP, because of the terrible protests of many people-I think probably very justified; that why should some people be sent to college, the others are dying in Europe-the ASTP was dissolved entirely below a certain level.

STEPHEN POLCARI: What were you sent to college to learn?

OSCAR COLLIER: Basic engineering.

STEPHEN POLCARI: And so the army was going to train its own engineers. Were they drafting engineers?

OSCAR COLLIER: The whole thing, I think, politically was conceived as relief for the colleges and universities, which were dying on their feet for lack of students. This way they were given some students, tuition was paid for by the army, and they could keep going. I mean, really it was just relief.

STEPHEN POLCARI: [laughs]

OSCAR COLLIER: When the program was dissolved the parts that were retained were rational. They were either going to train doctors-and there was a shortage of doctors-or to train linguists-and there was a shortage of linguists. Those two parts of the program had always been rational, but the basic engineering part, I have to say, was. . . . What I studied-trigonometry and physics-the same stuff you would study if you were going to become an engineer. Anyway, it was abruptly ended. I was shipped off to Camp [Maxi] in Paris, Texas, and given a six-week refresher course in basic training, because our original basic training had been accelerated and not complete. And then they were going to, well, as it turned out, ship us-all these selected, super-intelligent young men-over to be replacements in the Battle of the Bulge, and many of them were killed. So they had a tragic ending. However, Gertrude I think foresaw that this might happen. Judson Crews had been in the army and he had managed to get out-probably legitimately, because of a stomach ulcer or possibly _____. He was a little mysterious about this. So Gertrude said to me that I should try to get out of the army. I had married her, she had a child, and what was she going to do if I was killed in army, and so on. So, after a lot of thought, I decided I would try to do this. And how could I get out of the army? I was in absolutely peak physical condition. I mean, the best condition I've ever been in my whole life. There was not an ounce of fat on me. Healthy, muscular, the works. So I decided that I would pretend to be psycho-neurotic. And then I couldn't think . . . I knew that I didn't know enough about psycho. . . . I'd read enough psychology books to know that I didn't know enough about psychology to pull this off.

STEPHEN POLCARI: A Section 8, is what they call that?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, I thought about it a long time. And I thought about, too, how my parents [get, got, had been] alarmed when I was associated with Lynn Riggs, who was gay, and so on. I decided that I would pretend that I was terribly tempted to become homosexual by the exposure constantly to other men and naked bodies in the shower and so on as a soldier. And I began to act odd. I mean, in order to induce some symptoms I stayed up, got as little sleep as possible. And ate only the most indigestible things, and sometimes none at all. And so finally I did appear to be a little sick. I was put on sick call. I was sent to a psychologist. He probed a bit and I explained my real problem. And he was a little skeptical, I must say. But he said, "All right, I'm going to transfer you to a medical unit. In this unit you will have a separate room. You won't have this problem as much." So I was transferred to the separate unit. However, the commandant of the medical unit didn't want me, because he had a very good team of people. They were all really expert at. . . . And they were going to go abroad or something. He got rid of me because he just felt that he didn't want anybody on the team unless they were truly qualified and he didn't think I was. I wasn't. _____ I had no training whatsoever for the work that they did. So I was put in a sort of casual pool and temporarily put guarding prisoners, which upset me a lot because I was fearful that one would try to escape and I'd have to shoot him.

STEPHEN POLCARI: German prisoners?

OSCAR COLLIER: No, American prisoners. In a disciplinary barracks. You know, people who had gone AWOL or got drunk or had fights or whatever. And they had a really quite competent psychiatrist there that examined the prisoners to see if some of them were actually there because they were crazy and not because of bad temper. [chuckles] And he said to me, "Well, I think you're malingering but anybody who malingers to this extent must be pretty neurotic, and after the war you should certainly go to a psychiatrist," and he gave the names of people at Columbia. I said, "I can't afford a psychiatrist," and he said, "Well, tell them that and they will probably work out something." But anyway, he sent me-I think as just a little good will gesture-to a general hospital, where I was put in the psychiatric unit. Once you were in a psychiatric unit. . . . Oh, at the psychiatric unit they decided to give me truth serum to see if I was really crazy. And I was able to control what I said under the truth serum. I did retain my consciousness. And in order to convince them that I was crazy, they gave me a pencil and paper, and I drew the classic surrealist pun-that is to say, a figure which consists of, you know, like [several parts like] balls and penis for eyes and nose and a vulva, perhaps, [below, the mouth]. And that qualified. [laughing] They were not sophisticated. No one fortunately was a fan of Surrealism and did not know about this. I guess Marcel Duchamp might have been the originator of the pun. I don't know, somebody originated it. So I drew that, and that convinced the people who gave me truth serum that I was, in fact, sort of crazy.

STEPHEN POLCARI: [laughs] Just do Surrealism.

OSCAR COLLIER: But after that my problem was to convince the army that I was sane enough to release.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Now you had to reverse it.

OSCAR COLLIER: And so I began to behave and eat better, [play] in a more quiet way. Gertrude came. She had gone back to New York for a while during this. She came down and saw the people, befriended the guy who was in charge of me, a nice young man from New York. And so basically she wormed out of him how I'd have to behave in order to be considered well enough to be released. And so I behaved that way, and after two or three months I was released and given a hundred percent disability pension, which was a completely unexpected result of all this. [chuckles] So I was released in her custody, and we went back to New York.

STEPHEN POLCARI: ____ ____.

OSCAR COLLIER: So I mean I've always felt sort of guilty about it because after the war I met two or three other people that did not get released, and I learned from them how many of those boys were killed in the Battle of the Bulge ____ ____ replacement. I've always felt bad that they were killed. I mean, not bad that I survived but bad that. . . . These were wonderful young men, so it really made me feel that if ASTP had never been invented it would have been better because then they would have been randomly in the army and probably fewer would have been killed in the long run.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, they probably were sent in as replacements, and those units that didn't get ____ ____

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: . . . and then therefore they were probably given the risky tasks right away because there was no bonding with the others in the unit.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: And they ____ ____.

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, it was sad. But still, I mean, I guess I've got over it by now, but I felt bad for a while about it.

So Gertrude and I returned and we briefly stayed with her parents and then got a place on 103rd Street. And we had a little money. I got some discharge money, I was getting a pension, she had some savings and stuff. We briefly collected art. We bought some Käthe Kollwitz prints, a [George?-Ed.] Roualt print, and a Grandma Moses original of a landscape. One of the few things she ever painted which had no people in it, only a landscape. It was a sort of an artificial window. [chuckles]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, that's good. You must have got that from [Saint Etienne] Gallery.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, Dr. [Otto] Kallir became friendly with us. We later learned, however, that the Käthe Kollwitz set that he'd shown us was not of the highest quality, and so we induced him to take it back. It turned out that it was a later run of ____ steel plate things [rather than]. . . .

SP Umm hmm. ____ ____, yeah.

OSCAR COLLIER: It was too much of a bargain to have been what we thought it was. Anyway, he. . . .

Later on, when we were at Avenue C and found the American primitive paintings in a junk shop, we took them to him and he asked us to get in touch . . . to try to find the woman who had done them and we did find her. He wanted to give her a contract, because he loved the stuff. It was really beautiful. But the woman had stopped painting. She said that she had painted them, that her muse was her husband, and that when her husband died she couldn't paint any more. She didn't want to paint again. Because it reminded her of her husband and she just quit. I guess that was the first intimation I had that you could just quit. [chuckles] And anyway, so Gertrude and lived in this place on 103rd Street. It was sort of dark and smelly.

STEPHEN POLCARI: The west side of 103rd?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. West 103rd between. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Amsterdam, Columbus?

OSCAR COLLIER: It was between Amsterdam and Columbus. And it really wasn't all that cheerful, and Gertrude began to have asthma symptoms. Her mother had asthma. This was alarmed her particularly, because she'd never had asthma symptoms before. So we decided to go to New Mexico. Oh, I discovered that as a disabled veteran I could get training and be paid money, and so we went to Taos and enrolled in Louis Ribaks Taos School of the Arts-I did, and Gertrude went along. Well, when in Taos, naturally we met Louis and Beatrice Ribak, social conscious painters. Louis was an old Communist Party member who had [contributed] to The Masses and so on. A former a prize fighter. Nice interesting man. And we met a painter by the name of named Leo [Gorrell, Durrell], and of course we briefly met Frieda Lawrence. We met Tony, her Italian companion that she and [D. H.] Lawrence had picked up in Italy.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Male or female?

OSCAR COLLIER: What?

STEPHEN POLCARI: Tony was male or female?

OSCAR COLLIER: Male. It was Frieda's companion. Lawrence apparently was incapacitated later in his life by his tuberculosis and illnesses, and so basically Tony was a professional gigolo that they had picked up-a very nice man, too, I must say-in Italy and who actually lived out the rest of his life together with Frieda, after Lawrence died, and he was still there. And other people. I can't think of any later famous artists we met there, although there were certainly a lot of artists there. We stayed for the summer, and then we came back to New. . . . We became interested in Indian pottery and Spanish-American embroidery, Spanish-American design. Sort of interesting primitive stuff. And we went back to New York, [went by] the Art Students League, and met Gertrude's friend Howard [Dom, Gomb], who was studying there. And he said, "I know this wonderful painter. You've got to meet him. Robert Barrell." So we went to see Barrell and said, you know, "Where should we live in New York?" And he said, "Go to the Lower East Side." And that's how we went to 153 Avenue C. So we became interested in Barrell's work and so I thought of this idea. I mean, I hadn't enjoyed any of my classes at the Art Students League, in the sense that the instructors seemed to me to have nothing to offer. So I said to Barrell, "Could we take six lessons from you and learn how to do this kind of work?" And Barrell was extremely poor at that time. He was just hanging on. A woman named Lily Orloff was more or less financing him.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Lillian Orloff.

OSCAR COLLIER: Right, a painter.

STEPHEN POLCARI: She exhibited with the ____.

OSCAR COLLIER: Right, yes. She was financing him. She was a divorcee who lived on Central Park South and had a good deal of money with alimony. And maybe she and Barrell had a little scene or maybe not. It's hard to know for sure. But she was very fond of him and he seemed to like her. She also studied some with him. Anyway, so the six lessons. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Excuse me. His style was. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: He had the fully developed Indian Space painting style already.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Which you would describe as?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, he described it as a departure from the chests and blankets of the Northwest Pacific Coast Indians-the Haida and the Tlingit. He suggested we go to the Heye Foundation and to the Museum of Natural History and look at those things. We did go and I must say that, while I admired them, I was not all that impressed by those things. But what I liked about Barrell's style was the way it was like a synthesis of the Northwest Pacific Indian and perhaps Pueblo Indian styles and perhaps a little bit of the Inca designs and so on,

and the work of Miró, Picasso, Paul Klee. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: European modernism.

OSCAR COLLIER: European modernists. And seeing that stuff and seeing Barrell's stuff made me realize and examine very closely for the first time Picasso's Three Musicians, which is basically a painting of that type, and Miro's work, which I came to like a lot but I hadn't really understood it before, and Klee's work, which I'd admired but hadn't really understood very much. I mean, I came to understand most painters' work through seeing Barrell's work and through seeing Northwest Pacific Coast art through Barrell's eyes. And so the elements of his painting . . . the most important element as he explained it was that you draw with both sides of the line. That is to say that there's. . . . Well, not necessarily. . . . A lot of the painting will not have a negative space, but will only have positive spaces.

STEPHEN POLCARI: [Not] a contour, with a positive form and then a negative space?

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. It's all right to have some negative spaces if you want to, but you don't have to have them. You can [fill up] both sides of the line and then you can have a double image. But it's not a double image in the sense of the Surrealist fool-the-eye double image, but it's a double image in the sense that both images are strong flat things that could stand decoratively or symbolically on the canvas.

STEPHEN POLCARI: In doing this idea he was specifically rejecting, essentially, the double-image, double-space multiplem imaged, metamorphic element?

OSCAR COLLIER: Absolutely. He showed us earlier stuff of his. He was a proficient academic artist at an earlier stage. I wouldn't say he was a great one, but he was proficient. And so he had rejected all this and moved from this. Apparently influenced, he said, by Steve Wheeler, seeing Wheeler's work, interested in this. However, his work was rather different from Wheeler's, in the sense that it was perhaps more decorative than Wheeler's, I feel. I mean, while Wheeler's is decorative, there's a kind of kinetic vitality to Wheeler's work, which Barrell's work was more static. And anyway, I didn't really like Wheeler's work, and I still don't like it much. I mean, I admire it intellectually, but I don't react positively to it in the sense that I love the painting.

STEPHEN POLCARI: It's actually a fantastic kind of puzzle. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: . . . and which is very intellectual and very fascinating art to an art historian, [like] [uncovering, in covering] all these things, or to anybody, but the forms are small and tight and very precious.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. To me also Wheeler was absolutely uninterested in, well, I mean, close association with other artists. He was sort of. . . . I don't know what to say. . . . I mean, the word paranoid has been overused, but he was sort of paranoid in the sense that he felt that Barrell and [Peter-Ed.] Busa, whom [he, we] also met, were stealing his stuff and that he didn't want to be identified with them. He was himself and he alone had invented his own style and that's all. He didn't want to see other artists. He just wanted to paint.

STEPHEN POLCARI: That word has been frequently used about him, especially in his early years.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. So anyway we became very friendly with Barrell, saw him a lot.

STEPHEN POLCARI: He was single?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. Well, when we first met him he had this little tiny studio in the [Janis, Janus] Building. You know, it was maybe ten by twelve. It was utterly cluttered. You can't believe it. Paintings and Bureau of American Ethnology books and all sorts of things.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, yes, he had the ethnography books. Did you ever have them?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, yes. We bought quite a few of them after learning about them from him.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Did you all get them on Fourth Avenue?

OSCAR COLLIER: They cost absolutely nothing practically at that time. Now they cost a fortune each. It was never. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Miró had them, Pollock had them, Joseph Campbell had them. They were a big introduction to. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh, they were magnificent. However, I have to say that. . . . [moves away from microphone,

looking for something.] Gee, I don't know what I did with my. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Have you got a phone book?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. Could we interrupt a bit? I'd like to ____ ____.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Surely.

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh, there it is. Oh, well, never mind.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, yes, we might have it here.

OSCAR COLLIER: I loved those books. I read them all. However, I have to say that I was different from. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: You read. . . . Will you finish that sentence? You read them?

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh, yes. I read them, and I think that perhaps. . . . Barrell had a brother named Lloyd Barrell, who was writing in a style which was influenced by the Haida and Tlingit myths that [Franz] Boas had collected, which was a sort of free-associational style. It would be something I think. . . . We published one of his stories in the Iconograph later. "A man was sitting on the beach peeling away his sunburned skin. He peeled and peeled until he came down to his bones. He then took his bones and threw them-throwing his throwing arm last-across a river to get to the other side." And so on. He had a style in which one thing moved to another, which was very similar in spirit to the painting. That is to say that something is always going on.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Continuous metamorphosis of action and activity, one thing going into another. And that stripping himself to his bones and throwing the bones sounds Native American.

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh, yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: It sounds like x-ray style, the beginning of rebirth scenario.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. I have to say, however, I was not as impressed with the Indians themselves as, say, Helen DeWitt was. I mean, she like wanted to become an Indian. And Howard Dom perhaps to a very small extent, although Howard is such an [exuberant], frivolous person in many aspects of his life that it was hard for him.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Frivolous!? Howard!?

OSCAR COLLIER: He was a practical joker. He loved nothing more than to crush the hand of some delicate young woman that he was introduced to, and he was constantly playing jokes on people. [laughing] I mean, he was basically serious. . . . As an artist, he was very serious but his life was conducted in a very sort of exuberant, frivolous way. He found it hard to keep his voice down, was very impulsive. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, yeah. He lived alone all his life, I think.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. Well, his gestures were too gross for anyone to put up with him all the time. I mean, gross not in the sense of ugly or evil but in the sense of big. I mean, it was as though he had no fine motor control in personal relations. [laughs]. In his art, yes. But in personal relations he lacked fine motor control. But Gertrude liked him a lot and was able to, I think, cope with him quite. . . . He respected her enough not to pull any really bad jokes on her. But anyway the. . . . Go ahead.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So these were friends now, and you went to these museums and you discussed art all the time?

OSCAR COLLIER: Constantly, yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Constantly. Gertrude, too.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So it became just sort of this circle of intimates who, informally, just sort of saw and talked about art and. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, that's true. But also there's another motif in this period that's very important in what we did finally. And Barrell, in a way, laid the groundwork for it. I mean, Barrell's complaint-and I soon discovered that it was well justified-was that Americans could not show on 57th Street-that the dealers were only interested in Europeans, that American artists didn't have a chance. And a lot of artists felt that way at the time, that the whole art business, the Museum of Modern Art, [the] 57th Street, it was all built around the Europeans. And so

we all eventually could see. . . . I mean, I guess really Kenneth Bobois meanwhile had moved to New York, had become friendly with . . . and gotten a job as a truck dispatcher. He was a little, plain man and he had sort of a Napoleonic manner. And he was very good at ordering around enormous truck drivers, and he enjoyed that a lot- and was good at it. And he opened up a gallery in the evening, Gallery [Neuf] on [343] East 79th Street, in the basement of the house of a Hungarian countess who liked him a lot. So Gertrude and I showed occasionally there. And so I guess we sort of hatched a scheme or plot. We would take over American art. I would use the public relations skills I had gained working with my aunt as a politician. After all, she had once caused the very first farm-to-market road in [the USA, the state] to end directly in front of her own house. [laughs]. So I saw what politics could do. Kenneth had always wanted to prevail. Of course, American literature was important, and so he realized success was possible if you were an American. And, of course, Gertrude was very politically oriented, having met all the left-wingers of different persuasions. So basically we schemed that we would take over American art. We would create an art movement. Gertrude and I joined it, Helen DeMott joined it. Howard was already in it. Barrell, Busa, and Wheeler were already well along in it. So I learned how to do it. It was always easy for me to copy anybody else's style. I mean, I found that while perhaps I didn't have a great artistic talent I could draw a drawing that looked like Modigliani or Matisse or whatever. So I absorbed Barrell's ideas from six lessons completely. Just six lessons gave me the key to his paintings. I was able to understand the paintings. And then, of course, meeting Busa. . . . I guess, Gertrude-although she didn't like Busa much, because she thought he was a male chauvinist. "Pig" wasn't used in those days, just male chauvinist. [laughs] Nevertheless, she was more influenced by Busa, I think, than probably anybody realizes. She was more influenced by Busa, I more by Barrell. And Helen DeMott. . . . I [really don't] know who she was really influenced by. I mean, she's just the kind of person it's hard to be sure. But, anyway, she was happy to go along because we were also in rebellion against the leadership of the Art Students League. We were trying to throw out Stuart Klonis and get the head of the art-supply department, Carl Ashby, in as the new leader.

STEPHEN POLCARI: He was head of which department?

OSCAR COLLIER: He ran the art-supply store.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, Carl Ashby, yes. He had a little gallery ____ ____.

OSCAR COLLIER: Later, he had a little gallery, yes. So, anyway, that campaign failed. We were not able to throw out Stuart Klonis, and the only thing I remember about that is a very witty remark. . . . Klonis took it all in good spirit and after he was re-elected he invited Gertrude and me and Kenneth to have drinks with him. And then he made this very subtle insult to Kenneth. He started talking about accents. You know, ____ in Texas, it's curious that I didn't sound like Texas anymore, and Gertrude how she didn't sound ____ a New Yorker. Then Kenneth made some remark about his accent, and Klonis said, "Oh, I always thought your accent was a homosexual accent." [laughs] And Kenneth was somewhat offended. Actually he had a very fine speaking voice. I mean, he had a poet's voice. He read his own poetry very well. And I believe while Kenneth was perhaps not a major poet, I do feel that he was a poet of consequence and I wasn't the only one who felt that way. Later on, William Carlos Williams arranged for him to read his poetry at the Museum of Modern Art together with a couple of other poets. So I wasn't the only one that respected his work as a poet. Anyway, so we decided we would create this revolution in American art and Kenneth would be the motor of it through his gallery, and we [decided that] for propaganda we would restart Iconograph magazine, Iconograph New York.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Which had been in hiatus how long?

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh, let's see. What did I do with my notes here?

[Interruption in taping]

OSCAR COLLIER: Iconograph was started in the spring of '46 and. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: But the old New Orleans Iconograph. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: I think it ended probably in '42.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So it comes off as a post-war magazine?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. I guess it ended in '44 in New Orleans and started again in the spring of '46 in New York.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So you were all very self-conscious about having your own magazine, publicity, a gallery, a showing-and put American art on the map!

OSCAR COLLIER: Absolutely! We were going to change everything. And it started off very well. I mean, Busa introduced Kenneth to Peggy Guggenheim, who was absolutely enchanted by him. Used to come down and

Kenneth would toy with her pearls and she would simper and say, "Oh Kenneth, if I'd only met you when I was younger." [laughs]

STEPHEN POLCARI: That did not inhibit Peggy, apparently, after a while.

OSCAR COLLIER: And then Kenneth would ask me. . . . I would come to the gallery and he would say, "Oscar, I need to make some phone calls but I have to go out on some errands. Here, you call these people." And there would be Mrs. Vanderbilt, Mrs. Rockefeller, Mrs. this, Mrs. that. And so, steeling myself, I'd call them, and when I was asked, "Who's calling?" I simply said, "Oscar Collier." And, by God, I got through to every one of them and I told them about our shows and, while none of them came, some of their friends did come. And Alfred Barr came and the critics all. . . . [Ingres] [Knauer] and Howard Devree, and others-Tom Hess-did come down and review the shows.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Did [Edward-Ed.] Jewell and would [_____] [Aual] and [_____.] ?

OSCAR COLLIER: No. And that's another little thing, you see. In the Art Students League Bulletin we mounted a major attack on Edward Alden Jewell. Cicely [Aikman], the editor of the Art Students League Bulletin, her father was a reporter, and so she did some research with her father's help, and she discovered that Edward Alden Jewell had been a failure at every branch of journalism, and that finally, in desperation, the Times had made him an art critic.

STEPHEN POLCARI: [laughs] What else is new?

OSCAR COLLIER: And then she detailed his rejection of the first shows of every major modern artist. And he died shortly thereafter. He quit and died. A lot of people felt this article hastened his demise.

STEPHEN POLCARI: [laughs]

OSCAR COLLIER: I don't know if it's true. I later became very friendly with Howard Devree, after he retired. He sublet my studio in East Hampton one summer-together with his very nice wife. And he didn't feel that the attack had killed Jewell. He just thought that Jewell was in poor health anyway. But we felt wonderful when he retired. And Devree took a much more cautious approach. I mean he. . . .

Tape 2, side A

STEPHEN POLCARI: Part two, Stephen Polcari with Oscar Collier, June 22, 1994.

OSCAR COLLIER: Anyway, the critics seemed to accept Kenneth's gallery as something of significance. He got in the James Street Group. Through that I met Nell Blaine and Hyde Solomon and Larry Rivers and somebody Roth . . . I can't think of his name.

STEPHEN POLCARI: They were a distinctive group?

OSCAR COLLIER: Again. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: [Sort of, They were] another group.

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. They had been somehow evicted from their space. They needed a place to show and Kenneth gave them a show. He had various other painters that he found whose works he liked. Also I should mention at that time through Gertrude I met Edith Schloss, who later was a reviewer for Art News. She was a German immigrant painter who later married Rudy Burkhardt, the filmmaker and photographer. I met Theodore Stamos.

Stamos told us how he got started in art. That is to say, he'd gone to Provincetown, he had very little money, he was very young, he observed people selling paintings, he went home painted a painting, went to the beach, sold it, and after he sold it decided it was a good thing to do, and he went and painted another one and sold it. At that point he said, "I have to continue this way: I paint a painting and I sell it, then I paint another one." [chuckles]

STEPHEN POLCARI: That's fair, that's fair.

OSCAR COLLIER: That's his self-described beginning as an artist.

STEPHEN POLCARI: [laughing] Well, you have to eat. So this was another group, but they're different. They weren't interested as much in Indian work?

OSCAR COLLIER: No, no.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Now this group of Indian-what has become known as Indian Space painters-that was the name of Howard Dom, he ascribed to the group. Were you aware of other artists outside your group being interested in Native American forms? In combination with Modernism?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, Helen DeMott became friendly with a woman named Sonia Sekula. I never met her, but Kenneth met her and like her a lot and induced her to show him a few things. And there were others who Gertrude met and then I met through her. Richard [Buscart, Burscard], whom she admired a lot.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yes, Richard. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: And at that time his style was somewhat in flux. A lot of people's style was in flux at that time. I mean, I don't know, if we had continued I think we would have moved many people. We met some of the pure abstractionists.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Such as?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, it was like some of the James Street group: Nel Blaine and Al Roth and Hyde Solomon, and there was another one whose name I can't remember.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Now you were editor or co-editor of Iconograph.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, well, the way we did it [was] Kenneth was the editor, I was more or less the managing editor, and Gertrude, I guess, was sort of the art editor. We settled everything that we would do by meetings. But we didn't have much trouble. Also I should. . . . Well, briefly because it's important for later in the story, on the psychological situation, Kenneth was very lonely. His lover had died in New Orleans. He never replaced that. He obviously was attracted to me on the one hand. On the other hand, he liked Gertrude a lot and met her-physically met her-before he met me, while I was still in army, and spent some time with her and so on. So he became sort of like a member of our family. We often would eat together. He tried to teach Gertrude how to cook and I learned something about how to cook. [laughs]

STEPHEN POLCARI: At least it took with someone!

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. He was a wonderful cook-in the French tradition. His association with us and with the other artists-but most of all with us-took the place of a family for him. And so I think that he felt. . . . Also it gave him a sense of achievement to successfully present-as an impresario-successfully present young artists. I think that that psychological aspect has to be. . . . Others resisted that to a greater extent. I mean, he was not able to become truly friendly with Busa, who was a very independent person-to say the least. I mean, cantankerously independent. Although Busa did spend quite a bit of time with all of us. I mean, he was more concerned with making a living as a teacher. He was married, he and his wife had a nice apartment, he was interested in maintaining a decent life-style through teaching and through his association with Peggy. He was sort of jealous of Kenneth's friendship with Peggy. Oh, another thing that happened then that was sort of important. Kenneth had an inactive gay friend, whose name I don't remember exactly. Something [Chrow], perhaps Leon Chrow, or something of that sort.

STEPHEN POLCARI: The painter Leon Kroll?

OSCAR COLLIER: No, he wasn't a painter. He was a collector and dealer in antiquities. I think it was C-h-r-o-w-something like that. Anyway, he was a very well-dressed, elderly, withdrawn sort of person. But anyway he became very interested in the whole thing, and he arranged to visit. . . . For Peggy Guggenheim. . . . That was, I guess, the first time she came to see Gertrude and me. And a New Zealand opal heiress and two or three other people would all come to see us at 153 Avenue C in our little railroad flat. They brought along some very fancy tea, and we didn't have any teacups, so I served the tea in sour cream jars, which thrilled Peggy Guggenheim because she thought it looked like urine samples. [laughs]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, I hope it was tasty tea.

OSCAR COLLIER: It was good. He brought some very good East Indian tea. However, that meeting-I mean, that event-was extremely depressing to me. It made me realize that if I became a successful artist this was the kind of people I would see: Peggy Guggenheim (you know, cheerful enough but hardly admirable), this nowhere New Zealand opal heiress, and Chrow, the antiques dealer who was really there because he liked me personally. I mean, this was a very depressing experience for me. It was the first time I realized how dependent a successful artist would be on patrons-rich patrons-and how eccentric and lacking in. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Go ahead, say the word.

OSCAR COLLIER: [chuckles] Well, how lacking in anything of value these people were intrinsically. I mean, they

were using art, it seemed to me, to advance their social careers, their lives, or to have something to do, not because they loved it. So that was, I guess, very upsetting. Now, in addition, at that time I was going to the New School of Social Research basically in order to get the G.I. money. Also, by taking a couple of art classes, I could get a lot of free art supplies. Very generous. So I took Louis Shanker's class in printmaking and a couple of other classes in art, and then I took survey courses in everything-meaning....

STEPHEN POLCARI: This was at the New School?

OSCAR COLLIER: At the New School. I mean, it was really. . . . I selected the New School because by going thirteen hours a week, all in the evening, I was able to get the G.I. money, free art supplies-also free books for these courses-and at the same time paint in the daytime. I mean, I would have the daylight hours free. However, in a way that unhinged me because I took Sidney [Hubb's, Hoff's, Heuf's] courses in philosophy, and I took courses in aesthetics and in art history, and philosophy and so on. Now two things happened at the New School which had a bad effect. One was I met Jean Franklin. She was a dropout from Bryn Mawr who was living a Bohemian life in the Village, but who was interested in art history and took an art history class. And I met her and I was very attracted to her appearance, because she reminded me of my childhood sweetheart, in appearance. And the other thing was that I was beginning to realize that my paintings did not communicate in an explicit way. For example, I did a painting and. . . . There were two experiences. One, I did a painting. One person looked at it and said, "Oh, that makes me feel so cheerful." Another one, "Oh, that's so tragic." And that struck me. I mean, like here I was painting to express myself-because in my heart I was an expressionist-and people didn't understand what I was saying. I mean, they could get exactly the opposite reaction to the same painting. Another thing that was a little shaky, although lighter in tone, was that downstairs from us at Avenue C there was a family that had a little girl that was only a little older than our daughter Greer. She came up one day and she saw the Grandma Moses on the wall, which we had kept as a window into the country, and looked at our paintings, pointed to the Grandma Moses thing, and said, "Oh, I bet that's a ____ painting." [laughs] And that made me realize, again, how far away we were from the ordinary person. True, this was a child of a slum family, but still she was a nice child and I liked her a lot. But it made me realize how far we were from communicating with those ordinary and truth-telling, childish Americans. [laughs] Those two things shook me a little bit. Although, I mean, the impact took a while to sink in, of the two things. Anyway, Kenneth mounted the Eight on a Totem Pole show. It created . . . you know, had some impact. A lot of people, I think, were beginning to look on us, and perhaps even a few. . . . Like Will Barnet, mean, I think began to, for the first time. . . . I mean, he had seen primitive art before naturally, but it was the first time he began to think, "Well, maybe I ought to be influenced by that, too." I mean, you see, that's when Barnet came into the Indian thing. Not before, the way he's always said.

STEPHEN POLCARI: No, yes, I think after the group was. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Right, right. After it was established, had the show, then he began to move a little bit in that direction. Previously he'd been influenced mostly by Matisse and Milton Avery. I mean, if you look at his paintings of that period, if you did in fact date them, you will see that Milton Avery was really his major influence. Matisse, as the stills for Milton Avery. [chuckles] Not that I'm saying. . . . I mean, I think Barnet is a painter of great talent. I like his work. But just from the history aspect, he moved into a market. Another thing is. . . . Oh, and then we also somehow met Alfred Russell at that time.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yes, who wrote in Iconograph.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, Alfred Russell and his wife at that time, Carol Bundy, lived also on the lower East Side, and I forget how we met them, but we did meet them. Alfred was a prodigious draftsman and he was studying also printmaking with Stanley William Hayter, and that gave me a little introduction to Hayter's studio. I mean, I walked over and took a look at it. He [recounted, retouted] Miró making a print [for, at] Hayter's studio. He said he [could, would] take something and take a piece of paint and move it around with his finger and then he would drop some paint. Anyway, he said this in contempt of Miró, but to me it seemed admirable, the way Miró worked, as he described it. That is, spontaneously creating each part through some . . . after an accident or a casual. . . . After starting casually and using accidental elements, then to connect them up and create something _____. To me, that was just Miró doing what he always had done awfully well. So, anyway, Alfred and his wife were friends. We saw them a good deal. And at that point he was very much in sympathy with Fascism. He was an out-and-out Fascist.

STEPHEN POLCARI: When was this? What were the dates on this?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, he was listening to Ezra Pound's broadcasts from Italy during. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, this is during the war.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yeah, this is. . . . Well, you see, I got out in the fall of. . . . [consults paperwork-Ed.]

[Interruption in taping]

OSCAR COLLIER: I got out in late 1944. We returned from New Mexico in the fall of '45, so this was in the winter of '45-'46 that we met Alfred. The war was still going on in the earlier part of it. Alfred was listening to Ezra Pound's broadcasts with great sympathy and so on. But since he was obviously, at that point in his life sort of crazy, Gertrude, though Jewish, didn't. . . . She wormed out of him that he'd had an unsuccessful love affair with one of the. . . . Well, actually, it was a first marriage with a Jewish woman, who had then left him. And so she felt that this was. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Rationalization.

OSCAR COLLIER: . . . rationalization and a reaction to this. So we didn't take him seriously. He'd go into a tirade, and we'd wait till he finished and we'd change the subject and [he'd get the point]. [chuckles]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Good, good.

OSCAR COLLIER: And eventually his wife Carol Bundy, a poet. . . . Was very strange indeed. _____-like figure. She had a very sour view of life, and eventually. . . . Alfred used to do crazy things to get rid of her. He would take her to the end of the subway line and go on walking somewhere, then he'd run away and go back, hoping she would get lost. And, of course, she always found her way home again. But finally she met another man and left him. And he was very happy and eventually he met a young French woman who had been active in the Resistance in World War II and married her and completely changed his point of view. [laughs] And straightened out. I mean, I don't what I'm [finding, pointing] out, but he was studying art history. He got an M.A. under Meyer Schapiro at Columbia. And, of course, I guess his terror of Meyer Schapiro was part of his anti-Jewish thing, too. I mean, he was tyrannized by Schapiro. He was. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, Schapiro could do that game for anyone?

OSCAR COLLIER: Anyway, it was a lot of fun to know Alfred. And so we always just sort of forgave him. And it turned out to be the right policy because he did eventually get over his obsessions connected with his first marriage.

So anyway, then we had the Eight on the Totem Pole show. Things seemed to be going our way. Gertrude then had a show and got very good reviews. Clement Greenberg said she was the best young female artist in America. Today it would not seem like a good comment. [laughs] Even then Gertrude was a little annoyed. She didn't really like Clement Greenberg. [coughs]

STEPHEN POLCARI: She didn't like what?

OSCAR COLLIER: She didn't really like Clement Greenberg. But, anyway, still it was something and. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Why didn't she like Greenberg? Personally or the way he. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: She didn't like him personally.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yeah. Why?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, she felt that he always acted for his own interest and never actually out of conviction. She felt that he was a very calculating person. I never met him, so I have no opinion. I mean, I always enjoyed his writing a lot. I mean, I admire his writing. You know, you can agree or disagree, but I thought he was a wonderful writer. Very stimulating to read.

STEPHEN POLCARI: _____.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, yes. Anyway, so Gertrude had a show, and, of course, we had problems between us in the sense that we were living in a small space. We had Greer, who was growing more active all the time. And Gertrude began to feel-and probably with some justification-that she was spending too much time on the mother-role and I not enough, and so we sort of made a very rigid division of time so she had exactly as much time to paint as I did. And I guess I found that a little confining. [chuckles]

STEPHEN POLCARI: You were ahead of your time!

OSCAR COLLIER: Anyway, one thing led to another. Gertrude and I had an absolutely magnificent sexual relationship, but I don't guess there was, on my side, there was very little love to it, although probably there was on her side. But anyway, I met Jean Franklin and I became attracted to her and finally asked her for a drink and we went out a bit. And finally I decided that we would separate, that we'd end the whole thing. And, of course, this brought the whole thing . . . this was. . . . Meanwhile, I had been doing a bunch of paintings, some of which were moving a little away from the Indian style. You can take a look at the catalog of the show. [moves away

from microphone to locate it-Ed.] You can see from this that I had thought of some new things.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Um hmm.

OSCAR COLLIER: All along, I'd occasionally done a painting which was not in the pure Indian style. I got an idea, and they all still had an expressionist quality to them, but. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: [You don't need Indian form].

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. So, anyway, the show I had would have included the very large painting, which was in a more. . . . It was a expressionist kind of work with a more surreal tone to it. It was a kind of a large figure holding up its hands and encumbered by various lines and things. It was sort of a combination of. . . . I can't think of anybody who ever did anything exactly like it. But it was a sort of a combination of some of the Indian things, but yet it had much more negative space and it was not so much, altogether, using both sides of the line.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Do you have any of these paintings?

OSCAR COLLIER: I don't have it, but my third wife, Diana , has the study for that painting. I'll tell you what happened to the big painting itself.

Anyway, my separating from Gertrude coincided with Kenneth getting so over his head financially and losing his job-and therefore having a little trouble meeting all of his expenses for the gallery and so on. I mean, he made some sales but not really enough to keep it going. I mean, basically he was supporting it and we occasionally slipped him a little money. So I was separating from Gertrude, Kenneth was having financial problems with the gallery, so that. . . . We had mounted and actually hung this big show of mine, and Tom Hess came and saw a preview of it and actually wrote a review, which was published in Art News, saying "These are bombastic paintings you would expect from this editor of Iconograph." [laughing] Anyway, then, right before the opening, Kenneth and Gertrude spent the night together, and Gertrude slashed and destroyed this big painting, and Kenneth [induced her, seduced her].

STEPHEN POLCARI: This big painting of yours?

OSCAR COLLIER: Right.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, terrific.

OSCAR COLLIER: It was sort of an act of castration, a symbolic act of castration. Fortunately, the small painting-the study for it-still exists and is in good shape and is alive and well in Boca Raton, Florida, in the apartment of my third wife.

But in addition I had suffered a sort of crisis. Jean Franklin having studied philosophy at Bryn Mawr had been taught to question everything. Bryn Mawr at that point in its history taught women to criticize everything. And there's nothing positive about a Bryn Mawr education. I decided that she and I. . . . Kenneth said he could no longer afford to help keep up Iconograph, which also was not making money, although it wasn't all that expensive. But we were planning an elaborate issue which would be thicker and more printed and so on. So I said I would continue it and that Jean Franklin would help me. So together we put together a final issue [which was a] very strange thing.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yeah, you would learn of Rothko's work at that time.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, right. She insisted that we include Rothko. I mean, I had met him and thought, well, why not? And she did an article on Pearl Fine, who I did know and liked all right personally. Although I never thought she was a great artist, I thought she was an okay artist. I mean, I still to this day-if she's still alive; I guess she is, _____-still, her work is worth seeing. I mean, she's not an influence on anybody else or anything like that, but her work is worth seeing. Also I like her a lot personally.

So we put this thing together and we published it, which, I have to say, I financed with some debt. And we gave a big party in Barrell's new studio. He had moved from his tiny little place. He made some sales as a result of all this, and he moved from his tiny little studio into the one next door, which was much larger, a magnificent large studio in the Janis Building. So we gave him a big party in his studio. And at the party, Jane invited her friend Gladys Wittbridge, and Gladys Wittbridge brought along her current lover at that time, Dan Weiss, a famous Village lover of that period. A married man, but who. . . . Also I had become sort of disillusioned with Jean because I had finally realized that her attraction to me lay not in me, but in the fact that I was an artist, that I had a _____ magazine, that she thought I was going to become a famous painter. But I discovered that basically her real role in life was as a midwife of divorce for me and for other men. So I became very upset and paranoid.

STEPHEN POLCARI: An interesting role.

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. And the fact that we were engaged, I guess, in what Gladys later called "high romance."

[laughs]

STEPHEN POLCARI: High romance?

OSCAR COLLIER: A game called high romance, in which the woman sets up the man to do all sorts of things but isn't necessarily really interested in. So, anyway, then I was practically broke. I think I was truly broke. And fortunately my mother and father had sold the farm-moved to my grandfather's house in Waco, taken it over. So my mother, citing Texas's community property law, insisted that my father give me an allowance of a hundred dollars a month to get me over this horrid period, so that, while it wasn't much, it did help a bit. I took a little tiny room _____ of Fenn Street, which was, let's see, it's about. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: It's in the Village, isn't it?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, that's. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: [inaudible; seems to be repeating name of street-Ed.]

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, well, that place where artists live now was still the telephone building at that time.

STEPHEN POLCARI: [Westback]?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yeah, Westback was still the Bell Telephone Laboratories at that time. It was right next to that. I don't think the building exists anymore. It was like a bar, and over it there were some rooms. It was a tiny room-four by six. It just barely had enough room for a cot and a little corridor next to the cot. But I painted a couple of paintings in there.

And meanwhile I had taken up with. . . . Dan had taken up with Jean, and I had taken up with Gladys Wittridge. Gladys was a person that actually graduated from Bryn Mawr, not dropped out like Jean, and she was going to Columbia and getting a degree in mathematics-a master's degree in mathematics. She was also a very Bohemian person at that stage in her life. She worked as a hat-check girl in a SoHo nightclub in the Village. And we became friends and went to Provincetown together-I mean, basically, she supported me for a while-and had a very nice summer, doing [something when]. . . . Nell Blaine and Helen DeMott started out living together and then separated, and Nell took up with somebody. I can't remember his name, but he disappeared later. Anyway, I gave some art classes in Provincetown, which gave me a little extra money. And then when we came back I moved in with Gladys and eventually we married. Her family was naturally not entirely happy about this, because they were a social register-type family in Baltimore. But actually we had a pretty good marriage, [though, and so] it wore out about fifteen years later. And then Gladys and I first went to Taos for one summer.

STEPHEN POLCARI: How would you define "wore out"?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, after we had two children and I. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Their names?

OSCAR COLLIER: Lisa Collier, the magazine writer, who writes for Cosmopolitan, Penthouse, Good Housekeeping, you name it. She's a very successful magazine writer. And Sophia Collier, who was the originator of SoHo Soda. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, yeah, sure.

OSCAR COLLIER: . . . and sold it for maybe seven, eight million dollars and now owns a bunch of mutual funds that invest in socially responsible businesses. Is very wealthy, young woman. [laughs] We have these two successful daughters.

Well, Gladys was highly educated, and yet the only job she'd ever had was as a hat-check girl in a nightclub and as a clerk in Larry [Batchwell's] Book Store in the Village. When we married she was very interested in housekeeping for a while-and, I must say, cooked some absolutely magnificent meals and kept house very well and did some hooked rugs and some needlepoint. But she was bored. I found it harder and harder to paint, but I did go to my studio and try to paint. I mean, I was experimenting in that period. I had abandoned. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: What are the dates of this [period]?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, I don't think I ever painted. . . . I mean, I gave up. . . . After the unsuccessful one man show-I mean, the one that never opened-I decided, since modern art didn't communicate, I would try to become a realistic painter. So I did some still lifes, and I did a self-portrait, and I tried to do landscapes and so on. But I found it extremely boring to do realistic painting. So much so that once in the middle of a [raid] I truly felt like I'd like to hire some other artist to finish it. [laugh] You know what I mean? It's like awful mental work. And once when I was visiting Texas and trying to do a watercolor of my grandfathers' house-I was concentrating on this very detailed, realistic watercolor-I began to hear a clanging of bells in my ears, as though I were having a

hallucination. And I interrupted my concentration and the sound went away, and I concentrated again and again I had this auditory hallucination. I figured maybe this wasn't right for me. I would spend hours staring at things, trying to see some way of depicting them which would have some significance and interest. I was trying to actually see what was there, rather than to see the perceptions of artists before me and so on. Well, occasionally I'd have a little flash of insight. I never had any great revelations of "This is the right way to do it." So [Gladys] _____ Taos, came back to East Hampton.

STEPHEN POLCARI: When was this? We're talking about the late forties?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, Gladys and I got married in, I think, '49. We were secretly married in 1949. Then we were officially-publicly-married in 1950. I don't know the exact reason why she wanted to have a secret marriage first. I think she was fearful that if she announced we were going to get married her family's actions would be so horrific that it might drive me away. But actually finally I became very friendly with her mother. I mean, it took a long time but. . . . Her mother was not very well educated, but self-educated woman with great taste [in the] _____, collected art and antiques and had a Paul Klee and a Matisse tapestry-or whatever those things were that he did at one period-and a few other. . . . You know, her mother really did love art, and that's why she came finally to like me-because she thought my art was okay.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Supportive!

OSCAR COLLIER: But I found it harder and harder to do any kind of painting. Let's see, the dates. What did I do with that notebook?

[Interruption in taping]

OSCAR COLLIER: I guess Gladys and I were married in '49, married again in 1950, went to Taos, then we lived in Chelsea for a while and I had a studio there, then maybe in '52 we moved to East Hampton. No, I guess when we came back from Taos we didn't know quite what to do, and we went to Provincetown, and of course it was after the season and there's nothing to do, and then we came back. We took the ferry over at the end of Long Island, just to. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: [Orion] Point.

OSCAR COLLIER: . . . have, right, a more interesting drive, and we drove out to East Hampton and Gladys remembered that her mother's friend Beverly Pope lived in South Hampton, and we came by to see Beverly. And Beverly said, "Oh, you've got to meet my old beau's nephew, Wilfred Zogbaum, the son of Admiral Zogbaum. [laughs] Admiral Z was a society figure and a real admiral in the navy. And so we met Wilfred Zogbaum, and he said, "Why don't you move to East Hampton? It's really nice here, a good place for an artist." And Zogbaum, of course, was a sculptor and a pretty good one. So we looked around and we rented a house for a while, and then Gladys's father died and she inherited some money, and so we engaged the architect, Robert [Rosenberg, Rozenburg], who designed a beautiful modern house for us, which we had built. And I built myself, with my own hands, a thirty-four by thirty-two studio, which he also designed-in a way that would be possible for an amateur carpenter to build. I built [just] the studio. We had bought a seven-acre tract in East Hampton for three thousand dollars because there was some dispute about the zoning, which is way cheap. _____ it's worth probably two million now. [laughs] But I built the studio, and I went there and I worked hard to paint. But each year I painted less and less and I was not very happy with anything I did. This is the last painting I ever did at East Hampton, a little sketch of a scrub oak blooming.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Scrub oak was something you saw at East Hampton?

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, I mean, outside my studio there was this scrub oak.

STEPHEN POLCARI: That's right. This is the early fifties.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes. Actually, this is beginning to be the late fifties. First, here are some paintings. . . . I'll give you this for the collection eventually, if I can find it. [throughout this passage is moving around, searching-Ed.] I have some of the paintings that I did in that period. I did a portrait of a woman named Bonnie [Goodrich], who was a [big] character in the Village. Oh, yes, here we are. A little tiny photograph. And then I did a painting called The Man of the Hour, which was based on a newspaper photograph that impressed me a lot, showing flashbulbs flashing in the face of a political celebrity. I did a painting of-a study and then a painting-of _____'s _____ of [mine]. [inaudible sentence] I did a realistic painting of an Indian woman, trying to hide the pose. And I did a terrible still life, which I spent weeks and weeks and weeks on. Oh, and Gladys and I also went to _____, Mexico, and lived there for six months-I guess before we moved to. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Where is that in Mexico? I don't. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: [Ay Ique, Aye-ique] is near. . . . It's in Lake [Chapala], near Guadalajara.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, I'm going there next week.

OSCAR COLLIER: To Ay Ique?

STEPHEN POLCARI: I'm going near Guadalajara, probably ____.

OSCAR COLLIER: Going to Chapala, probably, right?

STEPHEN POLCARI: To San. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: San Luis Batista.

STEPHEN POLCARI: [Arunde], the. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh, yes, San Luis Arunde. Yes, that's very nice.

STEPHEN POLCARI: And then to Guadalajara, ____.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: That's ____ _____. But, anyway, so you did a number of things, but you seemed to have been struggling for what you wanted to do.

OSCAR COLLIER: Right. And each year I painted less, and Jackson. . . . We got to know Jackson Pollock and Lee [Krasner], who tried to adopt us. Their style was adopting young couples. We resisted, and so they. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, did they invite you out to the place?

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh sure.

STEPHEN POLCARI: And Jackson. . . . Well, Jackson could cook.

OSCAR COLLIER: Right, but. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Lee was a charmer.

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh, yes, and the friendship with Lee endured after Jackson's death. But instead they adopted John and Cynthia Cole, and, of course, for a while sort of adopted the Braiders.

STEPHEN POLCARI: The [Bray Derrs]?

OSCAR COLLIER: No, B-r-a-i-d-e-r-s. They had a bookstore in East Hampton. I forget their first names.

STEPHEN POLCARI: By adopting, did they become very friendly ____ and socialize?

OSCAR COLLIER: Right, and spend a lot of time, right, and get drunk with, and so on. Well, I remember he was extremely elated at one of our meetings in which he had sold a painting for, I think, the highest price he had at the time. At least the dealer had sold it for \$35,000. He was really elated. And so I, you know, mechanically asked him, "Who bought it." He said, "The owner of Maidenform bras." [laugh] And, again, that sort of confirmed my feeling of, like, "Why are we doing all this? I mean, so that the owner of Maidenform Bra will have our work?"

STEPHEN POLCARI: I will complete your thought. Someone just bought the major Pollock of the season in New York. It is the owner of Snapple.

OSCAR COLLIER: [chuckles] Oh, boy, that's wonderful.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Now Snapple, of course, is a fruit juice company that sky-rocketed in sales in two years, so the first thing the owner does when he quote/unquote has "made it" is go buy a Pollock. I thought that was. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, another thing happened out there that was disillusioning. Through Gladys I got to join the [Maidstone, Maystone] Club, which is a very exclusive social club, which finally I realized that there's no point in, and I resigned from it. But it was a nice beach club, a good place to go to the beach and had good tennis courts that the children could play on and so on. A couple was coming out and someone. . . . I got to know a fellow named [_____] Ronan, who was Rockefeller's political advisor, and we had helped him get into the club.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Is that Ronan. . . .

OSCAR COLLIER: I can't remember his first name, but he was a professor of political science at NYU.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Felix Rohan?

OSCAR COLLIER: No, not. . . . No. Not that one. I think it's R-o-n-a-n. Not [Rohan, Rowen], the other one. I know all about him, but I've never met him. Anyway, a couple named Dr. and Mrs. Murphy were coming out for the season, and we were asked to come and look them over and let's help them get into the club. And at the party to greet them I found Dr. Murphy, who was a research doctor in sciences, extremely fascinating. I talked quite a bit to him, but I scarcely noticed Mrs. Murphy. Later, at Jeffrey Potter's party-at which supposedly Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe would come because they were his tenants on his place out there-Bill. . . . I was talking to Bill de Kooning and two or three other people, and Nelson Rockefeller came in with Mrs. Murphy on his arm. And de Kooning practically knocked all of us flat as he rushed over to see Mr. Rockefeller.

Well, I mean, again, who is Nelson Rockefeller that I should express my soul for? I mean, Rockefeller, you know, was like a nothing person. He was a failure at everything he ever tried to do on his own. He only was an inheritor. He got to be governor through. . . . Ronan was his Machiavelli, managed his political career completely, and so on. So that, again, that was very disillusioning. Also, particularly to see de Kooning, who was at the height of his powers then as an artist. . . . I mean, I myself don't like de Kooning's work very much, but I still think he was a great artist, nevertheless. I mean, his achievement is obvious. Although it's not to my taste, nevertheless I admire the artistry of his work. But for de Kooning to practically knock me and two or three other people down to go over and greet Nelson Rockefeller, not-I will admit-seeing that did not make me happy.

So I slowed down as an artist and I painted my last painting in 1959. I finally decided I'd just quit. And I remembered the woman-the primitive painter-who quit, and I thought, "If she can quit, I can quit, too. And what will I do with the rest of my life?" Well, I remembered that I'd known people who worked at Brentano's as clerks. When I was distributing Iconograph, I had enjoyed always visiting Frances [Deloff] at the Gotham Book Mart. A wonderful woman, truly in her _____, you know. So I thought, "I've always loved literature, I love to read books, I'll go into book publishing." So I got a job as a clerk in Brentano's at Christmas of 1959. Then after I ended that they offered me a job managing one of their branches, but I decided that wasn't for me, and I got a job with a small publisher, first as a salesman, and then became sales manager, and so on. And as I mentioned to you before, I would do all the different parts of it: sales, publicity, editing, subsidiary rights, and then managed the whole company. I found I loved book publishing. So I continued after that mostly as an agent. Sometimes as an editor, but almost always as an agent. And I would say the only significant thing I did for art after that was to represent. . . . Well, first to publish one of Parker Tyler's books, The Divine Comedy of Pavel Tchelitchev, in an elegant, interesting way.

And I'll say this. This is a little bit of gossip, which I'm sure Parker wouldn't mind my saying at this point, but. . . . I want to say several things about Parker because I think he's a wonderful figure in the [history of my life]. The first thing I'll say is that when Parker and his friend Charles [Boltenhouse] came to see Gladys and me in East Hampton before I was in the book business but we were already friends, we were driving into the Coast Guard beach after having lunch, and my daughter Lisa, then about, perhaps nine, ten, piped up and said in her very high piping voice that she had at that time, "Oh, Mr. Tyler, I've been studying American history. Are you related to President Tyler?" And I sort of held my breath because Parker had a lot of dignity and self-importance, and I was very happy when he replied, "Well, as a matter of fact I am. He's a [lateral] ancestor of mine." So I was really happy that she'd asked the right question. [laughs]

STEPHEN POLCARI: And then he had an opportunity.

OSCAR COLLIER: _____ was a very talkative [guest], I'm afraid. We gave a very large party once with. . . . May Rosenberg made _____ back. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: Hal Rosenberg's wife.

OSCAR COLLIER: _____ these big things would happen in the office parties of the arts. [laughs] You know, we gave one of those big parties at our place and. . . .

Tape 2, side B

OSCAR COLLIER: . . . art critic [Harold Rosenberg-Ed.] all the artists were afraid of, and in addition he was just naturally overpowering. I was very interested to see that he almost bowed deeply to Parker. It was the only time in all the time I knew Harold that he ever showed any respect for any other human being. [laughs] Oh, and it was really interesting that Parker's presidential presence, you might say, was able to impress even Harold.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yeah, Parker was a good writer and he wrote a number of things, and Harold was such an overbearing intellectual, somewhat of a bully, I think.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes.

STEPHEN POLCARI: But a brilliant fellow who attracted people with his brilliance even though he was totally off

the mark.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, oh yes. Well, I had an intellectual argument with him at one party, and I made some remark and he immediately disputed it. The argument continued, and finally after about five minutes I said, "Harold, you're now maintaining exactly the opposite of what you did when we started." He apologized and said, "I was just making a political point then." [laughs] I thought that was pretty neat. May Natalie Kaback became a good friend, and I frequently represented her as a literary. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: She just died in the last year.

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh, that's too bad. I tried to sell a very charming children's book she wrote, but I wasn't able to sell it. And her daughter, [Paysho], briefly gave recorder lessons to our daughter Lisa. But Lisa, I'm afraid, didn't prove very proficient at it. Paysho was a wonderful musician. I don't know whatever happened to her.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Well, I have had some correspondence with her. She's very protective of her parents. And, to make a long story short, the Rosenberg papers haven't gone anywhere.

OSCAR COLLIER: Oh, really. What a shame.

STEPHEN POLCARI: And so they just sit there. But [to _____, apparently] she's real fine person.

OSCAR COLLIER: She was a charming and delightful child, super-smart, yes. And at that time in East Hampton, also a magazine was published, one issue of it-I don't think there were any later issues-called The [Bonnacker].

STEPHEN POLCARI: The Bonnacker, oh, yes, The Bonnacker _____.

OSCAR COLLIER: Edited by H. R. Hayes (a writer and biographer), May [Sowells], and Elliot Atkinson in it. I contributed a little story called "Three Poets," which was the true story of my old friend Scott Greer from Baylor. He went out to California and stayed with a poet friend of his, Wendell Anderson, who was a forest ranger. And while Wendell was away forest ranging, he successfully induced Wendell's wife Betty to run away with him. He had failed to steal Gertrude, but he did succeed in stealing Betty. So I wrote this little piece, "Lives of the Poets," which tells about Tom, the pastoral poet, Vic, the pessimistic poet, and Harry, the romantic poet, and about this thing. And so I finally was able to get a lick in [this] stuff. [laughs]

STEPHEN POLCARI: Yeah, so you really [laid it].

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, Scott became, actually, a professor of political science that wrote some very successful sociological textbooks, and I lost touch with him, and [then, there] quite a while.

STEPHEN POLCARI: So you carried on here, now in Ohio.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes, I was a literary agent. . . . I mean, I was in publishing from 1960 to 1963. I was a literary agent for a year in '63. I guess, the most important book I started off then was Mark Lane's Rush to Judgment. I persuaded him to write it, and it eventually became my one best-seller. Although I had quit being a literary agent by then. I went back to the publisher, [Clay, Fleet] Publishing Corporation. And then they sold it, then I became an agent again. And some best-sellers I've been associated with-crass as they were, they were very profitable-were things like My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House [Lillian Rogers Parks, with Frances Spatz Leighton-Ed.], which was a best-seller and then later was made into a TV series, Backstairs at the White House; My Life with Jacqueline Kennedy by Mary Barelli Gallagher, her personal secretary. Barry Goldwater's first set of memoirs-I was the agent of that. He later wrote a second set of memoirs. And Harry Browne's number one bestseller, You Can Profit from a Monetary Crisis. All, you know, rather commercial works. And I was associated with Anna Lee Waldo, who wrote Sacajawea and the sequel, Prairie. And, I guess, a book I sold recently was the autobiography of William Randolph Hearst, Jr., called The Hearsts: Father and Son, which was co-authored by Jack Casserly, a writer of _____ . And the most recent book that was advertised very much that I sold was The Scripps, the Divided Dynasty, by Jack Casserly again, which was a history of the Scripps family in journalism. I've been associated with many significant works of American biography, twentieth-century biography. The history of the Mellon family by David Koskoff, I think the definitive book on Joseph P. Kennedy called Joseph P. Kennedy: Life and Times, also by David Koskoff. Books of all sorts: self-help books, detective stories, historical novels, and I myself have written two books-How to Write and Sell Your First Novel and How to Write and Sell Your First Nonfiction Book. And I hope to write other things.

STEPHEN POLCARI: Oh, it's worked out well then. It's worked out well. Do you have any regrets about the art world? It doesn't sound it.

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, no, I. . . .

STEPHEN POLCARI: The art world and the art life is pretty rough.

OSCAR COLLIER: No, I don't miss it. The only time I ever felt a slight regret. . . . When I was at East Hampton, I knew Fairfield Porter and his wife [Anne] very well, and she and my wife Gladys were friendly for a while. And also I knew Larry Rivers pretty well. And later when I was in publishing I did engage Larry Rivers to do the jacket of a book on John Lindsey, for which he did I think an outstanding picture of a political poster blowing in tatters, which was a prediction of his career. Anyway, but later, before I left New York-that was in 1986-I was walking down the street coming from some meeting, and I guess I had already had. . . . I hadn't had a beard up until maybe a little before that, and I had my beard then, and I passed Larry Rivers on the street, and I said, "Oh, hello Larry." And he stopped me and he said, "Who are you?" And I said, "Well, I'm Oscar Collier." And you know I reminded him of how we'd met, the James Street show at the gallery, how we'd seen each other many times both at my house and his in East Hampton, and he said, "I don't remember you." [laughs] Whether it was because he was in some sort of chemically induced daze or because [of] the fact that I hadn't done anything in his world lately, I don't know. I mean, _____.

STEPHEN POLCARI: _____?

OSCAR COLLIER: Well, very briefly, I was reminded that there was [powers that seek, power mystique] in the art world, too, because Larry had persisted and endured and I hadn't. I guess the reason I married Gladys was that, when I realized. . . . I mean, my family was like top of the heap in a very tiny pond in Texas. And when I came to New York I finally realized that I had no social background in the eyes of socially prominent New Yorkers, although they were perfectly willing to accept me because of accomplishment. But I was briefly interested in being accepted in society, and marrying Gladys and joining the Maidstone Club, and all those [others] did achieve that, and I realized that it was hollow like everything else and I quit. But when I saw Larry I did think, you know, maybe if I had continued as an artist I could be as famous as he, and perhaps not as dazed. [laughs] So I guess that's the only moment I felt possibly that it would have been worth it.

STEPHEN POLCARI: I think that's a good note to end on.

OSCAR COLLIER: Yes.

[End of interview]

Last updated... *September 18, 2002*