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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Paul Caponigro on July 30, August 7 & 12, 1999. The interview took place at his home in Cushing, ME, and was conducted by Susan Larsen for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by the Smithsonian Institution's Women's Committee.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

SUSAN LARSEN: This is an interview with Mr. Paul Caponigro conducted in Cushing, Maine on July 30, 1999. So I found the essay that you wrote entitled Seasons [Paul Caponigro; Little, Brown and Company, Boston: 1988]. Very interesting, about your development as -

PAUL CAPONIGRO: I thought I ought to write a short history of myself [inaudible].

MS. LARSEN: And when did you write that? On what occasion? Do you remember?

MR. CAPONIGRO: The Seasons book is a Polaroid publication. I was a consultant for Polaroid between 1960 and '67, thereabouts. And they decided in 1980 - well, the date is on the book itself, mid-'80s. Eleanor designed it. Connie Sullivan was in the publications department at Polaroid, and she looked after the publication. So it was mid-'80s that - when they said, you know, we would like to publish your Polaroid pictures, just the Polaroids, the one-of-a-kind single Polaroids that you get-very unique items. And she said, you know, would you like to write the foreword or an afterword? And I decided at that time I would write my own history in condensed form. It pretty much tells where I've been with photography -

MS. LARSEN: It does.

MR. CAPONIGRO: - and how it started. And I think it's a good record in itself.

MS. LARSEN: It is. It's very - it's extremely clear and even-handed, I thought. A lot of personal histories have a different tone to it. It's very special that way.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Even-handed.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. It was - there was feeling to it, but it wasn't all - it wasn't self-involved the way some things are.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. I was interested to see who that character was.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It's unclear where's he been? What's he been doing?

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Uh-huh. [Affirmative] And you got a little distance on yourself, and yet it was your voice. It was -

MR. CAPONIGRO: And enough humor to make certain that it wasn't going to be too serious.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

[Tape stops, restarts]

MS. LARSEN: We'll start again. All right. I think our audio level is okay. So I think we'll start at the beginning, if that's okay. So you were born in -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Is there a beginning?

MS. LARSEN: Well, biologically, anyway, you know.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, okay.

MS. LARSEN: I mean, there's - you were born in 1932. Is that correct?

MR. CAPONIGRO: December 7 -

MS. LARSEN: Wow.

MR. CAPONIGRO: - 1932, close to midnight. On a dark night arrives a dark baby.

MS. LARSEN: Ah-hah. And your - Caponigro is an Italian name?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Caponigro. My father was born in Salerno, Italy, southern Italy. My mother was born in Sicily, in the town of Canicattini Bagni. They were both brought over by their parents when they were perhaps a year and a half to two, three years old. So they arrived in New York, checked in, and moved to Boston.

MS. LARSEN: Interesting.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So both my parents were raised in Boston and went to approximately the eighth grade. That's when everybody finished their education. So they were educated in the Boston schools, and then left and took jobs.

MS. LARSEN: And they met in Boston?

MR. CAPONIGRO: They met in Boston.

MS. LARSEN: Did they speak Italian in the home?

MR. CAPONIGRO: The only time I heard my parents speak Italian was when the grandparents came to visit, or we visited the grandparents. But typical of that time, they were in process of becoming Americans, and they wanted their children to be American. So we didn't get the benefit of the language. They've always spoke English to us.

MS. LARSEN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MR. CAPONIGRO: And then it was equally confusing because my mother spoke Sicilian with her parents and my father spoke Italian with his parents, and -

MS. LARSEN: So you had two languages going?

MR. CAPONIGRO: It's quite a dialect with the Sicilian.

MS. LARSEN: And were you in a neighborhood that was very Italianate, or were you in a neighborhood that had a lot of different people in it? I don't know Boston, but I gather that there are these ethnic neighborhoods that are -

MR. CAPONIGRO: There were. I was trying to get a picture of it. There were enough other ethnic groups within the Italian group. The real Italian groups would dump off in the North End, and then they would spread out to East Boston. And we were in East Boston. And directly next to East Boston is Revere, and then Everett, and so forth. So the ones that just got off the boat would usually center in the North End, branch out, quite a few into East Boston, and - but then Revere was a totally - on one side of the town was the Jewish section. And on the north side of the town were quite a few Irish. So East Boston was like substantially Italian, but peppered by the Irish and the Jews and other ethnic groups.

MS. LARSEN: So you went to school with lots of different ethnicities?

MR. CAPONIGRO: So there were quite a few different types that we went to school with. I remember most of my teachers were Irish. Not until high school did I actually get an Italian teacher, and I elected to take Italian. She taught me the Italian language.

MS. LARSEN: It's interesting how the Irish figures later in your life, in your photography.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] Oh, yes. That was easy. I fell in love with a few Colleens in high school, some of the Irish girls. And of course, my grandparents would say, "What's-a matter you no go out-a with Italian girls?"

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.] But at least they were Catholic.

[They both laugh.]

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, that was another matter. Church and religion was not a center in our family.

MS. LARSEN: Really?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. My grandparents took it dutifully. I guess they prayed for everybody.

MS. LARSEN: Right.

MR. CAPONIGRO: But my own parents, mother and father, would send us off to church on a Sunday morning.

MS. LARSEN: Really? Alone?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: By yourself?

MR. CAPONIGRO: They would hand us some money for the poor box, tell us to light a candle, and they would stay home. So that set the tone, pretty much, how serious should this be taken since they never go. Of course, they were always there for weddings and funerals. Other than that, there really wasn't an interest. My mother had probably guilt feelings about educating us religiously, so she made certain that the children received the first Holy Communion. We did that. Then we weren't asked to do anything, or even go to church, until the age of 12, when it was time for the confirmation.

MS. LARSEN: Catechism? Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Then there was this ruffle and flourish and big to-do. I mean, I can't believe she had the nerve to bring us down to the local parish, to the Catholic priest, and announce that these kids hadn't been in church for six, seven years, and they must receive Holy Confirmation.

MS. LARSEN: Did you have to go to classes to learn all this - all the dogma and everything?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, we had every - oh, O'Brien, Father O'Brien, was livid with her and said, I want these boys in my office every afternoon after school until it's time. And he worked with us on the catechism and this, that, and the other. And we received Holy Confirmation. Got a chance to kiss Archbishop Cushing's big, big, big ring on his finger, and wear a red robe, and -

MS. LARSEN: And that was like being a big play or something? Or did you take it quite seriously?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, no. I couldn't wait to get this heavy robe off. And I like the smell of the incense in the church. I never liked being in church for the weight of it all, the heaviness and the feigned seriousness and - you know, it was a very serious place. I didn't like it.

MS. LARSEN: I went through the Lutheran version of that same thing, so that's why -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh. Yes, I went to church right from the beginning because I was told to, and my, I met a lot of strange things and mysteries I didn't understand. And all right, let's watch and see.

MS. LARSEN: Yup.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And I saw enough that said, I don't think this is for me.

MS. LARSEN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] And you had a brother?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I had an older brother.

MS. LARSEN: Okay. I should have asked about your family structure. Who was in your family?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I had an older brother and a younger sister and a yet younger brother. So there were four siblings, three males, one female.

MS. LARSEN: And so you were the second child?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. I was the second. My sister was the third. And the smartest one in the family was the youngest brother. He just outran us all. [Laughs]

MS. LARSEN: And what's become of him?

MR. CAPONIGRO: He became an auto dealer. He started - he didn't want to do high school. He was very bright, and he just didn't want to do high school. So they put him in - he wanted to go to vocational school. He learned how to take apart motors. Graduated there. Became a grease monkey. Became an attendant in a garage. He took care of used cars and helped the man sell them by turning back the speedometers [sic].

MS. LARSEN: Ah, he learned about business.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Exactly. And he just worked his way up. And he finally became a salesman. So from greasy clothes, he went into a fine suit and sold Chryslers. Then he got tired of that because he was working for somebody else, went into auto body repair at his own business, and did that for quite a few years. A fun kid.

MS. LARSEN: So when you went through the elementary school, then you decided to go on to high school, unlike your brother?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I didn't decide to go to high school. My mother and father said I had to go to high school.

MS. LARSEN: Oh. Yes. Well -

MR. CAPONIGRO: I didn't want to go to school. I didn't -

MS. LARSEN: Did you find - you found - did you find something in early school that turned you on and made you -

MR. CAPONIGRO: The only reason I got through school is because I excelled in music and art. I barely made it through arithmetic. I barely made it through geography. I was not good in English. All those study things annoyed me, and they just wouldn't get through.

MS. LARSEN: And what musical outlet did you have?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, my father's brother was a pianist. And so when we went to visit the relatives, I could not wait until Dad brought us to Uncle Jimmy's. And he'd open the door and greet us, and I would run right through his legs - I was quite small - and sit at the piano, knowing he would play eventually. And so I'd wait until he played. I couldn't wait to hear it, you know, because the piano meant something. This is age 3, 4, 5, thereabouts. I knew there was something in the piano for me. And my first exposure was to my Uncle Jim.

MS. LARSEN: Was he a professional or an amateur?

MR. CAPONIGRO: He was a songwriter, and he played in the bars. Then he was taken by the Army, which gave him the GI Bill. And he went to the New England Conservatory of Music and got a degree in piano and teaching. So he furthered his education, gave his recital playing Debussy and a little Bach and a little Mozart and something like that. He went for the classical training, but for years, he played popular piano in bars. And it happened that he moved close to where my dad brought a house in Revere. We moved out of East Boston ghetto into the Jewish Revere ghetto. And Uncle Jim and my grandmother took a place just around the corner. So while he was studying at New England Conservatory, I got a chance to go and listen to him practice.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, how nice. Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So that gave me a lot of grounding, listening and discussing with him. And of course, I was taking piano lessons with the local teachers while I went through junior high school and high school.

MS. LARSEN: And did he teach you and work with you?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. No, he was too busy with his college curriculum, as well as supporting himself by playing in the bars in Boston at night.

MS. LARSEN: Did you ever go to the bars to hear him?

MR. CAPONIGRO: A few. A few.

MS. LARSEN: Okay.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So the music was quite strong. Very strong.

MS. LARSEN: And did you have a piano at home? You did, it sounds like. Right?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Eventually, a piano came. Eventually. I think we were in our teens, early teens, when my father - who used to love to sing, and he would sing the popular ballads of the day.

MS. LARSEN: What did your father do for a living?

MR. CAPONIGRO: He started out by moving furniture for a furniture company in East Boston. Then he decided to open his own furniture store with a relative of my mother. The two of them became partners and sold furniture and utilities and all that kind of stuff. Eventually he sold that business to his partner and focused on floor covering alone, linoleum and tiles and carpets and so forth. So that's what he did most of the time. But when we

were early teens, he decided there's got to be music in this family.

MS. LARSEN: That's nice.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And my older brother Andy, you will get to play the guitar. And Georgia, you are going to play the piano, my sister. And Paul, you're going to play the accordion.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, boy.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And I said, "No, I'm not." He said, "Well, of course you're going to play the accordion. Your sister will play the piano and he's going to play the so-and-so, and you're going to play the accordion." I said, "I am not going to play the accordion."

MS. LARSEN: Why was that?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Because I wanted the piano. And of course, I was too young and didn't want to be disrespectful, and voiced that I wanted the piano. Why are you giving it to my sister? She never asked for it. Well, you know, these -

MS. LARSEN: I remember the accordion. Every family had to have somebody who played the accordion.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Exactly.

MS. LARSEN: I mean, in our circles, the accordion was sort of tacky. It was a tacky choice. And the piano was an elegant choice. And so my mother would never allow us to play the accordion. We had to play the piano. But I wondered if there -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, my -

MS. LARSEN: You just loved the piano, it sounds like, and -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, I was a bit hurt that they didn't catch on that I was constantly haunting my uncle because he played the piano and I wanted to be near it and I wanted to listen to it.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It surprised me, that when it came time for the instruments, that I didn't get the piano. And it hurt even more when they - when my dad said, "Well, all right. If you don't want to play the accordion, you won't play the accordion. But you seem to know a little something about pianos. Help me pick something out for your sister."

MS. LARSEN: Was it like an evidence that he wasn't paying attention to you? Or was it that he was imposing some kind of need of his own? Or -

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. They were very hard-working peasant types. And it was more keeping a family together and making a living. There wasn't enough time and space for them to look a little bit deeper, you know. It just was a major outer structure they were trying to keep together. And they did a fabulous job. They took care of us. They gave us love. They gave us a house to live in. You know, I mean, they really did well. But the subtler things of seeing a little deeper, that was seen by Arthur Gavin, who lived across the street with the principal of the high school. They eventually married. He was the art director for that city, the city of Revere. And he caught on that there was something going on with me. And he would feed me paper and colored crayons and pencils and inks and, you know, tell me to have a good time. And he'd do it in front of my mother, who didn't understand what was going on, wouldn't have seen that I had an artistic nature, and that it was supposed to have an outlet. So he caught on that there was something going on, and he tried to help my artistic nature.

MS. LARSEN: Well, that's nice.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And then it wasn't until we actually got the piano and my sister took lessons for a few months and became so disinterested, and my dad said, well, I guess the piano is yours.

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.]

MR. CAPONIGRO: So by the age of 13, I had my first piano lessons. By the age of 14, I got my first camera because we got our first Holy Communion - no, first Holy Communion is at 6 - and confirmation at the age of 13, for which I was rewarded with a \$20 bill. And I had already been scouting out where I could get a camera that I could afford.

MS. LARSEN: How had you seen a camera?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I was poking around the photo supply stores, and I'd look in the shop windows. I'd go in and just look at things. What happened at the - in those early years, I was not interested in school. I did not want to do the work. And what I did was could not wait for the bell to ring to dismiss us, and I would head out, not go home but go straight to the ocean, which was very close by, or the woods, and hang out there and listen to the birds and watch the waves come in and pick up shells. At an early age, I realized nature was my teacher. I didn't want all the reading and arithmetic. I couldn't give it my interest. So nature was really my teacher all through school, up to must have been the eighth grade. At which point I remember coming back from one of my forays to the sea - and this was at Revere Beach where it meets Winthrop, where the airport is and all that kind of stuff - I remember coming back from being in nature, picking up some shells, get some stones. And I was passing right through the school yard where I was going to school, on the football field. And I was stopped dead with a realization: I had to get a camera and photograph this stuff that I see out there in nature.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: That was at about the age of 12.

MS. LARSEN: That's astonishing. Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It just came full force. Get a camera.

MS. LARSEN: Now, who had a camera who you knew? Anybody?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Grandma had a Box Brownie. You know, the families. It was - my father and my mother both had big families. And there was always somebody with a Box Brownie to record events out on a picnic or at a family gathering, whatever. But -

MS. LARSEN: Often it was the father or the grandfather. How come it was grandma? Was there a grandfather there, too?

MR. CAPONIGRO: There was a grandfather, and neither one of them had any interest in - I've never seen a camera in their hands. My mother's father was a shoemaker. My father's father ran a grocery store in his basement. When he came over on the boat, he bought a four-story building, put a grocery business in the basement, lived on the first floor with his wife and one of the children who had her husband with her. They - my dad was one of eight siblings.

MS. LARSEN: It was typical, I guess.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And all the children with their spouses of my grandfather, all lived in this - and we lived on the top floor with my mother's sister, I believe. So I lived in a beehive of Italians.

MS. LARSEN: Yes, it sounds like it. Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: All the doors and all the windows were constantly open, and they were buzzing back and forth. And it drove me nuts. I could never get the quiet that I wanted, which is probably why -

MS. LARSEN: You went to the beach.

MR. CAPONIGRO: - I went to the ocean. Well, no, that's not - that may be part of the reason. But one of the things my dad did for us, he would take his two-week vacation and always, from Boston, bring us up to Maine. Rent a cabin on the lake, take us fishing, picking blueberries. He brought us to nature every year in those very early years.

MS. LARSEN: Where in Maine did you go? Do you remember?

MR. CAPONIGRO: He had a relative that owned a camp somewhere in the woods near Gardiner. I know the Gardiner River was involved. The river passed through some of the smaller towns. Up around Gardiner. Lewiston. Lewiston was more rural than Gardiner. We used to go into Gardiner to get supplies.

MS. LARSEN: And then go -

MR. CAPONIGRO: And then go back to the camp by the river.

MS. LARSEN: Well, getting back to the notion of photographing the shoreline or nature with a camera, most of us are experienced with photography in family situations as commemoration of the kids. It's a record of the family progress or something.

MR. CAPONIGRO: That's precisely what my mother's mother was doing. She wanted to make certain everybody was there and document it.

MS. LARSEN: But there's a big conceptual jump from documenting the family progress to taking pictures of something else that's not a story, that isn't an event, that isn't, you know, one another. Had you ever seen photography that wasn't the familial type?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No.

MS. LARSEN: Had you seen art that was like - that was different?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. But I think because of Arthur Gavin, who encouraged me and actually gave me the materials - and it was okay for me to use them in the house because Mom saw that a respected teacher had given these to me.

MS. LARSEN: Ah-hah.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And so I would try my hand at drawing. I would either copy objects or try something, you know. Mostly I think I remember I was copying things, drawings in magazines. But I do remember at the age of 9 or 10, somewhere around there, I decided to put aside the copying and just put down what came to me. And I was quite astonished at what came. It was an abstract, a series of circles and other more geometric shapes. But I was quite astonished. And I thought, did I do that?

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Where did that - yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Where did that come from?

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Were they in some kind of order, or were they just here and there, or -

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. Beautifully composed. Really well composed. And in fact, my friends used to tell me, when I first started to make snapshots with my little fold-out camera that I bought, but they made the observation that my compositions were really quite excellent, you know. I just was a natural. And I could organize things, feel how they had to go together or get just the right viewpoint. But I think the drawing kicked it off.

MS. LARSEN: Did you take these back to Mr. Gavin?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, yes.

MS. LARSEN: And did he talk to you about them or show you -

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. He just encouraged me to do more. Just do more.

MS. LARSEN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MR. CAPONIGRO: But what I discovered for myself as the years passed, at the age of 2 or 3 or thereabouts, something came out of that thing my parents called a radio. And the sounds that issued forth resonated in me to such a degree that I just simply wept. And I knew that those sounds were unique to a certain kind of music because my Uncle Jimmy played this stuff at the bar, and my father sang this. And so I knew that there was a certain kind of music that would affect me deeply. And so I would go for it any time I could, you know, if I could get someone to play with the radio knobs. So the music known as the classics was already hitting me. And I recognized that it had an effect. There was something going on in there that established or at least was allowing the same thing that enabled me to get that drawing out. It comes from an emotional realm, I discovered, that has its own perception. You know, it will manifest if the human being takes the interest and provides a medium for it. And I was lucky. I had a schoolteacher across the street. I had an Uncle Jimmy. And so I was being fed, and seeking it, various forms through sound and the art forms.

MS. LARSEN: And yet on the surface, very interesting because, you know, a lot of kids are taken to the conservatory or they're taken to the museum. It's like you're intuiting and finding these resources at close range.

MR. CAPONIGRO: I can remember not only at an early age but even later, especially when I was in the U.S. Army, looking for nourishment. I'd have the car radio on and I'd be driving along the seaside, and I'd watch the waves rolling in and a few birds flying overhead. And the atmosphere was just so. And everything was moving. So was I. And I'd realize that the pace of the automobile was right in tune with the pace of the waves rolling in. Then at other times, music would come over the radio. And it would be, to use the word, equivalent to what I was experiencing visually. They locked in and I recognized that the proportions, the tones, the whatever elements were combining, reflecting one another. So that is what I think gave me the ability to see that the

chaos around us can be ordered and put visually as a piece of music is visual...

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A]

MS. LARSEN: So these things, you were really finding your way. But was there a - how did some of this come back into the school environment? Did it at all? Were you able to use your drawing abilities and your interest in music to help you through the school experience? Or was it kind of a private -

MR. CAPONIGRO: It was very private. It was a very private matter. It was very private, and I kept it private. I invited my high school friends to participate, and they weren't interested in it. Mom was a bit concerned. She thought I should be out playing football or baseball after school and so forth. But -

MS. LARSEN: Repairing cars or -

MR. CAPONIGRO: The recognition that what - out there, certain things could affect me in here, and that that had to be recognized, as intangible as it was and unruly, and understood. I came to the conclusion after graduating high school and after - I don't know if it was before or after my two years of duty with the Army - I saw it as a gift that I did not do well in school intellectually in that the excessive intellectual activity subdued my emotional activity. I saw that my emotional activity could get fed and would function quite easily, and was very perceptive that my emotions would do the perceiving. When that happened and I got information, I always felt confident about what that information was rather than going through the logical process, the intellectual process, of saying, well, one and one is two, and two and two is four, and logically -

MS. LARSEN: How do I know - I know this thing, but how do I know this thing? And -

MR. CAPONIGRO: That seemed to be put - I mean, as if the cosmos itself arranged that I would not be a good student in school for the academics in order that the emotional realm that I worked with would flourish and develop. I think that's exactly what was going on.

MS. LARSEN: And that was - it worked out okay? You could handle that?

MR. CAPONIGRO: It worked fine. I was -

MS. LARSEN: That's good because sometimes - some people would -

MR. CAPONIGRO: In the same way that I got this burst that said, get a camera and photograph what you're seeing and what you're working with, you're moving in and through. In the same way - it was at the age of 11 or thereabouts - I was walking the streets alone. Came from the center of town to go home. And I remember exactly the corner that I turned to get up the street. And again, this burst of something came in and said, oh, my God. I'm an artist. I recognized that I was an artist. And I had a double kind of whammy which said, what a wonderful thing and what a responsibility, the two of them simultaneously. I go, wow. What am I going to do with this? I'm an artist.

MS. LARSEN: Did you know any artists? Had you met any artists?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Not there. No. Only the principal of the - the director of the art departments in the city. High school days allowed me to then start visiting the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. And also during high school, I would play hooky and go to the Boston Symphony Orchestra. So they became the next octave of activity -

MS. LARSEN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] Ratcheting up from - yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: - from nature and finding some medium to work with. And the piano. I was taking piano lessons already. So I fed myself on frequent visits to the Boston Symphony. I rarely missed a well-known pianist that came through, like Horowitz or Rubenstein or some of the old boys. I had to go and listen and watch.

MS. LARSEN: What did you prefer of those things? Did you have preferences, or did you really like - was it all so -

MR. CAPONIGRO: I couldn't do without. To this day, I have a darkroom in my basement right now and a grand piano on the first floor.

MS. LARSEN: I didn't mean of the two. I meant what sort of music, if any particular kind, did you particularly like?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Basically, the classics.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. But Baroque? Modern? 19th Century?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Anything that was good.

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.]

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. Beethoven wrote 32 sonatas. And people would say, "Well, what's your favorite Beethoven sonata?"

MS. LARSEN: Yes. It's a kind of silly question. It's like asking what Cézanne painting do I love the most. And I would just [inaudible] I can't pick one.

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. If I had to give an answer, I'd say, well, I would take the third movement of the 21st sonata, and I would take the last movement of the fifth sonata. And what I was doing was isolating when Beethoven had hit a real spot in himself that he couldn't help himself. As he would say, "When I'm talking to my God, do you think I give a damn about your instrument?" You know, with the violinist, the violinist that was working in the quartet with him. And parts were very difficult. And the violinist said, Mr. Beethoven, does -

MS. LARSEN: I can't do that.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Does this have to be so difficult? He said, "When I'm talking to my God, do I care about your instrument and your problem?" And when he hit that, you could - at least I could grasp it and know Beethoven fell into a wonderful realm. And equally, I could tell when he was intellectually working the notes to play possibly up to something or to be bumped into something. Then it would become inspirational. We all - like I have lots of photographs that I consider exercises. And it's something that, boom, I finally find myself. It's like that in terms of a favorite. The real work is the favorite.

MS. LARSEN: And you have - but you have to keep the other going to get to that -

MR. CAPONIGRO: It's exercise.

MS. LARSEN: - because it doesn't come out of nowhere. It just -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Exercise. I mean, the Zen monks that work with art, they busy themselves with honing their brushes, sharpening their pencils, preparing the papers -

MS. LARSEN: Doing calligraphy.

MR. CAPONIGRO: - lining the inks, and when inspiration arrives - not what they would fabricate - when inspiration would arrive, they're right there immediately. So you do need to keep your tools alive. And I could not find - I did not have - a piano teacher all through my school days that could give me that on the keyboard until I got into the Boston University - and it was by default; I was not academically trained. I snuck in with my musical ability into the music department of Boston University College of Liberal Arts, and found the teacher that hangs over my piano now, Alfredo Fondacaro, who rescued me, just as Arthur Gavin rescued me with his paper and pencils, and said, you need some technique. You have to understand that you can't just do any old thing with those hands because the scores are demanding and you have to know. And he took apart all the bad training that was given me on the keyboard.

MS. LARSEN: I read in your Seasons essay something about he made you not play for a while. Was that -

MR. CAPONIGRO: For a while? How about a year?

MS. LARSEN: I mean, to not play the piano must have been awful, yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: To stop using - well, it was - what I heard coming from him and his students, who were pretty adept, was strong enough that I would have gone through two or more years of not playing the piano. What he did do was to, first of all, insist that I stop simply because there were too many bad habits, and they would continue to manifest. Stop the bad habits. The second thing was that he could - he would teach me exercises, pure exercises, to train the fingers and train the ear, that they would learn what it meant to actually accomplish different kinds of passages or -

MS. LARSEN: So were you doing these -

MR. CAPONIGRO: He would invent the exercises. Five fingers, chords. He'd invent them on the spot and make certain that I knew them before I could go further in the use of the hands. He was my rescuer at that time.

MS. LARSEN: And what sort of music did he play or prefer?

MR. CAPONIGRO: It was the classics. After a full year of doing exactly as he told me and staying away from the music and really getting a sense of what he was - what he had to offer, I walked in, and it was almost a year to the penny. And I expected a lesson as usual, and he said, "Sit down at the piano." He went over to the window

and lit up a cigar. He was being thoughtful. And then he walked over to the music cabinet and shuffled around, pulled something out, threw on the music rack the Chopin Impromptu in A Flat. And he said, "You've earned this. Let's make some music."

MS. LARSEN: Oh, how nice.

MR. CAPONIGRO: My God. I think I'm in heaven.

MS. LARSEN: So what did you think you were going to do with your playing? Were you going to be a performer? Were you doing it for your own joy, or did you have any purpose -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, you know, at that age, all of us young artists think that because we see so-and-so's paintings hanging or so-and-so's photographs hanging, that we're supposed to aspire to giving a performance at the town hall or - you know, they set it up for us in the same way that a lot of teachers set up the young students with the idea that this is very difficult, and you're going to have to work very hard, and you're going to have to practice seven, eight hours a day. It's all false. Absolutely false. But I was trapped in it. I was trapped in all those ideas until, in my own working, I realized that doing the piano, doing the photography - and I continued with some drawing. These are drawings. You know that - that the transcendent moments are what counted, that all of this work really could get you to transcend yourself, at which point you got inspiration, and the work would be good if not extraordinary because you got there. And you recognize all the exercises and everything that led up to it, or so on and so on. So it didn't take too long for me to realize, no. You know, I don't want to go through what these concert pianists go through. Sure, I'd love to play at Carnegie Hall, and I'd love to thrill a big audience, and that would all be great. And to this day, I could still think of doing that. But I realized that that turning of the corner when I was 11 years old and saying, my God, I'm an artist, and the other half that said, it's a responsibility, not merely a joy, and that part really was connected to the idea that art was a sacred act. It wasn't until I had studied more and more of the Egyptian art and early ancient works in the museums, and certain of the modern pieces that you could tell were permeated with a man's soul and real being - it wasn't until then that I thought, my God, yes. This is - this could be a man's religion. It did not have to be the organized religion of those structures and burning candles and incense and the rituals and the ceremonies. This could be a path to sacred experience. And that is what allowed me to stay away from - I mean, I still participated. I gave workshops. I gave lectures. I've spoken before hundreds of people -

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: - and showed my art, and blah blah blah. And all of that is absolutely secondary.

MS. LARSEN: It's the being in the work -

MR. CAPONIGRO: That's the work itself. And I still have, you know, a lot of work to do. I still have a lot to fight. There's always a seven-headed dragon standing at my door when I try to go out and do this work. It's in the form of having to deal, make a living, a variety of, you know -

MS. LARSEN: People like me - I mean, just the things that are demanded of you.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Exactly. Taxes, voting for presidents when there aren't any, and all that kind of stuff.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. It's the structures of exchange in society that force us to engage with others in a system of plus and minus.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Which inspires me to get very, very essential within my life. At this stage, looking back at all that I have been through and I have done and I've experimented with and I've had to do, I want that initial contact with recognizing that inspiration comes from a particular realm beyond your own mind and your own rather misdirected feelings, that real art is a sacred business and it is a gift. One is graced with a state of being that could organize your totality, get your heart and your mind and your body together instead of they're always fighting one another, and that opens a path to sight that gives the inspiration to know this is where you [inaudible]. There is one. Or this is the color that associates with that form.

MS. LARSEN: The interesting thing, too, to me is that with a body of work, with someone like yourself who's created a body of work, only you could have done that work. That work wouldn't exist in that form except that you made these choices and decisions, and you have this amalgam of things that - and that in part to me is that part of the responsibility, that to have that voice come through, you're the only one who can make it come through. And it's not like someone else can bake a cake or someone else could - you know, I mean, it wouldn't be the same cake, yes. But still, there are things that can be handed off to somebody else. But making art, you can't hand it off to somebody else. If you don't do it, that work won't exist.

MR. CAPONIGRO: A lot of people fuss at me, saying, you're wasting too much time printing your own pictures.

Let somebody else do that. But that interrupts the process for me. I can't have someone else print my prints. They cannot feel what I feel, and it cannot be released emotionally into the print unless I'm there and yank it from the developer at exactly the right time. They have no sense of that. They've got their own rhythm and their own emotional system to deal with. And that usually gets imposed on the print.

MS. LARSEN: Yup.

MR. CAPONIGRO: I can give them a print, and I can have a master printer try to duplicate it. And they can't get there because you can't get there from here.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It's very simple. I want to know: Have I been there all through the process? If not, where did I drop it?

MS. LARSEN: And you can probably tell.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And I can tell. I can tell.

MS. LARSEN: How did you get involved with - how did you get from snapping a picture and taking it to the drugstore, perhaps - I don't know; maybe you didn't, but - and getting into the whole process of photography as this continuous number of activities and motions until you have a final finished product? That requires darkrooms and teaching and learning and, you know, all that kind of awareness.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. Nature was the main focus. And the camera was purchased in order to take pieces of nature back to my house with me. So I began with roll film and a bellows with a pinhole in it, which I didn't recognize at first. And somebody did repair it for me. And literally, the first two to three rolls that I brought to the drugstore, when I saw the results that came back, I thought, this is not going to do. And so I went to the other end of town where they had a photo shop, and I found - I remember seeing it at some point or other when I bought my film - a Kodak book that said, how to develop and print your own pictures. And so I bought that.

MS. LARSEN: What year would that be, about?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Age 14. Late 13, 14. And got permission from my father to set up in a dark corner of the cellar. I borrowed my mother's Pyrex dishes, and I decided I was going to run my own film through. I bought the Kodak MQ developer in a little packet. I set up my trays. And -

MS. LARSEN: All by yourself? You just did it out of the book?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I did it just out of the book. And I did it by putting two clothespins on either end and very carefully running the roll film through the tray by seesawing the film through it. I closed all the lights. I unrolled the film, clipped them on, did the seesawing through the first tray, through the second tray, through the third. And I had somebody knock on the door to tell me the time was up because I had no timer, my brother or my sister, I forget. And I switched on the light, and I had a total blank.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, boy.

MR. CAPONIGRO: A total blank. At which point I realized I had put it through the hypo first and the developer was - it was on the wrong side of the table. So I went out and I decided, okay, let's get this right. And I shot up another roll, and I went back and I got it right this time. And it was thrilling to see pictures on the roll. There were these negatives. And then I could make contact prints. What a delight.

MS. LARSEN: And again, there was nobody standing over your shoulder? Nobody saying, this is how you do it, or -

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. And I realized there's more to this, and I want to learn more. And at that point, junior high school was literally a block away from the ocean, and high school, further into town, was near Main Street where there was a portrait studio. So I'd get out of high school and I would go to the - and I'd say, can I sweep your floors? Can I run errands? Will you let me in your darkroom and see how you do that? So they took me on as a kind of a young apprentice.

MS. LARSEN: That's nice.

MR. CAPONIGRO: To run errands and do things, and they'd show me things through the camera, and they'd let me stand by in the corner while they lit up a portrait. And I would be in the darkroom with a red light and a great, voluminous globe of - it was an old Elwood enlarger, a great big diffusion enlarger. A huge thing. It was like an elephant. It looked like an elephant. And Mike - Mike Nazarro was his name - would just say, "You just sit

there and you watch what I do. See, I have to do this first, and I have to do" -

MS. LARSEN: That's very nice.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It was great. And he'd show me, "Well, use this kind of paper because it has this. And then I use that paper for this. And you can veritype it to give it a gloss, or you leave it matte." And so I picked up a lot of tips. I got a feeling for developers and papers and negatives. And eventually, they said, "Come with us. We're going to go shoot a wedding and we want you to hand us flashbulbs and just watch what we do." You know, so I would assist them on weddings. And after a few months, they threw a camera in my hand and said, "You're shooting a wedding on your own this Sunday."

MS. LARSEN: Oh, my. And how old were you?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I was 15, 16. Maybe 16.

MS. LARSEN: Gosh.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And I was coveting a particular 4 x 5 view camera that they had in their studio. And I thought, oh, I really want that. As it turned out, I bought from them a 3-1/4 x 4-1/4 Speed Graphic, and - because it was a Speed Graphic 4 x 5 that I shot the weddings with. And they had a small Speed Graphic, and I thought, you know, I want that. Of course, I never used it as a hand camera. I immediately put it on a tripod and looked through the ground glass and used it as a view camera. Those were my first nature pictures by the sea, some rather good studies. They were West Coast-like.

MS. LARSEN: Isn't that fascinating.

MR. CAPONIGRO: They were West Coast-like even though I had no idea that the West Coast existed in terms of who they had out there for photographers. But I built up a few images of - you know, a few pictures of the lake. I'd visit my brother up in the Adirondacks. He would play his guitar music at resorts.

MS. LARSEN: So he did do the guitar.

MR. CAPONIGRO: He did, and he became a very good jazz guitarist.

MS. LARSEN: That's interesting.

MR. CAPONIGRO: As well as - I mean, he brought himself to the level of an Andrés Segovia in terms of technique on the guitar. Really quite good.

MS. LARSEN: Goodness.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And he concertized for about a year, at which point he decided, no. I really don't like this concert business and traveling and all that kind of stuff. But during those years, wherever I went, I took my Speed Graphic and I photographed. And it was rather typical landscape photography that the West Coast was doing on a grand scale.

MS. LARSEN: And you weren't aware at this point?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. I didn't know who they were.

MS. LARSEN: Was there any place in Boston showing photography that you saw?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. Nothing of that kind.

MS. LARSEN: So you were just existing in this kind of commercial zone of the weddings and the portraits and -

MR. CAPONIGRO: That I did for, I uh - yes. Yes.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. That's -

MR. CAPONIGRO: In fact, I had a year. I took - before I got drafted into the Army and after I realized that I was not going to make it through a four-year course at Boston University, once I quit after the first - after the second semester, I quit and took up private lessons with that one teacher. Once I found that teacher, I thought, I want to focus on him. I don't want to do voice training and choral group and history of and -

MS. LARSEN: English literature and all the other stuff.

MR. CAPONIGRO: - all that kind of stuff. I said, no way. No way. So I found a job in Boston at a place called the

Photographers Portrait Service. They serviced a great many of the studios in the Boston area that did portraits, high school pictures, weddings, all matter. They would turn their film in to this place to get processed. Somebody would print them. Somebody would tone them. Somebody would retouch them, you know. And I was there as a printer.

MS. LARSEN: And how long did that last?

MR. CAPONIGRO: A year.

MS. LARSEN: And you learned -

MR. CAPONIGRO: During which time the - what they had was a huge room flanked on all sides with enlargers. And there were printers at each enlarger. But in the center of the room, there were four major stops, each with a huge developer tray and a man who was there. So you would print your picture, put the negative in, print your picture, and throw it at the guy with the developer tray. And he would bring it up and say, "Too much exposure. Cut back on your" - and he'd throw it away and you'd put another one in. And he would - and we would chat during lunch and he'd say, "Well, you know, if you put a little citric acid in this, you know, you could do that. If you use that particular one-tone paper, you could find out about this." And you'd pick up little tips of what - you know, hear a lot of experienced printers.

MS. LARSEN: Were you like living in a darkroom, though, for hours on end? All day long?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, yes. All day. All day.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. And who else - were there other serious photography people there?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Most of them had a business, a side business of doing portrait photographs, of being kidnapers, which was something that went on back then where you would present yourself to a mother who's about to have a baby and sell her a package -

MS. LARSEN: Yes. From birth to age 1 or 2.

MR. CAPONIGRO: - to photograph from birth right through to so-and-so. They called it kidnapping.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. That's cute.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And George Tice was a kidnapper. George Tice was. He was here last night. We had supper together.

MS. LARSEN: He's a good photographer -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, yes.

MS. LARSEN: - and a nice person, I think. I don't know him well. I've just run into him. But yes, I think he's -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Very dedicated.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. He's an excellent person.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Very dedicated, and a nice man. So I had a year of more training. I went from the local portrait studio to a major group -

MS. LARSEN: Is someone knocking? Yes. Somebody was -

[tape stops, restarts]

MR. CAPONIGRO: - what my dimension was, what my realm was going to be, and was fortunate enough to have people around, a few, even though they were just a few, that recognized that I needed some help. You know, I came from a family that was concerned about making a living - four children, hard-working parents. They haven't time to dig into the -

MS. LARSEN: But the story that unfolds, though, is without - is very often people who take this path in their life experience all kinds of conflict and argument from people around them. And it sounds as though in general, you had very strong conviction, and perhaps they had some faith that you knew what you were doing.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Not only strong conviction but supportive parents, that despite the fact that my dad was building the business for me and my older brother to take over because it's not easy to make a living and here is a ready-made business. He said, "When I retire, you really should" -

[END TAPE 1 SIDE B]

MS. LARSEN: In some big families, too, there's a - I noticed - I grew up in a mixing neighborhood in Chicago, too. And I noticed in the Jewish families particularly that they would almost designate one of the children to be the scholar or the intellectual, and the other one to be the businessman. And I guess in Catholic families sometimes, one would be a priest. And, I mean, there was one who was - as long as the group moved along economically, they kind of helped each other along, and it was okay if one of their number went into a non-practical kind of - honorable but non-practical endeavor.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Honorable. [Laughs] So the high school stuff was a real good beginning because it really - it taught me to be in the world, and I had to relate to people. And it also gave me a good edge on the craft. And then that following year, I found my piano teacher. Although I fumbled through the academics of that year at Boston University, at least I found the teacher. So the following two years I worked in this Photographers Portrait Service gathering a little more technique, and a fabulous technique on the keyboard with the piano teacher simultaneously.

MS. LARSEN: And what did he aspire to with you? Do you know?

MR. CAPONIGRO: A transcendent sound. Produce a sound on the keyboard that would not only hover in the air but suggest that it could go a little further and, as I said earlier, touch that place where inspiration is fed through into the earth's atmosphere. He uh -

MS. LARSEN: Was he looking for you to make a career of the piano, or was there any pressure?

MR. CAPONIGRO: He had too many children. He had too many children. And there were one or two that had great potential, and he would give them that extra attention because they really were moving fast. And the rest, he would give them everything he possibly could. But he wasn't going to make a great pianist out of all of them. It's not possible. He had a bunch of personalities, all with different problems. But he was a very good father, you know. He would discuss the problems with them or with someone who might take responsibility to help this guy with that problem so he could get past it. I mean, he watched over his little flock. And he did say to me one day - we took a walk in the park when I was floundering a bit. And by that time, I was photographing, and quite seriously. I mean, I was really looking for what I found in my drawings to find that my compositions in picture making, photography, was equaling that or moving towards it. And the pictures were good, and he recognized them as such.

MS. LARSEN: You showed them to him?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I showed them to him. And I was wondering what should be my direction? How far can I - he said, you know, you have a really serious problem. And your problem is you have too much talent in one too many directions. You've got the piano and you have the drawings. You have to make a decision, you know? Somewhere along the line you've got to find out whether you're going to put your effort into this or you're going to put your effort into that. But for now, you know, don't harry yourself about it.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. It'll happen. It'll happen.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It'll take place. So that year in the high school and the year following, that really was grasping the need for good technique in order to really make good work with photography, and the same with piano. They were just right next to one another. And I was able to get both. I had a good grasp on making really good commercial prints. After two years with this Photographers Portrait Service and printing, and continued lessons with the master, bam. The U.S. Army got me. Called. I was devastated. Devastated. What? Here I am just beginning. I have real teachers and a real atmosphere for working, and the Army gets me?

MS. LARSEN: How dare they interrupt?

MR. CAPONIGRO: My piano teacher said, "Listen. Don't fret." He said, "What you have put into your hands will never leave you. Even if you're away for a year or two, when you get back, in a couple of weeks you will be right back where you started. So do your duty. Don't worry about this. Come see me when you get a furlough." Blah blah blah. And I was very, very unhappy. As it turned out, they trained me to go over to Korea and fight at the front lines.

MS. LARSEN: And the Korean War was going on?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. LARSEN: Bad luck. That was poor timing.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, well, that was bad luck. But my life has been full of good luck. I got to Fort Lewis,

Washington, the separation point. They give you shots for overseas, new dog tags, new boots, clean up your carbine, fresh clothes, duffel bag full of stuff to go over and fight a war. And you report to the doc. They bring you in to the doc, first thing, early in the morning after two weeks of this processing, which we all did. And they sail you off to Korea. Midnight the night after all the processing and the morning where we were to get on the boat and sail comes an announcement over what is commonly known as the "bitch box" or the PA system in the barracks: "Now hear this. Now hear this. President Truman has ended the Korean conflict. There will be no further shipment of troops to Korea."

MS. LARSEN: Wow.

MR. CAPONIGRO: "Report at 0500 hours on the parade field for reassignment."

MS. LARSEN: Right.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So what's my reassignment? Presidio San Francisco.

MS. LARSEN: Ah-hah.

MR. CAPONIGRO: The post photo lab at Presidio San Francisco.

MS. LARSEN: Had you ever been to the West Coast?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. Never been.

MS. LARSEN: No?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Where a civil service worker, a civilian, was hired by the U.S. Army to process all their color work for the Army hospital. And he had his own little lab within the major lab that serviced 6th Army headquarters. So I was printing in the major darkroom, the black and white darkroom, pissing off the sergeant of that lab because I was so much better than him.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Not realizing that that friction was because of this. Eventually he shipped me out. Couldn't wait to get rid of me. In fact, he tried to get rid of me by giving me aerial assignments: Go up into the sky in a Piper Cub. And he was hoping I would fall out. [Laughs]

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Anyway, I'm always finding myself at the door of Benjamin Chin, who's a Chinaman, educated in both art and engineering.

MS. LARSEN: And he was - was he in the service?

MR. CAPONIGRO: He was not in the service. He was a civil service worker. He had been in the service previously. But he'd open his door after processing his film and find me standing there once too often. And he finally said, "Well, I know you're new here, but I don't know what you want. Why are you always standing at my" -

MS. LARSEN: How did you find him? How did you know of -

MR. CAPONIGRO: He was there. I mean, he was a worker in the lab.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, I see. Okay.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Hired by the U.S. Army to do their color. I said, well, you've got this stereo system and you're playing very beautiful music on that stereo system. And all I have to listen to is that scratchy box and that terrible stuff they pour over the daily radio. "Oh," he said, "Oh, okay. Now I understand. You like the music." I said, "I'm crazy about music." He said, "Well, you know, I got a brand-new system at home with the latest in stereo, really good sound. How about you come into San Francisco on a weekend and I'll give you a dose of some really good music on a really good system? Let's do it." He said, "I'll take you to the Chinese restaurants as well." We did that. And he brought me through the back door of a Chinese restaurant, garbled a lot of words at the cook. Then we went upstairs into the main dining room and sat and waited for a feast to appear, which it did. And then we went to his apartment. He played music, and I saw some photographs on the wall. I said, "Ooh, these are really nice." He said, "You like those?" I said, "Those are special." "Oh, you see them as special. Well, you want to see some more?" "Yes. I would love to see more." Pulled out an Edward Weston 50th anniversary portfolio. Pulled out some original Ansel Adams. Pulled out some Minor Whites. He pulled out a lot of work of his and fellow students while they worked with Minor and Ansel at the California School of Fine Arts. At the time,

early to mid-'40s, they had instituted a fine art photography program. Ansel and Minor were the head of it. And these guys were working in it. And I thought, oh, my God.

MS. LARSEN: Where has this been all my life?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I said, "What's this?" He said, "What, you never heard of Ansel Adams?" I said, "No. Who is he?" "Oh, he just happens to be one of the great nature photographers. You never heard of Imogen Cunningham? You never heard of Dorothea Lange?" The whole roster was there in his room. I said, "Would you look at my pictures?" Because I had brought some of my work with me. He said, "Bring them into the lab when you can." Which I did, and he looked at them and said, "Well, who the hell are you?" I said, "Well, I'm" - you know, he said -

MS. LARSEN: I'm me, from Boston.

MR. CAPONIGRO: "I'm from the East Coast." He said, "Nobody works like this out there. You're a West Coast photographer." He said, "You actually are a good nature photographer. You really belong here on the West Coast because they're not doing anything like that. That's all that New York stuff and journalism and all that kind of - this is where they do this kind of work. And all you need is technique." So he took me under his wing, taught me the zone system, used his densitometer, used the U.S. Army film and papers, spent all my weekends with his camera and tripod photographing along the coast in San Francisco.

MS. LARSEN: You couldn't have fallen into a better situation with better counsel had you tried.

MR. CAPONIGRO: There we have it. It all got set up.

MS. LARSEN: But you saw right off that there was an affinity?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, yes. Yes.

MS. LARSEN: You saw it?

MR. CAPONIGRO: And I was - he worked with me for about four or five months and then said, "Are you free this weekend?" I said, "I am." He said, "Well, get yourself ready. Dress up in your civilians; don't use your Army clothes. We're going to go to a party. There's going to be a bunch of photographers there. You might like to meet some other photographers that work around this area." I was 19. He picked me up at the barracks. We drove to the other end of San Francisco. 26th Avenue is where Ansel lived. Walk up his driveway, this walkway, and ring the bell. And the door opens, and Mr. Ansel Adams is standing there. "Hello, Bennie, how are you?" He said, "Fine. And this is my friend Paul Caponigro." "Well, how do you do, sir? Come on in." Ushered into his studio, where the moon rises and the mountains and the Yosemite Falls and, I mean, unbelievable prints.

MS. LARSEN: They really are, too. They truly - the physical aspect of those prints - you see them in books, that's cool. You see them in person, it's entirely something else.

MR. CAPONIGRO: I was entranced.

MS. LARSEN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] Sure.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Entranced. I was absolutely stunned. And then Bennie, you know, brought me around the room. It was a going-away party for Minor White. Minor was leaving the California School of Fine Arts, that teaching position. Took a position to teach at RIT in Rochester, and simultaneously was going to be the curator of shows for the George Eastman House. So there was a going-away party for him. And I was introduced to all of them - Bert Westin, Imogen Cunningham. Dorothea Lange was there. Oliver Gagliani. A lot of the younger students that were pretty talented of Ansel and Minor. And two or three other well-known photographers were there, as well as some of the faculty from the California School of Fine Arts.

MS. LARSEN: That was that first evening?

MR. CAPONIGRO: That was that first evening. All the community of photographers on the West Coast was there saying goodbye to Minor, who was going to head for the East Coast.

MS. LARSEN: When did you find out that -

MR. CAPONIGRO: And there was a piano in the corner.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. I was just going to say, when did you find out that you had that in common, too, with Ansel, love of the piano?

MR. CAPONIGRO: That night.

MS. LARSEN: That night? Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: That night. Because they prompted him and made him play, you know. And eventually he sat down and -

MS. LARSEN: How was he as a pianist?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Pretty good. He was pretty good. A bit mannered, which was the style of those days. What you might say a competency, but just enough - too much attention to flair, which causes a kind of disconnection from the keyboard. It's more manner that you're after, unconsciously, no doubt, rather than what my teacher taught me was, you stay with the keyboard because the sound is inside and you have to make it come out. So there was a certain kind of - I wouldn't call it superficiality. It was a mannered thing. And what my teacher wanted me to do was to get into the sound and let the sound be the inspiration to understand the music and the composer.

MS. LARSEN: I've always heard people discuss the fact that Ansel Adams was involved with the piano. I've never heard anyone tell what it sounded like.

[Laughter]

MS. LARSEN: Just the fact that he loved music is usually enough.

MR. CAPONIGRO: No, I'm aware of that whole period because I looked through his sheet music at one point and actually got him to make some copies of certain pieces that I couldn't find. He was perfectly happy to let me have - you know, or let me at his piano and work in his library of sheet music. So I got a pretty good taste of especially the Bach chorales. They're sort of very grand and they're very almost Victorian, you might say, or they were played in that era. I got a good flavor of the era in which he grew up and was educated. And it was a bit mannered. Not quite affected; I mean, there was depth to the man. And I say all of this after I grasped what my teacher was leading me into in my own piano.

MS. LARSEN: Well, there are different styles and approaches and philosophies and just personality expressed.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. And I have an ability to get a taste of the personality as they are manifesting either in their work through prints or their manner at the piano. It gives me - I can get insight into what their focus really is.

MS. LARSEN: Technically, looking at Ansel Adams' work, I guess I - when I first saw the prints in person, and the first time I saw them was at Orange Coast College when I was dating my husband and we went to a show, and they had their Ansel's work. And he was there. And there were a lot of prints, and I had never seen them in person. And I was really floored by their surfaces and the nuance of light and stuff, you know, every little -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Detail everywhere.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Exactly.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Beautifully toned.

MS. LARSEN: They just -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Wonderful scale.

MS. LARSEN: They just kind of rivet your eye and they keep it engaged. It's not -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, that also has to do with his own musical sensibility. His compositions were - as Edward Weston would have said, "When I see Bach in my photographs, I know that I've arrived." And that's a very strong, very powerful insight into what contributes to a successful image, is the organization of it. Not pitting one thing against the other; that's called design, and usually it's quite superficial. But what I discovered was not design, but proportion, how much of this, how much of that, and their relationships to one another. And that came entirely from an emotional recognition, not the intellectual, oh, well, I'll have this tree over here and I'll have this line cut in here and we'll make the - that's -

MS. LARSEN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] You're aware of the whole and the parts, I think.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And almost simultaneously. That's how the photograph happens. That's when I know that something has really worked. Just bam. I go, yup. And that's felt. It's not an intellectual jostling. A simple

movement of the camera one way or the other, up and down, looking at the ground, there they are.

MS. LARSEN: Did you see in his work an advance technically that you wanted to access? Or not necessarily? There were things that he could do that you wanted to do?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. I mean, that's what Bennie Chin recognized. He said, you know, "You see well. You know how to make a picture. You know how to put a picture together," he said. "But your technique is lacking," he said, "and I want to teach you technique. And I'm going to put you through the paces of the Ansel Adams zone system." When we went to see his prints, I thought, okay.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Here's the result.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Let's do it, you know. Let's go for it. It took some years to question that and try to get it to move a little further - not that I have any arguments with what he did. But I needed something for myself.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. I understand exactly what you're saying.

MR. CAPONIGRO: To inject something else.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. But he was a real force, I think, pushing people further into the medium and showing them what was possible. And maybe other things were possible, too, but -

MR. CAPONIGRO: But something happened in that - or rather, how should I say - I recognized that Minor was a good influence to have around Ansel, and Ansel was a good influence to have around Minor.

MS. LARSEN: In what way?

MR. CAPONIGRO: In that Ansel would only go so far in terms of the emotional recognition of a work of art. Minor went too far in that he got almost therapeutic and psychological, overly psychological. Ansel did not want to get involved with the psychological aspect. And that shows in the work, you know? It really - it goes that far, and it is beautiful for where it goes. And I can hear Minor saying, "Goddamn it, Ansel, when are you going to let your hair down?" You probably read in my Seasons book where I was standing next to them, between two glasses of vodka, and Minor was chiding him. He said, "Goddamn it, Ansel, are you still practicing that zone system?" And Ansel said, "Yes, my dear man. And I understand you are now practicing the Zen system."

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs] Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Right? [Laughs] With no animosity, no - just sort of playful. But I found that Ansel's work went that far, and Minor took it further, and I thought for a good reason. But I also found that Minor went more, further than - oh, you know, it's -

MS. LARSEN: It can get very inward, I think, very - it doesn't access the general and the grand. It becomes very involved in his home.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So Ansel I found underly personal and Minor was overly personal. And I would side with minor. And what I found for myself was I had to shave certain ways of his thinking, as I did with Ansel's work. I had to question the totality of the zone system and do away with certain aspects of it because it tended to block the emotional system.

MS. LARSEN: Not being a practicing photographer and not exactly understanding the zone system, is it a recipe or a formula or a sequence of activities or -

MR. CAPONIGRO: It's all that.

MS. LARSEN: - a way of locating yourself?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Ansel found a way to take the earliest discoveries about photography, about the photographic medium, particularly the film. Hurter Driffeld were the first explorers in realizing that exposure and development together exerted a certain effect on the film, resulted in density. So, so much exposure, so much development, and you would get this result in a print. If you changed the ratio of exposure to development, you were going to get another result. And Ansel coined a term which sums the whole thing up: You expose to get what you want in the shadows. You put enough exposure, you get values in a print, in the print, in the negative shadows. Then you develop to preserve the highlights. In other words, you cannot develop shadows into existence. You must put exposure on the film because the amount of light that strikes the emulsion is not sufficient for the energy of the developer to activate and bring into a density that will reveal detail. So you had to expose for what you want. The development, however, was quite malleable. You could change by degrees within a certain range of time, anywhere from five to ten minutes, and the shadows would stay relatively stable. But the high value would

come down very quickly. So you could overexpose your high values because you were trying to preserve the shadows. And you could control it and get both in by reducing your development time. So that was the zone system. But there's a lot of other technical information you needed to know about transmissions, opacities, densities, reciprocals, and blah blah blah.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. That's where I get -

MR. CAPONIGRO: And Ansel wrote six volumes on the subject. And you really don't need all that information. I found that too many of them, too many of the West Coast types, thought that they had to master all that. And they were so busy mastering all that information and processing it that perfection was like dangling always in front of them, and they missed what wanted to get into the photograph.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Until they put the technique aside. Then you could see that those - that the results of their experimenting to meet what you needed to manifest an image could then be felt. This is what usually got left out because you were barraged and overwhelmed by too much technique. Minor, on the other hand, would try to get you to an emotional state first, either by Zen meditation - if he really ever knew what that was, anyway; not many people do, really, but it's interesting and it's glamorous to say, oh, I meditate. All that kind of thing. He went a little overboard in assuming that he knew a lot. And let's face it: Most education hands out a great deal of information that never gets digested. It gets stuffed up into the head. Minor at least would have periods of like - that was his intent. Get them to the emotional place first; then reach for what you needed to manifest the image.

MS. LARSEN: Find the technical wherewithal to do what it is you have in the heart to do. But -

MR. CAPONIGRO: So I found my position had to be find out about the technique and then forget it. I know I often tell my students, oh, yes. Boy, I got six bags full of technique. But I never take all of them with me. One, maybe, all I need. Then I go to work. I just don't want to trip over the technique. I need to use just enough to get the job done.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So Ansel and Minor were like, you know -

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Two poles.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And I saw, and I actually left the West Coast because I realized that the grand landscape and that kind of beauty of detail and that clarity of rendition is missing something. What's missing? As exquisite as it is for its photographic silverness and detail -

[END TAPE 2 SIDE A]

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.] Could you see yourself getting into that community and being - these people were much older than you and in another stage in their career. But the next generation, the next group of folks, did you have some sense that staying on the West Coast and merging into that community of workers?

MR. CAPONIGRO: This is exactly the process. 1955, my tour of duty is over with. I don't want to go home. I want to stay on the West Coast and continue working with this community, with these people. Mom and Dad were pretty wonderful to me. They'll be very unhappy if I don't come home. So I flew back to Boston from the separation point in Arizona. They shipped me out. This Army sergeant who really didn't like me got me out of there and gave me duty in hell, Yuma, Arizona, 115 degrees in the shade. It was a testing station for the U.S. Army, clothing and products. How does it hold up under intense heat?

MS. LARSEN: Oh, that sounds horrible, including you.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Exactly. Precisely.

MS. LARSEN: But you were still in the photo lab?

MR. CAPONIGRO: But I was still in the photo lab. And it gave me the opportunity to get out into the desert and photograph. I really started using the zone system and what I understood of it, and making quite good negatives - with Army materials, but with my own 3-1/4 Speed Graphic, which I would set on a tripod. I brought my -

MS. LARSEN: Is this the same camera that you'd acquired a million years ago?

MR. CAPONIGRO: That I bought in high school.

MS. LARSEN: That's great.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So I would go out and photograph in the desert of southern Arizona, very close to the California border. Wonderful dunes, all that good stuff.

MS. LARSEN: Was there any other photographic person out there to talk to?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. But I intrigued a few of the people who were a little more intellectual and realized like what's going on here, Caponigro? So I helped them understand about exposure development and, you know, I would share this with them. And we had a good time. There was another antagonist who just liked being an antagonist. But that year in the desert was good. Then I got discharged from Arizona. Went back to Boston. Got back to some piano lessons while I floundered around about would I go to school? And I've got the GI Bill; I could get an education. I did some night classes at BU in art, in art history, with a Professor Bailey, Professor Mervin J. Bailey, who was head of the art department at Boston University in Reliance. And he was like the guy in grade school who handed me paper and pencils and said, you know, do it. He saw something in my photographs and said, you know, come to my place. I live out in the country. And I actually photographed his gardens. Got a picture of him. And I would go to the lectures on art.

MS. LARSEN: What periods did he teach? Ancient art?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Renaissance.

MS. LARSEN: Renaissance.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Renaissance I think right up to Impressionist. A good man, and sensitive, too. So he was helpful. I communicated with him. He sort of took me under his wing, as he saw it. I wasn't going to football games and hanging out at the bars. And he wanted to encourage me. He saw that I had a really good eye. So that year I did that. And I thought, no. I don't want to be here. I don't want to start a business. I could go back to shooting weddings. I don't want to live at home, you know. I'm going back to the West Coast. So I got on a bus. My father gave me - he said, I haven't got money for you. I said, look. I've got the GI Bill. They'll support me till I get a job. He said, all I can give you is 50 bucks for your pocket and a bus ticket. He put me on the bus, him and my mother, sent me on my way. It was a four-day drive, four-day Greyhound bus, night and day on that - all the way back to San Francisco, where I met some Army buddies who put me up on their couch till I found a job with an advertising company in their darkroom, and I reacquainted with the West Coast group, which included some painters and sculptors, quite good ones.

MS. LARSEN: For example?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Beniamino Bufano was doing some wonderful sculptures.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. I know who that is. Yes. Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Dell Federle was not that well known, but he had a very Cézanne-like feel to his paintings. And there were dancers. You know, it was a real live art community, including the photography.

MS. LARSEN: And that was the peak period, too, wasn't it?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes, it was. It was. So I went back and spent a year, during which time I was realizing, this is wonderful but there's something missing. I do not know what. I can't quite grasp it. I love doing this. These guys are great. Del Federle said, "Meet me for lunch at so-and-so. It's right near the Museum of Modern Art. We're going to go see a show." I said, "Okay. Let's go." And we had lunch, and we talked about this, that, and the other. He used to love to come up and listen to me play the piano. I rented a piano. He'd come and listen to me play the piano. He would draw and sketch. We had a nice relationship. Had lunch. Went to the Museum of Modern Art. And he ushered me into a retrospective on the work of Morris Graves. And just the way that I walked into Ansel's studio and thought, oh, my God, there it is, that was the technique, I walked in and I thought, now I know what's wrong, what is missing. This man has a mystical sensibility he is able to impart in his images. The West Coast school can't do that, or very rarely does it. The only photographer in the whole group is Minor who approaches it and every now and then gets there. But this is what's missing with the whole West Coast thing, why I'm uncomfortable. And now what do I do?

MS. LARSEN: Where do you find the place to practice that?

MR. CAPONIGRO: It was the vision that had to be attached to whatever you had as technique.

MS. LARSEN: Graves was not a person who I think everyone understood or even now understands. He's sort of a by-the-way person that the big art marketplace doesn't honor.

MR. CAPONIGRO: His watercolors, drawings of things like Little-Known Bird of the Inner Eye, Moon-Mad Crow in the Mist, unbelievable mystical intensity and penetration of that very emotional state that I have to recognize or another artist to recognize that you're in it and now work. He got there, and you could see by what he manifested that he was there. And I thought, there it is.

MS. LARSEN: Did you ever seek him out, or was that at a point -

MR. CAPONIGRO: I tried to find him, but at that time he was away at a New York show. I did visit his home, and his housekeeper let me in and was very kind and showed me around the grounds.

MS. LARSEN: I love Imogen Cunningham's photographs of him. You know, those -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. They're quite -

MS. LARSEN: Yes. They're absolutely -

MR. CAPONIGRO: They're quite good. Well, I saw that show, and it answered my question, what was nagging me. And within ten days I packed up my bags and got back on the bus, went back to Boston where I set up a little photo business, and I was going to find out how to merge this technique with this ability to capture your visions, and the ability to know that you are emotionally connecting with what you see, and how to get back in the print, how to get it into the image.

MS. LARSEN: And then so you reconnected with Minor as well?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I kept in contact with him. Well, wait a minute. That was at that point that - yes. He said on the West Coast - Bennie Chin brought me to him at the party and said, "Minor, I can't do any more for this guy. He really needs your attention at this time." And Minor said, "You're stuck with him because I'm leaving. But, young man, if you ever get to Rochester, New York, look me up." So I remembered that. When I got back, after I'd seen the Morris Graves show and I set myself up in Boston, I put together a group of prints, mailed them to him in Rochester, and said, "I would like to work with you." And he liked the prints that he saw and said, "You know, this is a poor man's land. If you have any money and you can take care of yourself, you're welcome to come to Rochester. I'll give you a bed. We have a little community of photographers, both from the university and from George Eastman House, and we all kind of share and participate." And those were - that was 1957, the year after I left California and said goodbye to the West Coast. And then that was the beginning of that contact with Zen in the art of archery and Zen in the art of photography and Zen in the art of cooking, and et cetera et cetera.

MS. LARSEN: Maybe we can start with that next time. Is that okay?

MR. CAPONIGRO: We could, yes. All right. It's 12:30. It's a good time.

MS. LARSEN: Because that's a meaty subject.

MR. CAPONIGRO: You're right.

[END TAPE 2 SIDE B]

MS. LARSEN: I'm very sorry. I do deeply apologize.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, you go back and you give hell to that salesman at the Radio Shack.

MS. LARSEN: Well, actually, it was my husband who put this tape in. And I didn't figure out -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Uh-oh. So where did it -

MS. LARSEN: Just a few minutes, and then it stopped. So we lost most of it.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Just a few minutes? So all of that.

MS. LARSEN: I'm heartbroken, and I'm very sorry. But this is working and this is moving, and this has been just cleaned. And here I'm trying to - well, you know what it is with new cameras like that sometimes. It's better to try it out. In fact, we did even do a rehearsal at home this morning with the new machine, and it -

MR. CAPONIGRO: And you never know where the gremlins are going to be hanging out.

MS. LARSEN: I don't understand it.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Just like the variables in photography.

MS. LARSEN: Jeez. I'm sorry. I'm very sorry.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, now, we can make a real recap and go quickly through.

MS. LARSEN: A lot of that was very good, and I - well, I remember most of it.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, you probably want to - maybe you might remember some of it and write it down.

MS. LARSEN: Okay. I will put it in my notes, as much as I can recall. But okay. We are here and we are moving, and that's good. Okay. So -

MR. CAPONIGRO: 1956 was the year that I went back after the Army days to San Francisco to continue studying with the West Coast photographers. It was seeing the exhibition of Morris Graves, whose work offered this - what I appreciated about Edward Weston's work, kind of penetrating more, getting into the subject, trying to go beyond it. I was dissatisfied with that feeling of the grand landscape on the West Coast. I knew something had to happen. When I saw the paintings of Graves, I thought, yes. That's the idea, you know, not to be afraid because of mysticism in there, not to be able to put some atmosphere that goes somewhere and works more with the emotions than it does with the intellect. So I decided to leave the West Coast and go back to Boston to work. I worked at anything. I even helped my dad at his furniture shop.

MS. LARSEN: And you photographed architecture at that point?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. I didn't start that just yet. I actually was shooting some weddings to make some money. But then I decided that I would take up Minor's offer to visit him in Rochester, and he took me on as one of his students. He always had two, three, sometimes four people hanging around at 72 North Union Street. There would always be what I used to call the séances, where we would be reading photographs, you know, putting up somebody's work and reading it à la Minor White, trying to go deeper with it, which was a very good exercise.

MS. LARSEN: Was it like a critique or was it different?

MR. CAPONIGRO: It was more than a critique. It involved some critique, but Minor was trying to get the students to become a little more psychological. Ansel would stop at the technique.

MS. LARSEN: Really?

MR. CAPONIGRO: And Minor would push them. You know, why did you do that? Why that specific and why that - I mean, that's what Minor was doing in his work. In that regard, I considered him a lot closer and already separated from the West Coast school, closer to Morris Graves in the approach to mysticism, which is a term - you know, it's a difficult word in terms of getting to it.

MS. LARSEN: It's a little more like an art critique, too, where typically people ask not - a little bit how you did it, but why and what it's getting toward and what it's trying to -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. So Minor pulled out all the stops on why. And it was part of our group.

MS. LARSEN: And that's where you met Walter Chappell?

MR. CAPONIGRO: That's where I met Walter Chappell. I think Jerry Uelsmann was part of that, although he wasn't actually present. He had just graduated along with Carl Chiarenza. They were the previous students, but they were involved at RIT rather than just being at Minor's apartment. David Lyons had arrived, and he took a job at George Eastman House. Several others, some known and others not known, were there. But it was a pretty lively activity of pulling the students in to really look at their work and try to go further with it. So I was there for the - I was there in 1957 for the winter. In early '58 I went back to Boston and continued finding a way to make a living, photographed for myself. Was invited to go back to work with Minor as a student in early summer of '58, at which time he gave me an exhibition at George Eastman House. I remember he insisted that I would put a title to the exhibition.

MS. LARSEN: What was the title?

MR. CAPONIGRO: We selected out the group of photographs, decided, yes, this is what we're going to hang. And I just sort of lived with them for a little bit and thought, ah, you know, the title is "In the Presence Of." And he was very pleased with that. And I thought, where the hell did that come from? That's about it, isn't it? "In the Presence Of" - dash. Of what? And that's the big question. What? And you're either sensitive to that what or you're not. And that was all the arguments about -

MS. LARSEN: Sure. What is it out there?

MR. CAPONIGRO: So he was very pleased with that title. Then I went back to Boston again, kept contact by phone, by mail. I would make a trip up there just for a weekend sometimes. Walter Chappell would come to Boston at times. So we had a little community of photographers there, kept each other warm. There were no galleries at that time. People weren't -

MS. LARSEN: But was there writing about you, critical writing?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No.

MS. LARSEN: No?

MR. CAPONIGRO: The one thing that took place was Art in America magazine -

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: - used to have a little two-page deal called "New Talent in the USA." And I don't know how they got hold of my name, but they wrote and asked if I would submit some of my pictures and a statement. They accepted it. And so, I mean, that was the first thing that gave a sigh of relief to my mother and father, who didn't know. They wanted me so much to take over Dad's business. It was safe and sound and who knows what.

MS. LARSEN: Generous.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Art is a good hobby, but you can't make a living, et cetera. So when they saw this magazine appear and my work in it, they thought, maybe he's onto something. So they actually provided me with being able to build a darkroom in the basement of their house. I could live there and have a place to work. And that was quite good, helpful. And for '59, Minor asked me to assist him teaching some workshops on the West Coast; that we would travel together from Rochester, photograph and camp out all the way, and then teach on the West Coast. And that was a summer affair, during which time we spent a few weeks as the guest of Ansel Adams. He gave us a place to sleep. Allowed us to raid his liquor cabinet. I was allowed to play his piano and use his darkroom.

MS. LARSEN: That's nice.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It was very nice.

MS. LARSEN: All of that that you describe - Minor's home, Ansel's home - all of that, that openness and generosity, is quite remarkable.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. Very much so. Very much so. And as I said, so few photographers were working and thinking in this direction. But they sort of tended to keep each other informed, and stay warm, and swap prints. Nobody was buying them so we used to swap them, you know, that kind of thing. And that's when I met - I met Ansel for the first time in '54 when I was in the Army. And that was very brief. And I met Minor very briefly. But then when I went back, he wasn't sure he remembered my being there in '54, but saw that I had been working diligently, and asked me to - he said he would get in touch with me when he came to Boston to consult with Polaroid. So Minor and I finished that summer-long session. Went back to Rochester. I stayed there for a few weeks, processed my film and proofed, and we talked a bit about that. And as always, there were always students around, and look at the work, talk about it. Then I went back to Boston. And that's when I took up architecture as a way of making a living.

MS. LARSEN: Now, were these just-completed buildings that architects needed record photographs for?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. Yes. New buildings. I created a portfolio just by going around Boston and the vicinity photographing interesting buildings from interesting angles, and would knock on the doors of architects. And I picked up four or five clients who liked the work. So that worked well. I was able to make a living. But then Ansel arrived that following year, 1960, saw my exhibition, my first Boston - well, it's not my first Boston exhibition. My first Boston exhibition was at a place called Spiral Gallery and Gift Shop on -

MS. LARSEN: Was that in San Francisco or Boston?

MR. CAPONIGRO: It was in Beacon Hill, Boston. I came back in '59. I didn't want to live with my parents or my grandparents. I forget where I - I would maybe bunk in with my brother now and then. But I bumped into the Spiral Gallery at Beacon Hill, and they had half a dozen artists from all the media. They had a huge loft space, and everybody had their corner. And they would also get the space for hanging periodically, like so-and-so would hang a painting show for a month.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So-and-so would hang a show. So-and-so. And I had my very first photo show at the Spiral Gallery and Gift Shop. I forget the name of the street, but it was in Beacon Hill, on the main drag that goes through the Beacon Hill area. And I simultaneously was able to use that space to start teaching. So evenings I could teach because no one was there. During the day people would be there working in their corner or whatever, and the show would be up for people to come and visit, whoever's show was up.

MS. LARSEN: So as you were teaching, you didn't have a darkroom facilities there for teaching.

MR. CAPONIGRO: I was able to use the darkroom facilities - Carl Chiarenza was finishing his PhD in the photojournalism department of Boston University, and he got me a job teaching in the department. It was a special deal with the director of the department. He just wanted to find out what the hell I was about, what was going on. And so Carl Chiarenza - that's where I was sleeping, was at Carl Chiarenza's. He was still a student. We hooked up, remembering the Rochester days. I had the show at the Spiral Gallery, and I began teaching private students, at first as a group. I put an ad in the paper and got a group of about eight or ten people. And then - two of which were William Clift and Marie Cosindas.

MS. LARSEN: Wow.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Both of them were beginners with students of mine. Bill hung on for a few years after that, and Marie would come occasionally. Because I later took a place on Newbury Street right across from her design studio. She was doing design - painting, design, graphic work for publishers, et cetera.

MS. LARSEN: I know her as a photographer.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And she was very, very interested in photography. And she would come once or twice a week to my new studio after the Spiral Gallery. That's when I met Carl Sinbad, who had a painting gallery and decided, "We've got to have an exhibition of your work." So we put up a show. And that's about the time that Ansel arrived, saw the show, and said, you know, "Put this guy on as a consultant."

MS. LARSEN: With the Polaroid?

MR. CAPONIGRO: With the Polaroid Corporation working in that new department that was developing the professional materials.

MS. LARSEN: Were they aiming toward people like yourself, or were they aiming toward a product that would be used, say, in the advertising businesses and media?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, yes. Definitely the commercial world and the media. Definitely. I mean, that's where their real money would be because these art photographers, you know, who knows what they're about. However, you know, they knew that using their sensitivities, they would get the best out of their materials, whether they were going to sell commercially or not.

MS. LARSEN: Did they ever use your material as an example or promotion or -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] Every now and then. Every now and then they would ask my permission to use this on a brochure that they were putting out. One year they put out a Christmas card, a three-fold Christmas card, with three of my images on it, very beautifully done. A number of ways. Recently there have been exhibitions out, a big catalogue of Polaroid images using a lot of the Polaroid [inaudible] collection.

MS. LARSEN: And did they acquire your work as well that you'd done in that medium, or not?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. No, they never acquired anything. They were entitled to. The deal was I would shoot so many boxes - it worked out to like three days a week - three days a month. And I would be given \$300, all the film I cared to use, and I could make pictures for myself as long as I turned in a certain number of boxes or items to test that particular material. So I kept for myself images that meant something to me as well as handed them in, you know, because, you know, right there on the spot, you can do two as well as one. So I always made a Polaroid print for myself. Well, it seems that all the Polaroid prints, they have no collecting. There was no way of preserving or interest in preserving them. They were purely interested in how it's behaving and how the emulsion is going and dah dah dah dah. And the stuff would be laying around the desk of the scientists. And came time in the early '80s, to do the Seasons book, which were all my Polaroid images, the designer and publishing department under Connie Sullivan in Boston called and said, "Polaroid is ready to do a book, and we're going to distribute it through Little Brown," et cetera. I said, great. I'd love to do that. "Bring the Polaroid prints. We've got to have Eleanor, my ex-wife, design it." And she said, "I don't have any prints." I said, "What do you mean, you don't have any prints?" I had left hundreds of prints there, and when I was a consultant. She said, "We never had a way of preserving, collecting." I said, "Well, where are they?" And she said, "People at the end of the day would just pick them up and put them on their refrigerator or take them home. They just dispersed."

MS. LARSEN: Oh, boy. They had no curator, no archivist.

MR. CAPONIGRO: I said, "Well, aren't you lucky that I made a collection for myself. As long as you promise me that you'll insure them and take really good care of them, we'll use my prints for this." So they have not that many of my images there. What they do have, and what Ansel did in the early '60s, he said, "Look, Dr. Land. You need to know more about what really good photography is. And you should have a collection of conventional prints. I want you to buy some from Minor White, some from my collection, some from Paul, some from the New York photographer so-and-so, and, you know, a range of well-known photographers, and put those prints into a collection." And that's when they began - this was '61 or '62; I forget -

MS. LARSEN: Well, weren't they fortunate.

MR. CAPONIGRO: They were.

MS. LARSEN: They had very good advice from him.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. And at that time, that's when they began holding onto whatever stuff I would produce. And I was consultant off and on to them till about '67, when I got the Guggenheim to go to Ireland, and I stopped everything and focused on the Irish prehistoric content. So then when Ansel came and said, "Give this guy a job as a consultant," I thought, fabulous. This is - you know, this is secure. Not a lot of money. So I found a place that would cost me 50 bucks a month. It was in the country, at Ipswich. It was a gentleman's summer place, really quite beautiful. A simple structure, but nicely put together. And he said, "Look. All I really want is a caretaker. Pay the heat and give me 50 bucks a month and you can live there." And I thought -

MS. LARSEN: Could you be there in the summer as well?

MR. CAPONIGRO: All year round. That's when I bought my first piano. I thought, wow. I've got a place to put it. I can make a payment, 50 bucks for rent, \$50 towards a payment on a new grand. All the film I can eat; I don't have to buy film. I have the materials. And I don't have to do commercial work. And I did. I stopped all the commercial work. And I lived very spartanly.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. And it's not a big margin you have there.

MR. CAPONIGRO: But it worked. It worked just fine. And so the '60s were involved with running back and forth to New York and Boston using the money from the Polaroid consultancy. And that is when I got involved with the Gurdjieff people in New York City. I took up with them. That's when I started -

MS. LARSEN: You were doing drawings there?

MR. CAPONIGRO: - drawing, and I started the sacred dances and the special exercises Gurdjieff had invented, and really went into that in depth, and still continued to photograph.

MS. LARSEN: And what sorts of images were you doing at that time while you were in Ipswich? Landscapes?

MR. CAPONIGRO: A beautiful series of snowstorms. A wonderful series that actually never got printed. I hardly ever show them. And also, I was doing some stuff indoors. I'd bring some plants indoors and place them on a marble table and get some still lifes out of it, things of that nature. And a lot of the landscape around the area. Also - oh, yes - there was another very unusual series, again which have never been seen, hardly ever been seen, and that's the doll series.

MS. LARSEN: Doll series?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Dolls. I had a painter friend who had a large collection of dolls, and fascinating dolls. I mean, they really had some presence about them. They were good. And so I would photograph those dolls. I did it with a set of Polaroids, and I did it simultaneously with conventional film to be able to enlarge them if I wanted, as well as some on PN-55 negative for Polaroid. But that was an unusual series.

MS. LARSEN: I remember in that lecture you did in Rockland, you showed a few of those.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. There was a couple. But there's a much larger group of a few dozen that are quite handsome. Very [inaudible]. I think those are tucked away somewhere.

MS. LARSEN: Was there ever a time you did the human figure or portraits in any -

MR. CAPONIGRO: I did a few friends, maybe three or four people that I knew. A couple of head and shoulder shots. There's a few portraits, but nothing extensive. The dolls got much better treatment than the humans did.

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.]

MR. CAPONIGRO: They were much more human, as a matter of fact.

MS. LARSEN: And the still lifes with the sunflower and the thistle, when did they come in?

MR. CAPONIGRO: That came after I left New York City because I eventually moved down there and spent about two to three years, specifically to focus quite intensely on the Gurdjieff stuff, the Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. I was there for the drawing. I was there for the sacred dances. I was there for a working. There's something about the teaching of Gurdjieff which throws people together. And it's not like psychotherapy, but it's aimed much more at you realizing that the person you're dealing with or getting excited about or angry at - the whole idea was self-study, you know. Well, where are you in all of this? And Gurdjieff was teaching that, you know, if you actually stand in the street and look at somebody else, you see your own asininity or your own good qualities reflected in them because you're no different than them. They're no different than you. And they can remind you when you come back to yourself and catch on to what you're manifesting. And the focus was heavy on self-study. And so he would arrange for groups together and work together in everyday situations - build a barn and do a - and we actually did all of that. That was a period of seven years.

MS. LARSEN: That's a long time.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes, it is. Well, I stayed with the group for seven years. That kind of work was for about five years. And that all ended for me in 1967 when I got the first Guggenheim, decided I wanted to go to Egypt to photograph the temples. But at that time, Nasser was very much against America, and so they didn't treat Americans very well over there. Dorothea Lange, in fact, warned me. She said, "You want to go to Egypt at this time with a one-year-old boy and a wife?" She said, "If you must, you know, fly in from Italy and speak Italian. Don't tell them you're an American." Well, if it's going to be that difficult, we should think about something else. And that's when my wife Eleanor showed me that there was ancient material in Ireland that would also be worth considering.

MS. LARSEN: Ah, so that's how -

MR. CAPONIGRO: So we went to Ireland instead. So instead of the Egyptian temples, I got into the prehistoric temples, Stonehenge and all of those related sites.

MS. LARSEN: I was very curious. I love those Stonehenge photographs, and I always have admired them very much, and wondered - let me see how this is moving along here. Good, we have lots left - what did people know of Stonehenge at that time? And what did you know of it?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Absolutely nothing. I knew nothing. And the archeologists were in the process of measuring them physically, and the only thing they had were legends and myths surrounding them. Of course, they could not take the myths and the legends seriously. Folklore was probably doing one of the best jobs, the folklorists of the British Isles, because some of the ideas in folklore would reflect some of the myth and some of the legend that was associated. So they were floundering.

MS. LARSEN: So it came down to verbally, that it was - the folklore collected verbal memory that had perhaps tumbled down the -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Folklore had the Irish fairy tales of them. The rhymes in the British Isles had some interesting - you know, a guy named Graves, as a matter of fact, the writer -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Robert Graves. Robert Graves wrote something called *The White Goddess*, and he did a fabulous job of taking the Ogham writing, which is a very special writing from the time of the Druids, and some of the rituals written up in legend and myth; and the language of the trees, how the hawthorn did this and the ash did that, and related to certain seasons. He did what Joseph Campbell did with *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* for the prehistoric period with his *White Goddess*.

MS. LARSEN: And did you know that at the time?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. No, I was absolutely - I was picked up as a dumb kid, but innocent, picked up by the forces of nature. I knew that the forces of nature were a language, was a way of life, could inform you. In other words, nature really was my teacher right from the beginning. And something happened in my life that related me to stone in particular - which I wasn't aware of; I just loved stone. I loved the form, the shape, the texture, the arrangements. And in working with that with my camera, a very powerful impression came from a particular photograph of stone. And as with these poor mystics who are - you know, they're infected with the devil; stuff comes at them, in them, through them. But this impression arrived, and it caused a set of words to rise in my mind. And it said, teachings from the ancient fathers. Here I am looking at a photograph I made of a stone wall,

and I'm hearing the words, teachings from the ancient fathers.

MS. LARSEN: Was this before you went or was this -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Long before. Before I even - before I was even married. Before I even considered the idea of - I mean, I knew I wanted to go to Egypt because I was going to the museums to get what I could from that.

MS. LARSEN: That seems very much the most obvious and the most known structure there.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Then I saw - as we were doing research about whether we would go to Ireland or not, I saw photographs of certain kinds of stones. And I thought, I think - you know, there were the dolmens and Stonehenge and similar sites. And I thought, oh, yes. Yes. There's something in there.

MS. LARSEN: So you started in Ireland and then -

MR. CAPONIGRO: I started in Ireland. I was actually going to do the high cross and the churches and the Celtic Christianity. But when I saw my first set of stones in the land, I thought, oh, my God. I was bewitched. Something snapped, and I blindly just went for them. I thought, you know, the more I address them, the more I'm with them, the more I could possibly understand -

[END TAPE 3 SIDE A]

MR. CAPONIGRO: So I just wanted to know what - well, what the hell are you up to, and where is your measuring stick? You know, you're photographing without a measure. You know, they used to put - everything they studied had a stick graduated in feet, red and white.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, I see. Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And they put it next to there.

MS. LARSEN: So this is the document that you - that's a scientific document you were supposedly taking.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Exactly. They thought I was studying [inaudible]. And I said, "Well, they spoil my picture." "Well, how is anybody going to know how tall that stone is in the picture?" I said, "Frankly, I don't care," you know. I mean - so there were -

MS. LARSEN: How did you find these places? Did you -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, like I would have - I'd have a stout with the archeologists. I would go to the main cities where they housed their collection of photographs of these places. And it was called the Board of Works at that time, what we would call the National Monuments Department, that care for these ancient sites. And they had all kinds of records, a library of the legends and the myths associated with them. They'd been photographing them. They had a library of photographs. So I got access to their maps and their photographs so I could -

MS. LARSEN: That's great.

MR. CAPONIGRO: You know, very often I would go out and I'd know a certain site was here. But I'd get there and there really was nothing to photograph. It was no more than a foundation outlined by the earth. I thought, oh, that's going to waste a lot of time. Then I took up with looking at their photographs, which they'd made over several years. And I thought, okay. That has potential. That one has potential. So they were very helpful, and at the same time they were wondering, you know, "What the hell are you doing? I mean, why are you studying these?"

MS. LARSEN: There's a huge interest in the last twenty years.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. And I started photographing them a couple of years before they suddenly became a curiosity that had to be looked into a little deeper. And maybe a few people like Gerald Hawkins, who wrote Stonehenge Decoded.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. I got that book.

MR. CAPONIGRO: That came out after I was photographing those stones. So I was brought there for my own questions about mysticism and ancient material, which is the most informative of the mystical life and mystical activity that I could find by associating with those sites, especially the Egyptian. It's very powerful.

MS. LARSEN: When you first went to Stonehenge, was there a - I remember going there in 1969, and it was very plain. And there was nobody there, and it was very just unencumbered, no fence and nothing -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Right.

MS. LARSEN: And it was - you know, I didn't really think too much except to study it in school. But it had a kind of clean purity and quiet about it. And I guess now it's very -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, they had to put a fence around it by - I think it was 1977 is when they put up the fence because between '74, '75, and '77, there was a great deal of vandalism. A lot of hippies thought that they should take it over. There was a lot of activity, and resentment that they were not allowed - you know, not allowed to play latter day Druids or - there was a bit of a thing going on. And they wanted association, these people, with the sites. They were denied it by the keepers all. And so, you know, they would go and spray paint on the damn thing, peace signs and - so they had to fence it off.

MS. LARSEN: But when you first went there, what was the atmosphere?

MR. CAPONIGRO: When I first went there, it was totally - the only device they had - there were no fences, but they had a device where the earth, the ground, before, surrounding the whole monument, was sensitive to touch. They would switch on in the main guard room. They would switch it on when they left. They'd open the gates at 9:00, switch off the power, and keep it off until 5:00 when they closed the monument officially. Then they'd put on the alarm. If anybody walked within a certain distance of the monument, the alarm would go off and the police would come. So that was the protection they had. Otherwise, it really did - you had the open space. And I took advantage of that because I started photographing it in '67. And I continued photographing it right through '72. I think my last photographs were in '77. I made some in '77 without the fences. I went back every year and spent a few weeks with the place, just photographing it.

MS. LARSEN: Those photographs are very well-known and widely admired. What were other sites that - other places that you felt were -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, that's in my book entitled Megaliths. It outlines all of the different types of prehistoric monuments. And there's a good section in the back that a friend of mine, an editor, put together describing the sites and telling where they are. So that pretty much covers the single standing stones, the stone circles, the avenues, the mounds, the tumuli, and all that kind of stuff. So I covered most of those.

MS. LARSEN: This body of work seems to have evoked and tuned into a very general awareness and appreciation of your work in the art community, it seemed. Is that so or not? I mean, I remember seeing those just a lot of places.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, when did the great Celtic revival come in? I'd say somewhere around the '70s. The New Age people hooked into the Celtic as being one of the really strong holders of that power of that thinking and idea of Mother Goddess, God being a woman rather than a man, all that kind of stuff, that whole revival of the pagan and Druid thinking. I'd say that is what pulled those stones into focus in the world in general, the realization that those - Castaneda happened simultaneously. Castaneda was being brought by Don Juan to power sites, and it became obvious that these were power sites. They were places chosen by the ancients who knew what the earth energies were about and would build their sites on particular pieces of land that have that extra strength or energy that could affect a human being.

MS. LARSEN: When I saw your photographs, aside from the content of place, which I remember feeling when I was there, with eyes that are educated on minimal sculpture and modernist abstraction, et cetera, et cetera, the formal qualities of those photographs seemed to really relate to and measure up to some of the best of that kind of sculpture and the general artistic look of it.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. I could see where they would do that, mainly with [inaudible]. I worked simultaneously not only for what to me was the best facet of that particular stone as a sculptural entity, but also to try to pick up the atmosphere of the groupings of stones. So that was the task I had, which I didn't realize at the beginning. And I didn't realize what the hell was happening. You know, my first two years were - I was mystified. But I was also impelled. And as I was working with those stones trying to understand them - and the archeologists were always after me: "What the hell are you doing exactly?" "I don't know. When I find out, I'll let you know. I just got a photograph." And then it hit me, bam, teachings from the ancient fathers. It was a stone wall that gave that phrase to my brain and teased me in my emotions. And when I got to these sites and I was totally caught, and thought, I'm done, I can only follow my instincts here and work, I thought, here, yes, are the teachings from the ancient fathers through stone. I thought that was an interesting dimension, an internal dimension, of -

MS. LARSEN: Like an affirmation.

MR. CAPONIGRO: You know, I mean, one of the things that would - an affirmation of the silent realm informing you and having a validity because you keep running into it.

MS. LARSEN: And you're following something, and you've started here, and you're still - the path is -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. And in that sense, time is telescoped. The accordion is closed. And I thought that was no different between that time I made the photograph of that rock wall to the time that I recognized that the stone was really the medium and that nature somehow beats out an energy that informs you.

MS. LARSEN: It's just what I was trying to say, that these photographs make and satisfy on a number of levels where different people will come at it with different purposes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, that's why they chose me, because I was determined to be an artist and I was trying to work within the medium of photography, keep that as the art. My other artistic interests and the museum visits were nourishing and feeding me. And so all of that could arise in these photographs I was making. You know, when I met those stones, one of them, as I tried to photograph it, you know, leaned forward imperceptibly and said, "What do you want?" It said, "What do you want?" And in it was like two paragraphs: Why that angle? Why this particular place at this time? What is your purpose? What - you know, it just sort of said, what do you want? And I backed off because I knew that I was after a composition. And I had my zone system and I could master the light, whatever the light would be, and blah blah blah, all my rationalizing, intellectualizing, composualizing [sic]. And the stone said, "That's not what you're here for."

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Right. You're here for - you bring all that here, but what do you want?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Right. And I left. I just stopped right in my tracks, and I went and had a cup of tea and a pork pie at the stand, and just sort of sat back and thought, well, you're either going crazy or something's happening, you know. So I bravely after a few hours went back and very cautiously. What it said was, you know, you're not here for any of what you know. You're here to learn. And just bring us your craft. Use it. You'll be informed as you work. And that's what was happening. It was like - this was a -

MS. LARSEN: I think, too, that you saw that place in great depth and complexity, that, you know, like anything of that - it's a very special kind of situation because it's big, of course.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. And a very complex design.

MS. LARSEN: And it's high up, and it is large, and it has multi - it offers all these different angles. But, you know, most of us, when we go to see a place like that, we come away with a psychological impression, a memory. But the usual touristic shots linger because you see the same touristic shots over and over and over again. But -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, that's exactly what the stone was telling me. You know, be careful. We know what you're here for. All you need to do is keep your craft handy. Your craft is. It does not think, you know. And when you arrive at the state of being an emotional archeologist and not the average archeologist who digs, you are digging emotionally and you will be informed through that realm.

MS. LARSEN: Because you took it apart. You took it in elements. You put it back together again.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. And the printing was very important. The printing was very important. Like I said, too much selenium and it wipes out a certain quality of atmospheric feeling in the print. So I was after atmospheres more than -

MS. LARSEN: How did you deal with the tourists and the other folks? Or did you have special access?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, a few of the guards were sensitive to the fact that this kid was not playing around. He's quite dedicated and serious. Why would he come back so often and - you know, he has that something about him that you know that he's after something. So they would let me in at 5:00 in the morning. They would turn off the power. I would walk across the lawn leading up to the hedge. And I could work until 9:00 when everyone was allowed to go through the gates. So I had that free time.

MS. LARSEN: Four hours.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Then at 5:00, everybody would go home and they would lock the gates to them. But they would leave the power off until I finished my work. And that could be a few hours later. So they allowed me that time extra, without people. And then during the day, I just very carefully and patiently would see that, well, there's a photograph here. And I would get my camera set up and wait until a group of people were hidden behind the stones and get my exposure, and then they would continue. So a lot of jockeying at that time. But mostly, they allowed me to be there at hours when nobody else was.

MS. LARSEN: That was very generous of them.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, it was wonderful. It was wonderful. And I brought back - when it was finished, I did a

portfolio of twelve images of Stonehenge, twelve of what I thought were the best, and I wrote a piece about what I felt there, and I ceremoniously gave it to the head guard that used to take care of Stonehenge, Tom Woodhouse. And he said, "Well, you know, we've got this big fence up. But I think this wants to be brought into the center of the stone, so let's go. Just look for all the world as if you're an archeologist; behave as if you are, and we'll step over the fence," which we did. We went into there and laid it on the center stone, and then we walked it completely around the stones, offered it to Stonehenge, and left it in the guard house. And I said, "This is, you know, for you to share with anybody." He kept it for a year and said, "It's too good a piece to be just hanging around here. So I have donated it in your name to the Wiltshire Museum," which, you know, has done archeological work on all these places and [inaudible] cathedrals. The Wiltshire Museum, which is very - it's right across from the Salisbury Cathedral.

MS. LARSEN: It's a very wonderful area. It's a beautiful place.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes, it is.

MS. LARSEN: Interesting. Very interesting.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So the stones got me.

MS. LARSEN: And when you came back with that body of work, what happened to it? Did you show it?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Ah, '67. I arrived back in the summer of '67. We got there at the end of the summer of '66. That's when we actually arrived in Ireland, set up house, a place for John and Eleanor to live, and me contacting the archeologists and finding the maps and going on field trips. Then in '67 we decided to go over from Ireland to England. So the first trip was spring of '67. And I got the job - I got a telegram at the end of that year from New York University. Of course, we used up all the money from the Guggenheim grant. We were going home broke.

MS. LARSEN: Well, three of you. I mean, that's really something.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. And it was a small grant, \$5,000, which wouldn't last a couple of months at this time.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. And now -

MR. CAPONIGRO: You know it just wouldn't work.

MS. LARSEN: But people went to college on half of that.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes.

MS. LARSEN: But still, a family with a child.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And it was cheap in Ireland at that time. That was what helped a great deal. We got \$4 to the pound. That was a lot.

MS. LARSEN: I remember. Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: We got triple our money. But we left, came back to the States - and in fact, I came back earlier than I thought I wanted to; I really wanted to stay longer - because Peter Bunnell called and said that New York University was after Peter Bunnell, John Szarkowski, and whoever else they thought, and they nominated Paul Caponigro, to teach in the New York University film department. And they were going to discuss the visuals and the aesthetics and this, that, and the other. And we weren't going to teach filmmaking.

MS. LARSEN: Right.

MR. CAPONIGRO: But they thought we would be an add, an addition, to. And I said, "I'll do it." I need the money. And that's why I moved to Connecticut. I didn't want to live in New York City. I'd had enough of that. And so we found a place on the train line in Connecticut, over the border, and I would commute into the city and teach at New York University. So Peter Bunnell and John Szarkowski got me that job, and I did that for about two or three years. And it was at that time - when I got back and we talked with Peter, and he saw the material and said, we have an opening and we've got to have a show of this work. So I did some of the first Stonehenge prints and Irish landscapes and some of the crosses.

MS. LARSEN: Now, where was the -

MR. CAPONIGRO: At the Museum of Modern Art. He had taken the assistant curatorship under John Szarkowski. This is long before he went to Princeton. But Peter put that show together. Opened that space.

MS. LARSEN: Now, and the year was?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Fall of '67.

MS. LARSEN: So there you were, showing at the Museum of Modern Art, right in the crosshairs of the art world.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And a bunch of prints that mystified people. I remember the first two years, I forget who the critics were or the people who were writing. "You know, we can understand his sunflowers and we can understand his landscapes. But what's he doing? Is this a catalogue for the prehistoric sites?"

[Tape stops, restarts]

MR. CAPONIGRO: The stones were viewed by some kind of quite interesting, and then to just as many others, they were curious to know, you know, why Caponigro does these lovely landscapes and his lovely still lifes. And what in the world is he up to with these stones? So it was not accepted so easily. It took two or three years before people began to see them as more and more of the work was being printed and shown. And then, of course, the world decided that these stones were important and looked into. That helped them along. But let's face it, to me they were a mystery. So when they got into the photographic art world, they were a mystery.

MS. LARSEN: But the timing was remarkable because I really think the nature of that imagery and the nature of what must have also been being shown in places like the Museum of Modern Art, there is a congruence of form: the big, the definite, the architectonic. Those are all things of that moment. And that work was right for that moment, visually and in that context of Manhattan art at that time.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, what do I know? I was just being told what I had to do. [Laughs] You'll ask me, "What's your next project?" And I say, "I don't know. They haven't told me yet." It's a lot like that.

MS. LARSEN: Well, that's interesting. Very intriguing. Each of us enters something from a different perspective. You know, I'll see one of your photographs in a textbook and it'll seem, you know, just right with other things at that time. But in photography, there were other ideas abroad at that moment, were there not? Like street photography and urban concerns and hybrids of media and -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well - give me one minute.

MS. LARSEN: Certainly.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, it wasn't that. Photography itself suddenly being acknowledged as an art form and collected by museums and programs being instituted into the universities, wasn't that the time that photography suddenly became, I would say, not only conscious but self-conscious of itself? The self-consciousness being - I'm going a little bit overboard in placing an importance on it. And I suppose I can see that they felt they had to encompass all of what was going on in photography, from science to art. And so then all these special departments came in - journalism, poeticism, and whatever ism, and whatever "wasm", and all that going on.

MS. LARSEN: Well, it seemed like -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Simultaneously, the educators, I think, started a whole new direction of conceptualism, where - I don't know what it is. These people were educated in the universities and never left. They stayed there and taught others photography. And that stuff generated a lot of intellectual stuff, such as the conceptual really is. It's like they're mind games, space games. Write on the negative, it changes the space. And I think the emotional aspect of the art photography was being pushed back, and the thrust was for, well, now, listen. We have an art form and we have a history, and now we have to start building the history, at the expense of sometimes -

MS. LARSEN: Find yourself a niche and see where you could fit, and then build your little house?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, yes. And then the idea of being original set in, and that created a lot of - what's the word? - Anything goes. Anything goes.

MS. LARSEN: Suddenly, too, for example, like with the pop artists, someone like Warhol, photography, the photographic image, became a tool; or with someone like Diane Arbus, a kind of star treatment put onto a photographic body of work; and that separateness or otherness, like oh, photography's over here and paintings over here. People started kind of worrying about that.

MR. CAPONIGRO: What did we have at the Photo- Secession back in the early 1900s? A lot of complaints that photography had its dignity and we're going to stand up for it, and we're not going to put - we're not going to paint in clouds, and we're not going to make these photographs look like paintings. We are photographers. And

then Stieglitz got championed for inventing the "equivalent," which gave it a little extra dignity. And oh, well, we - you know, we've given a voice, too. And all the self-consciousness began to come into it. No, we're a straight photographer. And where are we now? We're right back there when photography was not accepted and they tried to make it look like painting in order to get accepted. And we're now painting on photographs. It's like it's now the thing to do. It's the fad. It's in.

MS. LARSEN: And yet there are times when, just from my small observation with limited time, where the separateness of the photo world also became sort of mannered, and the fact that photographic conversation fed on itself, and people talked to one another in a very almost academic manner. I felt that in Los Angeles, where the photographers only look at photographers. They talked about things that they all knew about and that were about each other. It was a little precious at times.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So insular and precious. Yes. I wrote an article for Parabola magazine on the craft at the time. And the thrust of it was photography having come in and made easily accessible, relatively, to the public in general, to the human in general, the industrial age took the craft and the use of hands and the making of -

[END TAPE 3 SIDE B]

MR. CAPONIGRO: So that industrial age took away the work, the craft, the art that was generated out of [inaudible] most people. And photography I saw as a way of putting it back in their hands. You could - you didn't have to master art. You didn't have to be that special or study for so long.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It's hard to become a master of one's craft in the arts, sculpting, anything. Whatever it is. Photography could give it to you quickly.

MS. LARSEN: Hence the popularity.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And then it became very popular. I mean, Dr. Land told me once - he said, "You guys need this, you know. You really do want to be artists again. You want to feel as if you're part of that whole creative art process." And so the camera really was a very special item.

MS. LARSEN: It empowered you.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It did, it did [inaudible]. What do we have? When we went to - always the negative side comes in, where - you know, the power of art resides emotionally in the heart. And that emotional realm, that emotional language, that unknown, it's been described as a great substance.

MS. LARSEN: That's why we look at art or listen to music or read a book.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And so quickly recognize in so-called works of art that are produced that are devoid of that. It's made from a different place. The intellect takes over or sleepiness takes over or whatever. So the art demands awareness and the participation. And this is what we need in the new digital realm, is how to get the emotions involved and not be such a strictly technological process. Photography did that, and gave art back to the people. And for the last ten, fifteen years, it's been the experimentation of putting the paint in alongside or right in with, on top of, merging painting and photography. So we're still in, I think, a big flux of separating out the desire to be an artist and what really is produced as truly good art, that could possibly match some of the ancient left us, some very powerful pieces that you can tell how great they are because they just shut you up. So when that arrives for this particular era, it's hard to say. I think we're definitely in process.

MS. LARSEN: Well, the desire to be an artist touched with the ability to actually do it always in this place [inaudible] that you hope they are.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. We hope. We hope. And on top of it, psychology, psychiatry, therapy in the streets, also enters now and gives it an added, gosh where are we?

MS. LARSEN: It seems, from my looking at photography, that sometimes I go to the photo exhibition, especially if there's a lot of people in it. And I think the sense of mobility [inaudible] something that - that it's photographing something better or something - it's uncovering from a spark that are dark [inaudible], and seeking it out, too.

MR. CAPONIGRO: We are disturbed. We are disturbed and have been for some number of years. And that disturbance, I think, is in the imagery. According to Jung and a few others, we have [inaudible]. We're maybe in the process of trying to understand how that emerged, if it emerged. Not a lot of happiness. Not a lot of happiness happening today, you know? There's a few, a few that look fun and enjoy [inaudible]. But for the most part, it is what you say.

MS. LARSEN: I wish it weren't so. It's just that one comes away and thinks, wow, you know. Did they just filter this out and seek all this? Or is this -

MR. CAPONIGRO: I call it therapy in the streets. There's a need to get this out. We can't always afford a psychiatrist or a therapist. And so we can hang it on the walls and it's therapy.

MS. LARSEN: But your work, I think, it's not necessarily cheery and laughing, but it has a kind of positive grandeur about it for the most part, that there's a positive valence or a larger view that it presents. It's not, you know, seeking those dark corners.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, I've watched myself and I've thought about it. And I have a pretty good idea of what I'm asking. And I am a human being, and my humanity gets into my pictures. And there are sad times, and there are very bright times. And there is a certain sense of humor that I'm [inaudible]. But for the most part, there is a positivity. There's a definite positivity, and not necessarily because I have been positive all the time. I'm a human being. I'm very moody. And that's not always possible. But what I recognize is in the working, I've thought, as the ancients thought, that art is a sacred activity. As such, you're pursuing the sacred, which has to do with transcending what the poor beast has to go through. And so the positivity in my work comes from always reaching for that transcendent time. As I said about certain photographs of Edward Weston, he wanted to penetrate, that something became transparent, see a little further into it. That's when you aim at not only universal, but at the very mysterious elements of what being is. So I'm after the mystery. And if I can last long enough and get enough energy stolen back from the structures that run our lives today, I might be an artist in this day and age. Of course, I'm busy paying taxes and trying to decide who to vote for, that we're losing a great deal of energy that we could be using at pursuing the depths of our art. So I'm kind of desperately myself now, to arrange some time and space. It's important to really go further by trying to penetrate deeper from where I've gotten so far.

MS. LARSEN: But when you went to Mexico and you worked on -

MR. CAPONIGRO: New Mexico. 1967 was the job with Peter and John Szarkowski at New York University; we stayed in Connecticut right up until 1973. I taught three of those years. The other three years of staying in Connecticut, I did some work jobs and was selling prints, that kind of thing. But in '73, I decided we're going to break away from New England and we're going to move to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where there is another layer of something special. There were a lot of reasons for the move. The marriage was beginning to get a little shaky. The Connecticut schools - in the grade schools there was some marijuana smoking going on. I didn't want my kid subjected to this. Fortunately, John listened to us about and saw some programs that drugs are not a good idea. They really [inaudible]. Then my son in high school, in his high school. He got three or four of his buddies off of drugs. He just reprimanded them, and treated them as if he was their big brother and scolded them. But we got -

MS. LARSEN: So that was scary, though.

MR. CAPONIGRO: But we didn't like that. And the society at that time in Connecticut was not healthy. You know, Fairfield County is questionable. I mean, what was that movie they made, Peyton Place?

MS. LARSEN: Oh, it was a sort of -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Which really represented -

MS. LARSEN: The values of it?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. All that kind of stuff. It was -

MS. LARSEN: It doesn't sound like -

MR. CAPONIGRO: In my opinion, slightly degenerate and bit overly complacent. Something was falling apart. We needed that stimulation.

MS. LARSEN: Not a place where the artist's values that we've been talking about would hold first position.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, it would superficially. A lot of people go to art exhibitions just to be seen there. And that's the gallery type that you find.

MS. LARSEN: But still, you know, their social position and -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, between social and my own -

[Tape stops, restarts]

MS. LARSEN: All right. Let's see where we are. So New Mexico.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. Connecticut was good. Six years. It was a good place to be. It gave me a lot of very good photographs out of the wood series and the water series, and set up a very nice darkroom. I got a lot of the megaliths from the Irish trips. There were also trips back to the British Isles, both with the family and I would go solo every once in a while.

MS. LARSEN: Did you have an audience in Britain or Ireland?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No.

MS. LARSEN: You didn't?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. There wasn't one. They themselves were not fully aware, or it wasn't given the prominence. The scientists and the archeologists at that time were stiffly busy with science. [Inaudible] mention the idea of some extraterrestrial energy that might be involved with this megalith [inaudible] they would shut you off. So they were very tight, very tight about it. You know, everything was carefully organized and categorized, and they really didn't want to entertain anything but what they could see directly at the end of their noses. So there wasn't [inaudible].

MS. LARSEN: Were you connecting with the world of art in Manhattan?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. No, I was outside the world in general. Any connection really was with the Museum of Modern Art, with Peter Bunnell and John Szarkowski. And at that time, I was being invited both to Princeton University, Yale University, a couple of other places, Harvard, all of whom tried to get me to become a professor at their university and set up a department of photography because my career had brought me to that point where it was recognized that I was an excellent teacher. And they wanted me to come into their department and take care of the photos. And I would go for workshops. But I declined on all of the - I said, you know, you can't hire me. I don't have a degree. I do not have a bachelor's degree. They said, well, we'll give you one.

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.] So it held no allure from the security that would -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, the security especially was one place that I felt was going to be really dangerous. No, I'm not going to do faculty meetings. I'm not going to do the social stuff. The other professors and teachers at the universities, I'm not going to that [inaudible]. And they would say, "Well, we're only signing you up for two days a week." I said, no. Two days a week, and the rest of the week with this activity and that activity and what little promotional thing is going to - no. Please. No, I -

MS. LARSEN: That was a very astute analysis.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. I know.

MS. LARSEN: Most people don't know that.

MR. CAPONIGRO: I knew that - as a matter of fact, some of them were a bit miffed. They thought, who the hell are you? I'd say, "Well, please. I've just gotten started on this project with these prehistoric stones. I've got to make several more trips back there, and to try to maintain a job here and do this job is not going to work." There was a very well-known painter at Harvard who understood. He said, "You want to be [inaudible] to be there." Back in the late '60s, early '70s, a curious little man. But he was well-known, relatively. So I got a contact with art in general. I think the world of art - painters, sculptors - well, 1959, at the time I came back from my travels and settled in Boston, '59 through '64, '65, I had a lot of interaction with the Boston artists, but not New York artists. That was strictly before what photography [inaudible] and what was happening at the universities. So I found some ground between the Ivy League universities. And I decided no. And I thought, a real break. You know, get away from all of this. Because they were after me consistently. Well, he's coming for a month, or be an artist in residence, and that stuff. And the marriage was difficult. I was cracking under the successful career and trying to be a husband and a father and an artist. And all of it was, you know, bearing down on me. And I thought, I've changed. Let's get out of here and start fresh. We had made one trip to a workshop or two to New Mexico. And we both liked it, and we thought, let's do that.

MS. LARSEN: And it has an artistic tradition and a [inaudible] tradition as well.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. [Inaudible] So we left there in '74. And I had my big breakdown right after I got there. I mean, the weight of all that travel, all that university stuff, all that - all the students that I would be working with, half of them didn't want to go away. They were bringing portfolios to my studio in Connecticut. It was too much. So I let go, kind of [inaudible].

MS. LARSEN: Was there anything -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, I mean, physically it was incapacitating. But mostly I remember all the internal psychological activity, both in the dream world, in visions that were appearing while I was awake and functioning. It was very extraordinary.

MS. LARSEN: You had lost your balance or something?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, I don't think I did because I recognized what was going on. And I was holding myself together to go through it. I wasn't going to turn myself over to the medical profession and get myself drugged. I knew that that was going to be - that's like the Army telling me to stay in line. I never liked staying in line. I always revolted against the lines.

MS. LARSEN: Did you react badly to New Mexico, do you think?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No.

MS. LARSEN: No?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. New Mexico, I mean, I drove in from one state to the other. And as soon as I got over the border into New Mexico, the skies literally gave me a vision of what I was in for. And it showed me very specific events that did indeed unfold in that way, and actually happened. It included the divorce.

MS. LARSEN: And you kept driving?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I kept driving. I just thought, okay. [Inaudible] And then it was - you know, when I told people I was moving to New Mexico, and they said, oh, the land of enchantment.

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.]

MR. CAPONIGRO: Because it's known as that.

MS. LARSEN: Sure. Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And while I was driving into it, and the skies were doing this, and a certain amount of rain was coming down, I thought, oh, I'm in the land of enchantment.

MS. LARSEN: But there are various kinds of enchantments.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, okay. So let's - we'll just accept this as an enchantment. But it also gave me a realization: All right, you're going to have to go through some things. And I prepared myself for it, and went through them, and they were fabulous. The insights, the kind of activity, always informative of the world I'm constantly pursuing, which is [inaudible] for the eye. The closest you can get is if your eye opens, you're in a dream world because the dream world at certain times can provide you insight and subconscious wellings up that are very important to you.

MS. LARSEN: Wake up, and you're in another place.

MR. CAPONIGRO: In the dream world, I would be able to see certain things and then realize, ah-hah. You have to watch for this and its translation when you dream at night. So I would always take this as the crossing of another threshold. There would be new thresholds. But the trip to New Mexico was like already going through that door, and I was making myself ready for it. If it included the breakdown, so be it. But I'm not going to - you know, the same way with the accident I had eight years ago. The doctors wanted to sedate me because I was having what they thought were hallucinations. They weren't hallucinations.

MS. LARSEN: You fell down?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yeah, I had a bad fall that just about killed me. And that was another thing, to get through another door because I saw it. But there were some beautiful images, symmetries, insights into a psychological, emotional breakdown. It was fascinating. So who the hell wants somebody to dump on it and quell it, you know, send it back down, when here I've been digging and digging and waiting for this -

MS. LARSEN: It's like you're really on a roller coaster.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It's not fun. No, it's not fun.

MS. LARSEN: No. You're not moving at a pace that's entirely comfortable.

MR. CAPONIGRO: But, you know, when it's over, you look back at some of the extraordinary patterns of images

that give a description of the eternal process. And then to be able to relate them to certain mythological expressions you get from 2,000 years ago, a legend that describes that such-and-such a hero went through the so-and-so and saw [inaudible]. And so the meaning of archetype began to jell and become part of the process. But in and on that level, we can be informed about the realm of mystery.

MS. LARSEN: And that's a great [inaudible].

MR. CAPONIGRO: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] So I was inviting mystery. I knew that that had to be a main staple, mystery, to have known the power of silence.

MS. LARSEN: Right here in America.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Right here in America.

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.] In this wholesome, touristic place.

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. Let me tell you, one of the greatest things I got from Gurdjieff was that that kind of antagonism head-on can cause friction in the human being. And you're either overcome by this head-on impact of what the culture is up to and the negativities of the structure and the society, or the human being can stand fast, take advantage of the fire that is generated by the friction, go through it, and use that fire to continue. You know, he made it very clear. Friction in your life is for growth. Don't hand it over. Don't succumb. So that was powerful.

MS. LARSEN: That's very - yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: You know, it confirmed what I had to go through as a child. I was in certain situations, and I knew that if I lay down on this one, then the steamroller runs over you. So you've got to stand up. There's an instinct involved here. And Gurdjieff simply brought it to a higher octave of perceiving and dealing in the world.

MS. LARSEN: If you're conscious of that lesson, then you hope you can [inaudible] to the application.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It comes. You're really on a search. The material will follow you and step in front of you at the right time. So all of that was going on, and I began to understand more and more what it meant that the artist had to suffer. Instead of the back of the hand to the forehead and "I want to be alone" [sic] -

MS. LARSEN: It's not the fainting ladies and -

MR. CAPONIGRO: All that kind of stuff, it really is that the artist has to remain open even under duress because without the opening, information will not come through. Inspiration will not register. So you have to bear the pain of dealing with whatever the antagonism is and go through it so that you're still available to the realm of inspiration, which holds hands with the realm of mystery. And then the mystery is yours.

MS. LARSEN: But there is a certain price.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Everything is at a certain price. If we only knew what to trade for what, and not merely work at the stock market. So I was grateful for [inaudible] because it brought two powerful insights, not only into reading in the deeper minds of mythology and the subconscious, and yield especially. Freud was right. So realizing you can be informed. Lots of people know this. If you allow yourself to deal with the uncertainties, [inaudible]. At a certain point, I realized they couldn't kill me. Go ahead. Fire. Fire away. You're going to take pieces of my flesh away, but you can't kill me because it's already got its foot in that other dimension. So my photography has to - you know, at this point I'm addressing my photography as the means to maintain the contact with that unseen dimension in the hopes that the images will inform, symbolically or any other way, to add a little more insight than a good fairy tale can do.

MS. LARSEN: Well, the landscape was entirely different. The foliage was different in the whole range of what you're offered usually seems quite different [inaudible].

MR. CAPONIGRO: If the audience can read it emotionally and not merely relate it to landscape that's already been done, except that I used it in trees, then maybe it will do its job. But the audience has to meet it. My job is to do it. And I can feel the projection, the vision, the vision which is the meaning of my projection. What I feel in my emotions is projected to a certain place, and that's what I'm [inaudible].

MS. LARSEN: So the switch to New Mexico, and what it had to offer was -

MR. CAPONIGRO: That was an opening. That was an incentive on the next step of the challenge. And some very good things were - some excellent photographs were made there, as well as meeting equivalents to the experience of being at a very charged sacred site in the British Isles. Certain of those Indian sites and certain

pieces of landscape, special kind of mountains or - it's very hard to describe what those empty spaces of desert are charged and -

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Even in terms of lightning, they do carry that. It's amazing.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So that confirmed that the invisible was hot on my trail and I was hot on its trail.

MS. LARSEN: And were you kind of cut off from that whole support structure back East, or did it reach out to you?

MR. CAPONIGRO: It's when I began to - no. There were still contacts with the galleries. I had earned a reputation, and a gallery in Boston wanted a show, and so-and-so wanted a show. And Szarkowski put together "Photography in the '60s." We need some of your prints. Minor is doing his "Life to the Seventh Power," and I want some of your photographs of so-and-so.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So there was a lot of activity, and people drew on my photographs to take part in that. But -

[END TAPE 4 SIDE A]

MS. LARSEN: You encountered Robert Singer in Japan?

MR. CAPONIGRO: In Japan, and he wanted to know what I was up to. He said, "What do you hope to accomplish? I know who you are and what your photography is about." And in fact, he had taken a course with Peter Bunnell while Peter was a Princeton, and I was a guest teacher and lecturer there. And he sat in the back of the room listening to my lecture. And when I got to Japan - totally unprepared; I didn't know anybody, I just went - and word got to him and he got word to - there was only one person I was going to see, and that was the editor of a Japanese camera magazine. I had an appointment to see him. It was arranged by I forget who in the United States.

MS. LARSEN: In Tokyo?

MR. CAPONIGRO: In Tokyo. And I got there, and he handed me a note and said, "This man wants to contact you." And it was Robert Singer. And he said, "You may not know me. I was attending one of your lectures. I studied with Peter Bunnell," and so forth. "If you get to Kyoto, I am working at such-and-such and I am studying at so-and-so, living here. Please look me up." And so he turned out to be wonderful.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. He is wonderful.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Anyway, he said, "Well, you know, I see you're photographing. Do you want to do this" - I said, "Well, yes. I'm also here because my sensei, Sensei Nakazono" - which means inner garden, by the way - "told me that I could meet his teacher and learn something about the Kototama." He said, "The what?" I said, "The Kototama."

MS. LARSEN: And Singer is very clued in, very well educated in Japanese culture. That's surprising.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. Well, he said, "Well, good. We'll start. I'll find you a guide," and this, that, and the other. He said, "There's a Swiss woman, you really ought to meet the Swiss woman, who's here doing research on religion." So he said, "We'll all have dinner together." And I didn't see him for about a week or so. I had gone off to photograph such-and-such, so-and-so. And I came back and he said, "The Swiss woman is very anxious to meet you, very anxious." I said, "I've never met her." He said, "She wants to know how an American knows about Kototama when almost no one knows about Kototama. And if her circumstances weren't so extraordinary, she wouldn't know about Kototama." Now, the Japanese won't tell her anything.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Not surprising.

MR. CAPONIGRO: There are some people who know about Kototama. I said, "Yes. She's got to find them in so-and-so." He said, "Yes. They are there, and she wants to question them because they do know something. And she thinks that if you - if she becomes your interpreter, that is accepted" -

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.]. Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: - "by the Japanese. But they will tell her nothing." And so she became - she was thrilled to meet me. She said, "Who the hell are you? Where do you come from? How did you get this?" And I said, "My Japanese sensei knows a man in Tokyo who is a national treasure and studying this religion." She was just thrilled. She said, "Well, now, the Omoto people have a hold of this. I've discovered that. But they will tell me nothing. If you will allow me to be your interpreter and you want to ask them questions." I said, "Fabulous. I'd

love to ask them."

MS. LARSEN: That's a great arrangement.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So there she was. She sat quietly while I asked a lot of questions. And she recorded it all. She was so happy.

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.] Do you think it was because she's a woman?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. Precisely. She said, "The woman's place is over there."

MS. LARSEN: Oh, it's, you know, three counties away. It's just the way it is. What can you say?

MS. LARSEN: Well, actually, my teacher, Sensei Nakazono, and his sons, I said, "Well, don't you miss Japan? Will you ever go back?" He said, "Listen. Once we caught the idea of free spirit in the world, we moved to Paris, the whole family. And then we went to India and stayed there for a while. Eventually came to America. We can never go back to Japan. It's too rigid for us. You know, our needs and what we want to learn and what we want to do, much too rigid. We could never go back."

MS. LARSEN: In many ways, the Japan that many of us are greatly fond of is what's left of the old Japan, which probably, if we were living as contemporaries in the old Japan, we'd still find it rigid in another way. But there are beautiful, beautiful things.

MR. CAPONIGRO: There are. I've never seen bamboo molded into so many unbelievable pieces of utility and art. I mean, there -

MS. LARSEN: I remember the sound of the bamboo knocking against one another in the groves in Kyoto in the wind. You know, it would be like this "knock, knock" sound. And I've never heard that any other place. I'm sure it exists.

MR. CAPONIGRO: You go buy a piece of candy and you walk away with a package that's a work of art. As a matter of fact, I was able to get hold of a couple of books in the States before I went, How to Wrap Five Eggs. Do you know that book?

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And then I found the other one, How to Wrap Five More Eggs, you know.

MS. LARSEN: Sure.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And it's all about the craft in packaging, and so beautiful.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Craftsmanship is truly revered and understood by a certain segment of the Japanese society. And it trickles down into everyday life. It's very beautiful.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. I wanted to go back for that, to try to photograph some of that as well as -

MS. LARSEN: Did you ever do that?

MR. CAPONIGRO: - as well as breathe in. No. I never went back again. Just that one trip. I had two other invitations, but I think one trip it was just going to cost too much and I couldn't afford it. The other one, I was going to be supported, but it was going to be for such a short time. I mean, to sit on a plane for umpteen hours -

MS. LARSEN: Twenty hours plus from here.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It doesn't work for me. It's just as bad as - it's altitude sickness, you know.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, sure. Oh, yes. Well, so we're not exactly proceeding chronologically here. But as you move through into the '80s, and you were still in Santa Fe but still traveling?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. It was the mid-'70s that I met Sensei Nakazono, which was part of my ongoing investigation of different systems. I was involved with the Gurdjieff movement. They had - they still have - a foundation, the Gurdjieff Foundation, in New York City. I got involved with them in the late '50s and stayed with them until 1967, when I got the Guggenheim to go to Ireland. Once that happened, I left the Gurdjieff work. It was a good seven, eight-year period. And I stayed with it because I felt that it was giving me the most out of the systems I had looked into. But I also looked into other systems continuously. I would read and I would study and I would go places. And when I hit Ireland, I realized there was a whole - just like the Kototama, not necessarily

unknown, but it really didn't hit its stride. The ancient Celtic myths and the fairy tales and the legends of the Irish culture going way back had a power equal to what I was catching with the Kototama. You know, I studied five, six years with Sensei Nakazono with this breathing meditation. And simultaneously, I was looking at it from the viewpoint of, well, I did the Gurdjieff work and I've studied sacred dance as well as art with - you know, these drawings came from that period. Then when I hit Ireland, a whole new system, a whole new teaching - not a system but a teaching - was surfacing for me through the ancient Celtic material and the prehistoric cultures. And so I was at all times investigating, just like going to get a brand-new paper that's just come out. If I heard about a certain teaching, I would want to find out. And how does it relate? So I was doing my own course in comparative religions. And that always continued. And that was the thread that held me, my real interest, throughout the photographing and being a teacher and going to New York University and teaching there. All that stuff was by the way. But that kept going right through the '70s, '80s, and never really stopped. Never really stopped.

MS. LARSEN: And probably is still ongoing.

MR. CAPONIGRO: There were interruptions. And it will be ongoing. So that really was my private foundation of investigation and study, and was always my springboard for making my photographs because I really did feel like the ancient Japanese master. Take your shoes off and shut up. Work. Let the medium be your teacher. Always had that. So a very heavy interest in the Irish material because the land itself when I got there in 1967, and then continued going back every year for the next twelve years -

MS. LARSEN: You did?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. In order to produce that book called Megaliths, I would go for a couple of weeks and then write home for money so I could stay a couple of months. So it was a long period I would stay every year. And that was a love affair that lasted quite a long time. And I was getting it really from the land. The land itself was the teacher. And then by the way I would, you know, pick up some books and read about the Irish fairy tales and read about the so-and-so.

MS. LARSEN: That's become very au courant with actually the generation in its 20s now, hasn't it?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Precisely. It hit them hard, and for good reason. The new Wicca religion and all of that kind of stuff is a return to certain pagan ways, pagan belief, Druid activity. I mean, they were the last real - who were the Druids? Do you know who the Druids were? They were the last real ecologists. We ecologists today are lip service ecologists. You look into their methods, their ways, their practices, their teachings, they were ecologists. Everything fit in, and they respected and worked with everything, in which case, if it was effective, it became magic because air/water/fire/earth, the basic tools, were at their command. And the work with them - the Druids worked with them. They could either make it rain, just like the Indians dance rain. So I could feel all that just by being in the land itself because Ireland, if one can try to imagine or fantasize, Ireland is a dreamer. The atmosphere of Ireland is a dream world that has as much palpability, as much dense atmosphere - in other words, you can walk into it and wonder, what is happening to you? It is truly a magical place. And one can believe in the fairies simply by the effect that it can have on you. That was why I went back so often, not merely to collect stones but to be in the presence of the land. And the British Isles has that something where they have not tarmacked it over. I mean, there's been a lot of progress. England in particular is roads after roads after roads, all -

MS. LARSEN: Cultivated and managed.

MR. CAPONIGRO: They haven't quite done that, but they're in process now of doing that to Ireland. They're making it a really big tourist center. The Irish are tired of being poor. They're going to take the money that's being put in by the European community to develop. Well, I don't know if that's fortunate or unfortunate, changes through the years. But Ireland was for me a real-

MS. LARSEN: That's strange. Those of us who've never been to Ireland and who know it just through the news think of it as a troubled place.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, that's quite superficial because the trouble is really six counties that the English took over. The trouble has been between the English and the Irish for a few thousand years. These are clan wars, you know.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Even within Ireland, they had six major provinces, maybe more - I forget - and the Connacht men were after the Wicklow men. And, you know, these are clan wars. And kings would take their seats. And Britain was involved. There would be wars across the waters, and the Scots would beat up on - it goes way back. It's really not about the provinces.

MS. LARSEN: Is it mostly an urban thing, and you're talking about the countryside, or -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, the English pretty much took over six counties. Six counties is a lot. It's called Northern Ireland. It's the north of Ireland. The rest of Ireland is free of all that, but troubled by the fact that they've lost a good piece of their land and some of their people, too. But, you know, the Irish/English thing has been going on for hundreds of years. It's not just this skirmish that's going on. Well, I got lost to the atmosphere of Ireland.

MS. LARSEN: So you were living in Santa Fe but traveling frequently to Ireland; also to Japan?

MR. CAPONIGRO: '67 through '72, I continued traveling back and forth to the British Isles. And John, my son John and my wife Eleanor, would come with me half of the time. The other half of the time, they'd stay home. John was in school. But when they could come, they would go. They both realized - even John in his youth knew that, you know, we were going somewhere special. So that happened up until '73, at which time we decided that we would move from New England and go to Santa Fe. So by '74, we were thoroughly established in Santa Fe. I continued to go back to the British Isles, but I spent most of my time looking into the Southwest. 1976 was simultaneously - '75 was a very difficult year. We were separated, Eleanor and I, trying to sort out our lives. '76 I got another Guggenheim. The divorce was finalized in '76. And that's when I decided, I need something wild and different to get me through this divorce thing. So I decided to go to Japan for the first time, since I had met the Japanese sensei and all of that.

MS. LARSEN: Right.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So there was that content with Japan. When I got back from that, I continued with the Southwest and would still make trips back. And it was not every year now but every other year I would go to the British Isles and continue work there. But by this time, I felt that I had done enough of the prehistoric stones. I was now focusing on the ancient churches, the ancient Celtic churches, stone buildings, beautifully masoned, crafted stone buildings in the land.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Who still have a feeling of the ancient religion, although Rome had moved in, sent St. Patrick to drive the snakes out of Ireland, which means -

MS. LARSEN: The spirits?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Not the spirits, but the serpent was like the prime - one of the prime symbols for an earth energy that they were aware of, the ancient Druids and the likes of those, the pagans. The serpent was like the powerful symbol of something that they revered and knew about in the earth energies. So St. Patrick had to drive the serpent out, which he never did.

MS. LARSEN: Drive that other way of thinking out.

MR. CAPONIGRO: He never did. He had to build his churches on the very sacred sites of the pagans in order to pull them in.

MS. LARSEN: Sure. Also to -

MR. CAPONIGRO: St. Patrick never drove the snakes out of Ireland. The pagans taught him how to drive the snake straight up his spine, which is a form of Kundalini yoga.

MS. LARSEN: It ended up being -

MR. CAPONIGRO: So those stone churches that came just after that period where Rome had already come, began to establish the rules of monasteries and this, that, and the other, these early monks didn't want much part of that. So they would move deep into the land and build their little stone oratories and churches in places, as well as on the islands where they couldn't be touched. So they continued with the old ways, and you can feel that in these stone churches. You know, there's something still primal and megalithic in the reverence for stone that is in these ancient churches. And I was after that, trying to pull that out of those stones. So that became the project rather than the megaliths themselves from about the early '80s right through.

MS. LARSEN: In a way, you're almost following that through chronologically.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Actually, yes.

MS. LARSEN: That's the aftermath, the next thing. What was the critical reception of that body of work as that moved along?

MR. CAPONIGRO: The first few years - I think we discussed this in an earlier tape - the historians and the critics didn't know quite what I was doing. I mean, you're a landscape photographer. Why are you - why this catalogue of stones? They didn't catch it at first. And it took a few years, at which time a little book would come out by Gerald Hawkins, Stonehenge Decoded, and it started to pull the mystery of the ancient stones into the world. And then, you know, by the mid-'70s, late '70s, the idea of the megaliths as one of those mysterious things could be decoded. Maybe we could understand. And so there was a big thrust in interest in these ancient sites, linking them even to the Southwest Indians, where they found similar designs cut into the stone which actually marked certain solstices. So there was a science involved of following the sun and moon alignments and all that. So the modern age was trying to get some information from the ancients.

MS. LARSEN: As all these years go by and this body of work grows, though, it becomes a considerable part of your career, a large -

MR. CAPONIGRO: It is.

MS. LARSEN: I believe. Is that true?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. I think so.

MS. LARSEN: It's a good proportion of your -

MR. CAPONIGRO: I think it's a very important -

MS. LARSEN: It's not just an excursion or a change of subject or something that took your fancy, but it's a long pursuit, but related bodies of work that happened at different times.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Which will, as I see it, help me to refine what I will continue to do.

MS. LARSEN: Does being here in Maine have anything to do with - I mean, it doesn't occur to me that there's something like that here in Maine. There's landscapes, certainly.

MR. CAPONIGRO: The fact is, I don't know what I'm doing in Maine other than the fact that I visited over the last fifteen years or more, coming to teach. My son got turned onto it when he used to come visit me, and the teaching about the land. And I built this house. This is really a matter of convenience. It's a good place to be and work, and I would say primarily digest. The last eight years, since the accident, in effect -

MS. LARSEN: That was in '91?

MR. CAPONIGRO: That was in '91. Those ensuing eight years, right up to this time, was a matter of digesting not only the accident but ways of pulling out of it and trying to upright again, to be fully functional again. That was a very difficult business. I mean, if I had trouble with my health earlier because of overdoing, this was another matter, where they ran more chemistry through me in that hospital when I had that accident that upset the metabolism and just brought on conditions, a significant amount of weight as a result of all that prednisone that gets put into your system. All of this - I was doing battle with just getting upright. But simultaneously, I knew when I left Santa Fe that that meant leaving the past, and that I had no idea what the future was going to do to me or for me. But I knew that the break had been made, and I made the break. And the last eight years has been actually minimal photographing.

MS. LARSEN: When did you leave Santa Fe?

MR. CAPONIGRO: 1992.

MS. LARSEN: '92. Okay. And you went to California?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. I came directly here.

MS. LARSEN: Here? Okay.

MR. CAPONIGRO: I continued to go. The winters were a little too severe for me here in my condition. I would just drive cross-country and think about things, more to think about things than to drive. And California would be restful for me, tranquil. So it's been a period of digesting and releasing. Mostly releasing. I mean, that break with Santa Fe was very, very specific. It was - an ancient hatchet just came down and said, that goes that way. You go this way.

MS. LARSEN: Was it just becoming too crowded and touristic?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. I don't give a damn about that. I was way up in the hills away from it all. I'm having trouble

selling my house right now because it's too remote. You know, I know a few people here. I knew a few people there. I had a very small circle of - a community to interact with. So it's really not that different. And I love that land. I mean, I really liked being in it. Made some good photographs in it. Continued photographing there. It was a matter of what goes on inside that had to be looked at in terms of how far I had come, how I got there, what I was actually in as a result of all of that, and literally getting close to death in the accident. I was right at the door. And who knows how I got through it, a high tech miracle in the hospital or -

MS. LARSEN: It wasn't the time.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Or it wasn't the time or - you know, there are all kinds of stories. And I'm convinced that there are forces at work that, though invisible, have a great deal of influence on one's life provided one takes one's shoes off and shuts up. You can hear certain things and feel certain things. So I was helped through that rough period. That will be a book I'll write about and give some interesting details about that process. But that was a life-threatening - I was right on the door. I could have just as well have gone through the door of death as come back this way and take up life again. The important thing was the fulcrum was death. And the dream world, which is stuff that rises up from inside, was informing -

[END TAPE 4 SIDE B]

MS. LARSEN: So you were talking about -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, in the same way that I had to leave the West Coast school of photography and find my own way of injecting the mystical element into the photographs, as I saw Morris Graves doing through his paintings, when I left Connecticut I needed to make the same kind of separation from the gallery world and the university world, which was going really hot on instituting photo programs, and away from the whole thrust of, hey, you know, we're finally accepted as an art form and we're going to take advantage of it, and we've got to show them and we've got to - you know, and I thought, oh, no, no, no. Lana Jacoby, a wonderful old German woman, a very good photographer - she's not that well known, but she is - people know who she is.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And we used to visit with her. And she was watching me, and she'd say, "Gee, that was a nice lecture you gave at the so-and-so. It was a nice piece that you wrote for the so-and-so. But remember, Paul, who you are. You're a photographer." She was right. And I did get caught up, and I could be sapped of a lot of energy by these various structures.

MS. LARSEN: And students.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And students as a participator in the world of photography [inaudible]. But boy, I needed that break, not only to try to save my marriage, which who knows what the result of that was, to go through all that. But to find a new space in which to investigate and be subjected to this next mention, this level of -

MS. LARSEN: Sometimes it's hard to say no about things, and sometimes it's almost as though like driving almost across the country was a way of saying no without having to individually say no.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. That's true. Yes. Certain types especially, it's extremely difficult to say no.

MS. LARSEN: That's a way of saying yes to yourself and no to some of these other people.

MR. CAPONIGRO: What is?

MS. LARSEN: That break. That moving away. That yes, what you're doing is very important.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. And at the same time, there are some out there who are sharing what you wish to preserve. You find a sensitive spot in another, you want to encourage that, because in a way it's reciprocal.

MS. LARSEN: Sure.

MR. CAPONIGRO: You know, you're really able to kind of tell it or give it from the present functions. Someone is going to actually receive it and use it. What happened in the last ten years in the world of photo workshops, you were lucky if you had one out of fifteen that you could relate to in that way. It's just a lot of people that wanted to be creative on weekends, and there really wasn't much fertile ground in all of that activity. Photography workshops became and have become big business for a lot of people. So I had to slow down not only because of my age and a couple of bad accidents, but primarily for keeping the right kind of energy to myself in order to continue with the perceptions that I can make in my photography.

MS. LARSEN: This is the same exact thing I heard from Richard [inaudible].

MR. CAPONIGRO: Really?

MS. LARSEN: Almost to the word. But it's certainly the same thought. He had been a professor at UCLA. He had cut back to part-time. They didn't want him to. Finally he had to say no to save the creative years he had. You know, he just knew that he'd been given a chunk of time. You brought yourself to this point where you're able to go from thought to deed. And you ought to do that every day. And that's where the magic is. All the rest is all the rest, and it's nice to be wanted. It's nice to be admired, and all this kind of stuff, which amply - you know, it was the same thing. He was amply admired, amply wanted. But the private time was so precious.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. I'm in the process of looking at 40 years in work or more and place it. Now, there are an endless number of museums, universities, that maintain archives, collections, photographs. They'd love to have it. Not a one of them will buy a photograph [inaudible]. I need to turn over what I have done, or at least a portion of it, and get something in return to allow me to continue working.

MS. LARSEN: Just a collectors do. Like there have been collectors who have bodies of work, collections, and have received a certain sum, far less than the worth of the total -

MR. CAPONIGRO: The collectors can sell all that material and either take a huge write-off for the full value, but the photographer can't. The photographer is -

MS. LARSEN: That's that lousy tax law.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It's allowed - they're allowed to give you materials. And then -

MS. LARSEN: Thank you, Richard Nixon. That happened under the Nixon administration.

MR. CAPONIGRO: [Laughs.] Well, whatever that's all about, I can see that the major archives are still generating millions of dollars to build new spaces, and still cannot, cannot, find money to buy some photographs from the artist to help them buy a fresh box of film and paper. I'm not going to just leave it to the tax law that Nixon instituted. Their attitude is these people are going to die. They're going to worry about their estate taxes and how it's going to affect their kin. So if they turn it over to us and we have the legal papers and so forth, we don't have to pay anything. Well, I want to live for 25 more years and I want to work for 25 more years. And I don't want to be torn apart by workshops and galleries, and they're taking 50 percent of it all. I should be able to turn this thing over -

MS. LARSEN: Yes. And it's scattered to the four winds, too. It's just [inaudible].

MR. CAPONIGRO: Put it somewhere where they can give me something in return to start over again.

MS. LARSEN: I think of the - for example, there was a collector who became [inaudible]. He collected American folk art. He was brilliant. He was a brilliant collector. Eccentric man. He assembled a collection which was so brilliant [inaudible] out of really just trust fund little bits. But he sold his collection to the National Museum of American Art for a million dollars. But he sold something like 40 or 50 pieces, a certain number of things from his collection, for that million dollars. And he really gave them the prime and best things. It ended up that in total, what they got was almost a thousand pieces, and they paid a million dollars. So they paid an average of a thousand dollars a piece for these things. But when he died, he left them the rest of the collection. But with the million dollars, he was able to live okay, you know, the interest off that; to keep on collecting, which he couldn't afford to do. He was crammed with things. It was the love of the chase that he loved, not the keeping of it. He added to the collection with the million dollars. I mean, they had the best collector in the country out collecting for them using their stake because he ended up leaving all the rest to them. And alas, he passed away not long ago. But they ended up with this collection that - you know, they had the best curator in the world [inaudible]. And the Vogels did the same thing, Dorothy and Herbert Vogel, gifted collectors, with the National Gallery. And I don't know what they [inaudible]. But they're still alive, and they're doing well. The National Gallery has the collection. They are still collecting. And I bet they left the rest of it to them. So there are collectors who can manage this. I don't know about artists.

MR. CAPONIGRO: What about the artist? Where are the energies of the day? Where are they? And these museums and these universities and these other institutions constantly are constantly calling the photographers to donate prints for the auction to pay their mortgage or to pay their [inaudible] or to - what is it? Why can't the artist get some support? It is so visible. It's done out there.

MS. LARSEN: I could tell you from a curator's point of view, too, which is another story. I was at a meeting of -

[END TAPE 5 SIDE A]

MS. LARSEN: Let's see. We had talked about your trip to Ireland and Stonehenge. And as you were talking about,

just as you got to Santa Fe, things in your life changed and you had some upheavals. And I think we were just about to get to your settling into Santa Fe and the positive and creative and constructive things that might have happened after that transition time. I was kind of wondering what the Santa Fe community was like that you found there. Looking at it from the outside, I think of people like Georgia O'Keeffe was there, and wasn't Ansel Adams there visiting some of the time? Or was that before?

MR. CAPONIGRO: There was a whole period before. And little if anything of that remained other than seeing some of the work, going to the bookstores and finding the books by the - who was the well-known author that -

MS. LARSEN: Was it Beaumont Newhall?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. A writer. He hung out with that crew, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Ansel would come through. Paul Strand would come through and his wife. And the Weston boys would go there. There were a lot of the West Coast people would come to that place as well as the East Coast artists, the painters.

MS. LARSEN: And while you were there?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No.

MS. LARSEN: No?

MR. CAPONIGRO: These were all before I got there. This must have been the late '40s, '50s, maybe even a little earlier. But I think by the '60s and in the '60s, they had either died off or - Georgia was always hiding out. She didn't take part in the community. Ansel was very busy with his stuff. We saw him rarely there. His wife used to come through, Virginia Best Adams, who ran the Best Studio in Yosemite where Ansel exhibited his work and did a lot of his photographing in Yosemite. She actually would make yearly trips throughout the Southwest and buy blankets and jewelry, and sell them in her studio shop.

MS. LARSEN: Interesting.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So she came through quite a bit. And she visited with me a few times. But that whole period was like a block, the Santa Fe experience, that area, Taos and the likes of that. And then whatever artists were left, typical of the artists in that community, simply took off for the hills, hid out, and come out once in a great while. But while I was there, we had quite a number of younger and newer artists and photographers that knew of that golden period and certainly wanted to partake of the truly enchantment of that land. It is known as the land of enchantment, New Mexico, especially for the Indian culture. I think it still had a lot of magic because of the dances and the people themselves who held strongly to their old ways. That got really well watched over in the last ten years. So you had people like Ed Ranney.

MS. LARSEN: How do you spell that name?

MR. CAPONIGRO: R-a-n-n-e-y, who has been photographing the places like Machu Pichu and the ancient cultures of the Maya and the Aztecs, and doing a great job on that material. Bill Clift, who was one of my very early students, he actually moved out there before I got there, started photographing that landscape. Who else was actually out there? But a handful of young photographers who were kind of up-and-coming, like myself, up-and-coming. A relatively small community.

MS. LARSEN: Did you find an audience for photography there that was more than you might expect from other parts of the country? Or was that not so?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. As a matter of fact, the Andy Smith Gallery, which is a pretty big gallery there now, was actually in Albuquerque and dealing with the old Edward Curtis material, had a business selling that stuff. He only later, I'd say in the late '70s, late '70s or early '80s, opened a gallery in Santa Fe proper and set it up as a full roster of photographers and sold their work there. Andy Smith Gallery. And then there was another young couple, Scheinbaum and Russek - Scheinbaum, David Scheinbaum, and Janet Russek - who started out - I mean, they're both photographers themselves. They started out by assisting both Eliot Porter in his last - now there's the other photographer, is Elliott Porter. Beaumont Newhall. Ann Mancy [phonetic] while she was still alive was teaching in Albuquerque. But he eventually, after his wife died - she was killed by a tree, which is rather poetic, on one of those raft trips. He then moved up to Santa Fe. So you did have Beaumont Newhall. You had Eliot Porter, one of the notable [inaudible]. Walter Chappell, who was part of that whole Rochester group when Beaumont was director of the George Eastman House. Walter, both Walter and Minor White, worked at the Eastman House, as well as Minor did his teaching at Rochester Institute.

MS. LARSEN: Did they come as visitors or -

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. Walter settled in. First he went to California, stayed there for a little bit, and then decided

he wanted to come back to Santa Fe. He had been there earlier. That was when he lived in Taos. But he was around. That's quite a little community already.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. It is. That's very unusual.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And half of them - no, 75 percent of them - were Easterners, come from the East Coast.

MS. LARSEN: So you had people to talk to and people to look at your work and you look at their work, or not?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. We'd get together. Bill Clift is pretty private. But being as I was one of his teachers, he didn't at all and still doesn't respect my opinion in looking at photographs and being able to say something about them. He's happy to share those with me, but for the most part he likes to keep to himself, as we all did. But Ed Ranney and I, my son John, and his daughters, Ed Ranney's daughters, were friendly. And so we were kind of friendly with the Ranney family. There was a lot of interaction there, so photographically, of course, we talked a little bit. Then there were quite a number of younger students who would be working with these people, including myself, would come spend time as an apprentice for a few weeks and -

MS. LARSEN: Were there workshops?

MR. CAPONIGRO: The workshops had not started yet. That didn't come till much later. David Scheinbaum did start teaching at the Santa Fe College. That has developed into a fairly good-sized program of teaching photography. But I arrived there in '74. Right through the early '80s, it was pretty quiet, just a handful of people. I think that by the early '80s into the mid-'80s, things started to explode. People got together and created a center for photography for exhibitions. That developed into a group of people who created a board of trustees to start collecting photographs for serious purposes.

MS. LARSEN: It's now very much identified with photography as a special part of what's its artistic accomplishment, I think.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. And that was a slow buildup over a period of five to ten years.

MS. LARSEN: Ten years? Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And of course, I spent only part of my time there. I'd spend six months, maybe, actually in Santa Fe because that's where my darkroom was. That's where I was centered. I never did well with the altitude, and my body did not like the dry climate. I always functioned at a deficit. For three months in the summer, I would come to Maine and I would teach a couple of workshops at the Maine photographic workshops. And the rest of the summer I'd just hang out because I wanted sea level and I wanted some moist air. Then I would go back, spend the fall, and come winter I would head for the West Coast and spend at least a couple of months there.

MS. LARSEN: What part?

MR. CAPONIGRO: That was my pattern. I like the Big Sur coast area, right up to the Monterey Peninsula and all the way down to Cambria. So that was my schedule.

MS. LARSEN: Those are good choices. [Laughs] Those are some of the best choices available in this country.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. I wasn't unhappy with that. That was - and in the meantime, I still was running off to Europe, both teaching some workshops - did a lot of work in England. Got a grant. When was that? - Somewhere in the early '80s, 1984, '83, '85, thereabouts. Those three years, the English government gave me an artist grant to come and photograph a specific area of England, which is right up on the border between Scotland and England, a place called Hadrian's Wall. They wanted me to work the landscape. Gave me a grant, so much money to produce so many photographs.

MS. LARSEN: Were there stones there?

MR. CAPONIGRO: It's literally a stone wall built by the Romans. Hadrian's Wall.

MS. LARSEN: And how was that? Was that successful?

MR. CAPONIGRO: It was interesting. I got a few good photographs out of it. Half of them I haven't even printed yet. But at the same time, there were workshops being done in England where American photographers or European photographers would come and teach there. So they began to take - England began to take photography out of the simple, more or less commercially oriented courses in photography and the science of photography and began to institute the art of photography. I thought they were [inaudible] after that. And the Victoria and Albert Museum started collecting - well, they had been collecting, but they became more active.

And then a new museum was set up somewhere in central England. A little grant from Kodak helped them get that going. It's called the National Gallery of Photography or something like that.

MS. LARSEN: Are there some English photographers who [inaudible] historically or contemporary?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Not that I remember. Not that I remember. There might have been one odd person here or there, but that would have been pretty rare.

MS. LARSEN: What about French photographers or other Europeans?

MR. CAPONIGRO: At that time, it was the mid-'70s. In fact, my first workshop with Mr. Lucien Clergue, who started the Rencontres. These were photo workshops and writing, a lot of people from Europe and America, for lectures and workshops and slide shows and, you know, just a lot of activity in Southern France, in Arles.

MS. LARSEN: How nice.

MR. CAPONIGRO: I was at, say, two or three of those. And he - Lucien Clergue drew heavily from the teachers that would come to the main photo workshop. So most of those Americans - Harry Callaghan was there, 1976, 1977, thereabouts. My memory just won't pull the name of the photographers that were running -

MS. LARSEN: Sure. Is it C-l-e-r-c? Lucien Clerc? Or C-l-a-i-r-e?

MR. CAPONIGRO: With a g-u in there. Lucien Clergue.

MS. LARSEN: I'm doing this for the transcriber.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Ah-hah. But my observation was that the British and the American photographers leaned heavily in the landscape, and there were some doing people in a very abstract manner. Who was that? But mostly what the American photographers were doing, a lot of landscape and then some journalism and some - not fashion, but very creative work with people. And the French were almost entirely photojournalists. That's what I noticed about that, all that interaction. And to this day, I mean, even the French photographers that come over still and teach the main photographic workshops mostly are oriented to the journalistic type of work.

MS. LARSEN: What do you think of, in general, the - I guess you've just said that. But, I mean, the American photography and European photography seem to me to have taken very different paths, very different domains as their interest. When I think of European photography, I think urban subjects so much and ties with art movements, surrealism in particular.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. We would have [inaudible] especially, who is, I believe, now a painter. He doesn't photograph; he's a painter.

MS. LARSEN: So I've heard.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And he photographed most of the well-known painters at that time. So yes, there was a strong tie with the art community. Not so with the photography here in America. There's that schism, almost, that separation: Well, all right. If we have to accept photography as an art, you know, let's do it quietly. Put them over there in that corner. It really didn't - it took quite a while before it really got established. And then they got self-conscious. The photography art community quite self-conscious.

MS. LARSEN: Is that a good thing or not a good thing?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I think it is a bit childish, myself, going a little overboard in trying to do more than what would have unfolded. You know, there was an impetus to, well, now, let's show them that we really are artists and let's show them we can be creative. And to my mind, that was interfering with a slower and more natural unfolding of what photographic history would be. I think they kind of put a fire under the photographic history to kind of get it moving a little faster, and I don't think that's healthy.

MS. LARSEN: That's a very interesting point.

MR. CAPONIGRO: I think a lot of the conceptual photography that came out of that period was based on, well, here we are. We are an art. It's being accepted by the museums, shown in galleries. There are now galleries. And there weren't photographic galleries in the early - even up to the late '50s. Here we are, and we're getting established. We're getting recognition. Let's show them. And those that were being educated and getting full program degrees would not even leave the university. They'd stay there and teach. And I think that it went heavy on the intellectual side, which is where the conceptual stuff came.

MS. LARSEN: Well, I know from personal experience in the '70s that people studying photography in the

university were in the same classes as people studying art or art criticism or art history, and that the strategies of art-making were talked about and shared across the board so that photographers in particular, I remember, would talk about their art strategy as though they had to have a road map and a way of being relevant to the critical world.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Being relevant.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: What business does an artist have being relevant to a community or a system? I had a chat with Harry Callaghan, and I made one little slip. I said, "Well, you know, I'm obligated to think about these images." And he said, "Big mistake right there, son. Big mistake. You're not obligated. You are not free. You are talking about freedom in your photography, and you make that kind of a statement?" He said, "You're not free." And I thought, Harry, you got me.

MS. LARSEN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] [Laughs]

MR. CAPONIGRO: So the freedom within, the expressing of oneself, the discovery, the work within photography. It got too - it precipitated too quickly with too many ideas. And didn't we go back to what the Photo-Secessionists were bitching about? It's not accepted as art, so we'd better paint some clouds in. We'd better paint this in. We'd better use a broom oil [phonetic] for this and this. And it was very arty and fabricated. And then you had the group that broke off and said, no way. No way. We're seceding from all this. We're going to be straight photographers. No messing and no hanky-panky. And then it went right back to the involvement of the plastic arts, where manipulation of the negative, putting scratches on them, going crazy about how space relates to the image - it's a lot of intellectual stuff that I could never get really interested in. Certainly it explained the process in terms of the technique and visually what effects were there, but I found the content too superficial. So all that stuff was coming in. Let's face it, the West Coast school had hold of photography as art. You know, Ansel and Weston and Stieglitz put a very solid ground under that type. And of course there's going to be a reaction to it, and you want there to be movement, but I think a much more natural movement than actually happened because the whole education process came in and pushed it in that direction. One had to be original, and that meant no more going to Yosemite. Ansel's been there and done that. No more going to Point Lobos. We've got those all catalogued. Do something original. But it wound up mostly - I mean, you have a student with a heart for nature, and these are cathedrals. They're not off limits. These are natural cathedrals. Anyone should be able to worship there and work there. And to be stunted and held back from that, you're going to get some perversion. You get this little bit of wildness come out that says, all right. They want it original? Boy, I'll really be different. And it gets perverse.

MS. LARSEN: As you were speaking, I was thinking - you don't need to comment, but I was thinking of Robert Heineken's work when he was teaching at UCLA, and all of that kind of chopping and cropping and kaleidoscopic stuff. And it never to me had a soul. You know, it seemed just sort of smart and kind of perverse, but not really -

MR. CAPONIGRO: I will give the world of photography a certain amount of experimenting that - you know, the first wriggling out of that cocoon, and the pains involved. You know, I'll go for that. But it does continue. What I saw was, for the most part, it was continuing in a direction of difference for the sake of being different. And that's when the soul gets left out. It becomes mostly an intellectual process. A certain amount of that would be necessary. And then it's, all right, where do we go? I mean -

MS. LARSEN: Well, there's also the other side of that equation, and that is the people who are devoted to technique, and worship at the altar of perfect print, and think if they go to the same place where Ansel Adams took a picture, that that's what it's all about. And, you know, that's boring as all get-out and sterile.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. To this day there's this concern about falling into the tripod holes, as the old master said.

[Laughter]

MS. LARSEN: But when you're teaching, when you're doing workshops and you encounter these various attitudes, how do you deal with people who come with expectations either of making the perfect print or making work like your own or -

MR. CAPONIGRO: With a great deal of humor. Nonetheless, I do have a little - I have a tendency to puncture those balloons. Not without backing up. You know, I had an argument with the Zone system in the mid-'60s. And I thought, can you really pre-visualize? Is that true?

MS. LARSEN: What do you think?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, I set out to find out for myself whether that was. I think it was a misnomer. I think the

idea was basically in the right direction. But to be able to pre-visualize your image of the final print while you're in the field? Ridiculous.

MS. LARSEN: Wasn't that something Weston said?

MR. CAPONIGRO: This is where it went bananas, as far as I could see. It was Weston who said, "I pre-visualize my image. I see what I want. And then I transfer it to the ground glass." He didn't say anything about the print. It was about seeing, oh, I want that tree and I want that stone, and I will transfer. Then I will crop and there is my - I pre-visualized my image. Ansel decided to put that into the print. Well, if Edward's going to pre-visualize his images there, I'm going to be pre-visualize my prints. And then this whole Zone system thing came out. And it's a good exercise, a perfectly good exercise to think, all right. I want so much shadow in my - detail in my shadow, and I've got to get the exposure right, and it's late with my ASA factor, and the development time controls it. I mean, the Zone system is six volumes of Ansel's thought and work and energy. And it's a lot. And you can get buried under it. It's an avalanche of information. The simplicity of it is you expose for your shadows and you develop for your high values, and that way you control both ends of what they call the continuous tone scale, and hold detail or information in such areas. And so there was that whole idea of brilliant prints with lots of tones, and being able to read information in most of those areas, and to pre-visualize and say, well, I want that to be on a zone so-and-so, and I want that to be - and I wanted to know, well, wait a minute, you know. Can you actually pre-visualize? Can you actually hold that tone? I'm going to find out. And I spent literally weeks in my darkroom with boxes of all kinds of junk and different types of developer and a densitometer and a voltage meter, a voltage - you know, something to hold the current steady. I tried to create a lab that would be consistent. And I exposed a lot of film. I even found a way to get rid of the color factor, by using a neutral density filter wedge scale to photograph rather than using color. Different types of film would respond to blues different and to reds different. So I eliminated the color. I went after it and said, can I hold this? Can I actually visualize that tone and get that tone in the final print? So I had to find a way to deal with getting an accurate reading of the negative in the printing process. What I was encountering, that you are getting - you're being tripped up by variable after variable in the photographic process. So the print itself, a final print, was known as a continuous tone, ranging in black and white from black to white in the range of tones. And the photographic process, I discovered, was nothing but continuous variable every step of the way. Buy a new box of film with the same label on it? The emulsion speed has changed. You got your fingers in the developer for making a print just a little too long; without even knowing it, you've raised the temperature a degree or two and you are not going to get the same exposure to result in a final print the same as the last one. In other words, there's no - if you're telling us that we're going to pre-visualize our prints, well, then, what the hell is burning and dodging all about? You don't pre-visualize burning and dodging in the field. Later they came up with the idea, well, I guess what we do is visualize. You have an idea. But pre-visualization, huh-uh [Negative]. And I used to say to my students, well, you know, if you can pre-visualize, I mean, I have only admiration for you. And I know that you have to live in a test tube. And if you actually get what you pre-visualized, then you deserve what you get.

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.]

MR. CAPONIGRO: You deserve exactly what you get.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, there is a riddle answer. That's great.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And it will be the same each and every time, you know. That type of tight control - so I would try to impart: Listen, the Zone system has a lot of wonderful information. You know, put it right next to your photo lab index when you need some information, and go for it. But for the most part, you know, let experimentation come in and let your awareness of what is good be available when it actually arrives. So I try to leave it much more open. There's also this idea that in order to have that kind of control, then you must standardize. You've got to use that type paper, this type film, that type developer, and consistency. Well, I never was happy with that idea. I could not get what I wanted from nature into my prints or -

[END TAPE 6 SIDE A]

MS. LARSEN: - your ground here, that your take on it is remarkably - it's both profound and light-hearted at the same time, which is great.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, as I said from the beginning, with a lot of humor. I go at it with a lot of humor. But I needed to cut down some of the misconceptions, and especially the ones tied to such excessive control, which is still rampant today, especially on the West Coast. It's still -

MS. LARSEN: Is it also -

MR. CAPONIGRO: But what was the last thought that I was -

MS. LARSEN: You were talking about different papers, different toners.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. To standardize to that degree, where everything was comfortably and securely and masterfully controlled and put into, you know, I thought, no. No. I don't want the color of that paper. I don't like the scale of that paper for this particular image I'm making. So most of my contemporaries, and a lot of students, are kind of fascinated that I have six, seven different brands of paper as well as variable contrast papers and graded papers. I have a wide range because to me, photography was just as fluid, if scientific or more technological, just as fluid as a painter who squirts colors onto his palette and then mixes them. I want to mix this developer, which is a cold tone developer, with that warm tone paper. It's a chlorobromide or a bromochloride or a something chloride, which has a different color to it. Let me see what happens when I mix a warm with a cold. And can I get somewhere in between? How do I get just a silver image? Well, you need to use that type of developer and this type of paper. So I needed a wide palette. And so I use any new paper that comes through. I'll run up and get a package - 25 sheets, I don't need very much - just to try it and see, does it have anything over and above this or that or a particular quality I can use. So they ask me, how do you get your prints? I say, well, a lot of hard work.

MS. LARSEN: Do you have a - it sounds like there would be, in your body of work, also issues, sort of connoisseurship issues, with some variability in the body of work you've done, that certain times, certain prints just come off as the best and the most marvelous or the biggest revelation. And do you think other people -

[Whistling sound]

MS. LARSEN: What's that?

MR. CAPONIGRO: That's my bird clock.

MS. LARSEN: Oh, that's great.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It's telling us that it's a new hour and a new bird call.

MS. LARSEN: That's great. I guess do people see your prints with the acuity that you see them? Do they see the differences in them?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I rather doubt it. Not at first. I think it needs a trained eye. There are obvious differences they can pick up. In fact, I created an exhibition called "The Voice of the Print" back in - I think in 1990, or was it '89? I think it was '90 - and printed one particular negative with two and three different types of paper to show that the image could be leaned toward a different feeling as a result of a cold printing or a warm printing or changing the scale of the image. And I demonstrated it visually so people could see directly what I'm talking about. If you just hand them a print, whether cool or warm, they're going to go after the subject and say, "Oh, I love trees or I love - it's so nice that you're from a rock and root school of photography." That was a term handed to me by one of my students, Marie Cosindas. She said, "Oh, yes, you're still doing that rock and root stuff." The rock and root school of photography. I thought that was very good.

MS. LARSEN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] That's great, yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: But no, it would take some training or another photographer to see what is going on.

MS. LARSEN: Do you think curators and dealers see your prints that way?

MR. CAPONIGRO: I hope so.

MS. LARSEN: They probably do.

MR. CAPONIGRO: I hope so.

MS. LARSEN: But they'd need to see a certain amount to be able to make those distinctions.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. I was just thinking that what they see is quite limited. Very limited, as a matter of fact. And so they may not be aware at all.

MS. LARSEN: What institutions have the best holdings of your work, come to think of it?

MR. CAPONIGRO: The best is the Tucson Center for Photography. They have purchased upwards of 35 prints and a few portfolios. So they probably have a total number of prints anywhere from 75, possibly a hundred, maybe. Usually there's a dozen prints in each of the portfolios.

MS. LARSEN: That actually doesn't sound like so many.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, and that's the biggest. The rest of the collections around the country, a dozen. George

Eastman House has eight or ten, maybe.

MS. LARSEN: Museum of Modern Art, do they have -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Museum of Modern Art has a half dozen, possibly. Very few. All around the country, different institutions have very few.

MS. LARSEN: How about the Getty? Do they have any?

MR. CAPONIGRO: The Getty has nothing.

MS. LARSEN: Nothing?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, they don't collect modern photographers. They're working on 19th Century material. I did show them some of my quite unique Polaroid images, which I consider part of my vintage group. They were made in the early '60s, and they're quite unique prints. And the Getty kept them there for a while and said they would consider them, but it would take - well, they had them for almost a year. Then they said, well, they need to keep them for another year.

MS. LARSEN: Goodness.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And at that point I said, well, why don't you just return them, and when you're really ready to consider them, I'll send them back if you're still interested. So that was - that went by the way. The Hallmark photo collection, I stopped to visit them, and in fact Keith Fenhaus came to my studio and he looked at quite a number of my vintage prints. He only wanted to see what's really vintage work. So there are a few connoisseurs out there. And the idea of vintage is very hot these days, especially in the market world.

MS. LARSEN: These are works that you printed at the time of their exposure? Is that - or just older work?

MR. CAPONIGRO: That's one basic definition. But it's a print made at the time. I mean, I made a negative last week and I made a print at the same time, you know. Is that a vintage print? I think it's much more the early work of the photographer. And if a connoisseur really wanted to have a field day, they should look at that early work and the middle period and my blue period.

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.]

MR. CAPONIGRO: And on in, you know, because there are changes not only within my own life changes, but the materials that are available. There are certain papers that are - they stopped manufacturing twenty years ago. And they're quite unique emulsions. They have a very definite quality about them. For these, I think it's quite valid to collect these for a serious collector and a connoisseur. The vintage stuff definitely has something about them. They are unique.

MS. LARSEN: Have some of the emulsions or papers or materials disappointed you in time? Or have they all held up rather well? I know that some of my contemporaries who experimented with mixed techniques that weren't recommended made work that looked rather interesting at the time, but I just know for some prints that I actually own, I opened it up the other day and looked at it and it looks nothing like what it looked like fifteen years ago.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Have your eyes changed or -

MS. LARSEN: No, no. She mixed things - she never mixed them. They just were fugitive, although at the time she thought they weren't. She swore they were not. And so I'm - and my husband was not surprised. I was disappointed when I opened it up and looked at it. But -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, I've known, you know, in this new era of experimentation, conceptual photography, multimedia, all that kind of thing, I've met a few people who intentionally don't wash their prints, expecting that they are going to change. And they are interested in that change. I don't like being that unstable. You know, I don't like being - I mean, I like some control. I like to know that it's going to hold because I've given a lot of thought to this image. That print is just about where I want it for this time. Some brand-new paper might come along and offer a scale or a color that may enhance that, and I will think, gee. Great. Let me print it on that and see. And I might get maybe not a better result, but I get a different result. But I'm pretty much after stability. And that's a simple matter of chemistry. Just don't forget to do the hypo, and wash your prints. Wash the hypo a lot.

MS. LARSEN: Interesting.

MR. CAPONIGRO: If you don't wash the hypo out, then it turns around -

MS. LARSEN: Well, this is an issue in painting, of course. You know, different schools of painting have held up differently through time. And we're talking about a relatively similar time period here. You know, some paintings from the 1960s, for example, are not holding up physically very well, and yet they are admired. Like some of the color field paintings that were done with washes on unprimed canvas are not holding up terribly well. And that variability in technique is an issue in collecting of anything. Well, maybe going back to when you got to Santa Fe, did your work change appreciably from that difference, or were you still going to places that you were familiar with? It sounds as though you regularly came to Maine, and you regularly went to the West Coast. And was there a big shift of sensibility, or was it more continuity? In the '70s, now.

MR. CAPONIGRO: No. I would say the only real change that took place in my work over 45 years of time, 45 years of activity with photography, was the departure from the basic landscape to the prehistoric sites. And I was at first interested in trying to do something similar with the sacred sites of the American Indian, but caught on very quickly that they'd rather not be bothered. They've been bothered enough. And just out of courtesy, I simply stayed away. I wouldn't bring a camera to the dances. The dances are fabulous. At the pueblos where they allowed you to photograph - I think the last time I went to the Taos pueblo, which is one of the most ancient and quite beautiful, I walked through the gate and an Indian stopped me and said, "You want to make some pictures?" I said, "I'd rather like to." He said, "It's going to cost you. Big camera. Ten dollars for the camera, five dollars per leg on the tripod."

[Laughter.]

MR. CAPONIGRO: And that's for the tripod. Five dollars per leg.

MS. LARSEN: Was this the going rate or was he making -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, he was having fun.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. He was making it up.

MR. CAPONIGRO: He was having fun. And I gave him his money. But they also say, look, you know. We want you to stay on this side of the river. You know, don't go into the pueblo. We have our lives. And I respected that. So I've made a few pictures. Mostly I've gotten photographs of the ancient ruins that are not inhabited.

MS. LARSEN: Like where?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Bandalier. Puyé. Chaco Canyon. That wonderful place that all of the photographers have gone to from the earliest days -

MS. LARSEN: Mesa Verde?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Well, Mesa Verde is one of them. And then the one in - I'm having a block-

MS. LARSEN: It'll come to you.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Canyon de Chelly. You can go in Canyon de Chelly, and there are these cliff-dwellers, these wonderful sheer cliffs with the buildings at the base of them. Everybody has photographed those. So I did some of that material. And I did really just as much photographing of the Southwest landscape, which to me was part of that sacredness. You know, the Indians held it as sacred. So it wasn't just where they had put their buildings. The land was sacred, so I turned away from the project with doing anything direct with the culture and their important sites and their activities, and simply the ancient sites that were available to the public in the landscape in general is what I did. That was more going back to my landscape photography than it was working specifically with a certain set of stones or, as I did in Japan, the Buddhist temples.

MS. LARSEN: How did that come about? How did going to Japan come about?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Oh, yes. I met a Japanese sensei who was an acupuncturist. My health from the mid-'70s took a strong turn downward because up to the mid-'70s, I had been all over hell and back. And then my career had taken off. I got married and we had a child. I was traveling back and forth between home and travel, and sometimes they went with me, sometimes - I was carrying an awful lot. And then some publications began to come. A lot of the universities around the country wanted me as a guest artist, and in fact, eventually wanted me to set up a department and just stay there, which I thought was not going to help me as a photographer. I really wanted to be free enough to move out and photograph. So I declined on several offers. That whole period really tired me out. It was very tiring. And it was 1976, '75 - 1975. Somebody said, "Go see this new guy that's come to town, Sensei Nakazono. He's a very good acupuncturist." And I did go to him. And he was helpful. He would really - you know, I had low thyroid and I had low adrenals. I really was blown out. And he would give my energy a lift. And I thought, hey, this guy is pretty good. He had some books on his shelf that he had written

about a certain ancient religion called Kototama. And I would take them off the shelf while I was waiting for my turn to get stuck with the needles -

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Ooh. [Laughs.]

MR. CAPONIGRO: I understand. And so I would question him. I'd say, you know, what is this business?

MS. LARSEN: It's written in English?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. It was in English. He and his two sons were practicing. They were from Japan. They had traveled quite a bit. They left Japan, traveled quite a bit, and then decided to settle in Santa Fe. And they were literally teaching Aikido, which is one of the martial arts. But they taught it not just from the martial point of view but in terms of dealing with energy and as a spiritual practice of learning what you're about and how you work and self-knowledge, self-awareness. All of that was in there. And I said, "This Kototama sounds very interesting." He said, "Oh, well, maybe you would like to come to one of my classes and see what it's about," which I did. And it was about announcing sound, literally the vowels and the consonants. There's a whole system of vowels and consonants interacting, and the real practice was breathing and getting the sounds to come from a particular place they call the tandem [phonetic]. And you hear about that in Tai Chi and Qui Gong.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. I was just thinking how similar this sounds.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And it's an Eastern practice of reaching a certain energy in the belly. And these ancient sounds from the Kototama, there was a particular system that's a little too much to elaborate at this time. But I took a strong interest in it, and he saw that I really was trying to get hold of it. And he said, "Well, you know, you ought to go to Japan and meet my teacher. He is one of a handful, maybe six people in all of Japan, who know that this system even exists. It is a very ancient system that has gotten lost, probably from 4000 B.C. or earlier.

MS. LARSEN: It sounds very Chinese in a way. Some affinity with Chinese things.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Possibly. Possibly.

MS. LARSEN: I don't know. But he said, "You should go because they may be able to help you understand more. I can give you so much. But you may also want to experience Japan," he said. "But don't ask the average person or even the educated men in Japan what the Kototama is because they will not know. You know, you go and talk to my teacher. You will see." And really, the roots of Shinto is from this. And even the Shinto priests don't have the deeper information about this ancient practice of sound meditation.

MS. LARSEN: And Shinto is so old.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And Shinto is old. This went even further back. So there were - I became aware of a few Japanese mystics who set up -

MS. LARSEN: Where? In Kyoto?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Not in Kyoto, but one is in Kamayoka, which is west of Kyoto. And they have become a religion. It's called the Oomoto religion, O-o-m-o-t-o, Oomoto. And they believe that the practice of art is a means of realization, that you can reach inner states by engaging your craft to a degree and with an intensity that could bring you to those internal places.

MS. LARSEN: That sounds like many of the things you've been saying.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes, it does. And so I thought, yes. Okay, I'll go for this because there's something happening here and I have something to learn. So I studied the Kototama with the Japanese Sensei Nakazono here. He kept my health up. I went to Japan right after my divorce in 1976 in a state of hypoglycemia. I was full-blown hypoglycemic at that time. My health was really shaky. But also, my work was - I was so intense about my work that I could forget the problems and just go and do the work. And I found out what I wanted to find out, you know. And it was extremely helpful. And that's why I photographed the Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, whatever -

MS. LARSEN: Did you go from one to the other on the trip?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. I just traveled around Japan. And we'd get invitations to go to certain places. The Oomoto people were very helpful. And they pinned a note on my sleeve. I couldn't speak any Japanese. They would pin a note on me and put me on the train and show me a picture of the man that was going to pick me up at the other end.

MS. LARSEN: Like a child, really.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Exactly. Exactly. But they were extremely helpful. Very, very helpful. Anything I needed, very, very helpful. And they'd pick me up at the other end, and I would get introduced to the abbot of the Shinto shrine here or the one over there. And I visited the Grand Shrine of Issei in the south. So I got around. It was about a three-month period. And I had the help also of an American, Robert Singer, Robert Singer's son, who is now with the L.A. County Museum.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Do you know Robert Singer?

MS. LARSEN: I've met him. I've met him, yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. He was over there. And he helped me a lot.

MS. LARSEN: He's a nice person.

MR. CAPONIGRO: A very nice person. Very good.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Right.

MR. CAPONIGRO: He was very, very helpful while I was over there. He gave me - he introduced me to a young student who was interested in photography who spoke enough English that he could be my guide or my driver.

MS. LARSEN: That's nice. Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Go into the shrines or the temples and talk to the abbot and say, "This American photographer wants to work," and this, that, and the other. I would always have a couple of my books with me so that the abbot could see that, you know -

MS. LARSEN: Sure.

MR. CAPONIGRO: - I was serious about it. And the guide would come out and invariably would say, "The abbot wants to know who is this Oriental photographer that wants to work in these?" They thought the work had a very Oriental quality about it.

MS. LARSEN: Which I think it does.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It does.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Yes. It does. Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So that's how I got involved with the temples and the shrines.

MS. LARSEN: How did that all affect you? Did you -

MR. CAPONIGRO: The Japanese sensibility was right up my alley. Right up my alley. I wish I could have stayed and apprenticed to somebody. The whole idea of, first of all, being invited in, you know, is a very strong consideration. You just don't let anything disturb a sacred atmosphere. Here in America, anything goes. You know, everything may just as well be a baseball field, and everybody comes as rowdy as you can - you know. But the sense that, well, what do you really want? What do you expect? And what can you contribute? And you can contribute - if you have nothing to contribute, then make it your silence. Make that your contribution. And I liked that idea. First of all, before you enter this space, if you are interested in learning, take your shoes off. When you get in the space, shut up and watch. And that whole - you know, that's been the basis of my working. I get behind my camera, and I'm with nature or I'm with whatever. It's communion. So that whole way of life, especially in the arts and their religion, because they didn't separate it, was right up my alley. And I loved what was being produced because that internal life was being imparted to the work. It wasn't merely self-expression. It was art as sacred business. So that appealed to me greatly. And I truly - like three months was an acquaintance. I got a few good pictures, but I got - scratched the surface. And I would love to come back here and work more. And then, of course, the money system went out of bounds.

MS. LARSEN: Right.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Ten bucks for a cup of coffee. Hotel bills, unbelievable. And I thought, no. I can't do it. I had my second Guggenheim grant which was supporting me. A few thousand dollars of that was to go to it.

MS. LARSEN: Sure. But it ran out fast.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And it ran out fast. But at that time, it was manageable. It was manageable. But within a year or two after that, there was no way I could go back, even with a couple of grants, to do that.

MS. LARSEN: I felt the same way about Japan.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Absolutely.

MS. LARSEN: Nothing I saw, touched, smelled, ate, was near anything but the right thing. I loved it.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Total respect of materials and those who would partake of it.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. The artist's place in society is not overly fawned over or treated with disrespect. It's integral, and it's -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Absolutely. And the idea of national treasures, you know, that is a rarity. They get near it in Europe, but there's still a bit of a free-for-all. But to say, no, we consider art as sacred, and one can enter a sacred domain by the proper practice of art or with the right spirit of art, and these men are worthy because they have produced and shown that their life is integral with it, and therefore they are treasures for the country. We don't have any national treasures in the United States.

MS. LARSEN: And I wonder, if we did, how we would choose them. The system without the culture is maybe - would be as laughable as -

[Laughter]

MS. LARSEN: I think the culture and the system are beautifully in synch.

MR. CAPONIGRO: I kind of saw the truly ancient Chinese. The modern Chinese have that problem with the political systems and all that. But the ancient Chinese, which is where the Japanese got a good deal of their culture, and the ancient Japanese systems - like they have grandfathers. And in Europe, they still have an attitude towards art that is close to it, maybe a little more loose at the edges. A lot of the experimenters came. Good stuff, Impressionists and this and that. And I see them as the uncles and aunts. And here in America, we're the teenagers. Teenagers. Unruly.

MS. LARSEN: No respect.

MR. CAPONIGRO: No respect.

[Laughter]

MR. CAPONIGRO: So being an artist in America is tricky.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. Well, from the things we've talked about in general, aside from Boston and New York in the early days, you've lived outside the big urban art centers also. I think a lot of artists do. But at least in painting, often, people feel they need to be in the urban center to progress in their art.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Progress in your art. That's the recent - in recent years, the last ten years, how many artists from around the country would have to buy a loft in New York City in order to be there long enough to be totally abused. They would be touted. They would be red carpet. They would have -

[END TAPE 6 SIDE B]

MR. CAPONIGRO: - not only my own personal dream world. The studies I have made of the various religions, the sacred sites I have visited, the recognition that certain portions of land which the ancients recognized had power within it to affect the human being, to reach deeper within himself - all of that had come into play at the time of my accident. And it presented the image and the possibility of death as a puzzle. And what I realized only after I'd come through it - because it's a great struggle to keep a physical body, in pain, upright and continue to function until it heals - but it said, you asked about death. That was your question. You have been investigating it esoterically speaking, through the religions, the questions of the beyond, other worlds, et cetera, et cetera. Here it is. You know, it's your question, and you grapple with it and we can assist you in maybe getting some understanding about it. But this is going to be a process that you will have to continue. I actually was given a choice to either go through that door or death or to come back and continue working. Those on the other side were prompting me to come back. I wanted very much to go through it. But with all that interaction, I finally realized, yes.

MS. LARSEN: More to do.

MR. CAPONIGRO: There's more to do here. And it's actually an opportunity in very different ways of my will. Well, that's when the other forces informed me. It said, well, this is one particular kind of death. You will be going through a succession of deaths. These others will be primarily psychological in nature and, you know, you should watch for them. And so leaving Santa Fe was another death. Restructuring my world with the photographic galleries and my business was another death. It was a series of interactions -

MS. LARSEN: And closures of things.

MR. CAPONIGRO: - with my personal, business, creative, all of that. That was stretched out over a period of the last eight years. And I can mark them. I can see them. Sometimes I could never see them coming, but suddenly, boom. I'm like, oh, yes. Oh, okay, another one. Another. And all I can think is that it's part of that process of shut up and listen. What's next? Well, you know, don't agitate your intellect into that place where you'll start manufacturing something of what's next. You should be - you know, everybody in the world, well, they want to know, oh, what's your next project? Well, I just finished an exhibition, and it's hanging now, and it took me two years to do it. And it all ended yesterday, and you want to know what's next? That attitude of discipline and -

MS. LARSEN: Career.

MR. CAPONIGRO: All that kind of stuff, yes. That was to be absolutely wiped away. And to listen carefully, just wait for the day and see what's next. It's taken me the eight years of either having certain identifications I've had pulled away from me, or my seeing that they must be released. Give it over. Give it over. Lost but not lost. Making space for - well, you won't know until you find the space, when you are in that space. And that's what the last eight years have been. 1992 right up to - we're almost hitting 2000. And I don't know what they're going to shoot me at.

MS. LARSEN: Well, it's a nice place to be here.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It's a good place to be, yes. Yes, Maine is - I always thought of Santa Fe and that area as a rather vertical energy in the land. It kind of is demanding of you.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And keeps you on your TV, so to speak. And when I come here to Maine, it's a more horizontal energy that you can move into and will envelope you, in a way, and assist.

MS. LARSEN: What do you do with the whole Maine picturesque kind of aspect which, you know, is true in Santa Fe and California, almost every place you've talked about. But it's true for painters, and this is a picturesque place with lots of clichés abounding. And you've known this place for a long time, a lot longer than I've certainly known it. What do you think of Maine?

MR. CAPONIGRO: As most places. It can be very picturesque. The West Coast school has these glorious mountains, which you've heard the criticism, are like glorious postcards. And any place will offer beauty as a sentimental something. If you respond sentimentally, then you will get -

MS. LARSEN: Sentimentality.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Sentimentality. What I have been finding and what may be helping me is this - well, first of all, my own maintenance of a basic question. No formulation of words. A question: Meaning, what is meaning? Not the meaning of meaning. Meaning itself is a process, and it has the form of a question. And I don't know how better to describe it because we all want specifics. Well, what are you going to do next? Well, take a break. Well, that's good. It's good to take a break.

MS. LARSEN: [Laughs.] But after you take a break -

MR. CAPONIGRO: Define it. Define it. Give me the box and then fill it. And so I've had to break all of that. Like I remain in my question, which means that I continually take off my shoes and I keep my mouth shut. Then I am a question which is receptive, and not demanding, an answer. So this whole process has been keeping and honing my question stance. And I can see how pretty that is and how - well, you know. And at the same time, I've missed my photography. Unfortunately, the accident plus other things coming along minimized the amount of time or the kind of weight I can carry into the field, a big view camera, et cetera. It's slowed me down. And I've felt a bit frustrated about being slowed down. But then you realize, you know, you'd have burned a lot more film and there would be a lot less on it. And what's happening really is you are there and you are experiencing and seeing possibilities, but not everything is taking. But you now have the edge of realizing, well, you only need to take that. And it pushes away the pretty stuff. So Maine, as far as I'm concerned, hasn't been photographed yet.

MS. LARSEN: I agree with you.

MR. CAPONIGRO: It has not been photographed yet.

MS. LARSEN: It's not been painted yet, either, for some reason.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Exactly.

MS. LARSEN: The Maine of the now. You know, this - I don't mean just topically now, but I mean, just living in this moment and seeing it for what it is. Not that overlay of nostalgia that is constantly around here, and sentimentality.

MR. CAPONIGRO: But who is going to produce that? Hasn't that been the problem over how many years off Sunday painters. And it takes - just as our friend Joseph Campbell said, one of the heroes has to venture forth and go out into the unknown and bring back the gift. That is the problem, is to become one of those heroes with a thousand faces. So that's the costume I have to adopt. The others just don't fit any more. And that's how Maine will get photographed.

MS. LARSEN: Good. I hope so. I'm looking forward to seeing that.

MR. CAPONIGRO: But then if you look in back of you -

MS. LARSEN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative] I see the camera.

MR. CAPONIGRO: You see the camera, and it's got an object under it just waiting to be photographed. Go ahead and look.

MS. LARSEN: This is beautiful. Flowers, and I like the acorns, too. [Inaudible]

MR. CAPONIGRO: They may. They may or not. But, see, what's been happening since I moved into this place a little over a year ago, you see all these dried flower arrangements. I've been collecting them, will continue to collect them and dry them. I've been collecting shells for quite some time. But now they're coming out of the boxes.

MS. LARSEN: Good.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And so this whole room is a studio in which, you know - you've been here three or four times already, and you notice that these -

MS. LARSEN: I have noticed them as decoration.

MR. CAPONIGRO: As decoration.

MS. LARSEN: But I haven't noticed them as subject matter.

MR. CAPONIGRO: But suddenly a particular group of those dried petals found themselves on a wooden bowl in front of the camera. But that's the same as trying to photograph Maine. Wait until Maine announces itself and you are not being over-sentimental or insisting on making - you've got to make [thumps table] five photographs today or I have no discipline. Discipline. That idea of discipline is too American, you know. Produce, produce, without really any discrimination. So my whole studio is Maine, landscape, and the room in which I collect pieces of Maine. Now, there's some milkweed that's been waiting since last fall, waiting to be recognized and placed in an image. So this is where the work will take place.

MS. LARSEN: In the winter, do you think you'll be working indoors more than outdoors?

MR. CAPONIGRO: No.

MS. LARSEN: No? Not necessarily?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Not necessarily. This last winter I had a great deal of printing to finish up. I produced one new show. And the last four or five years has been primarily printing negatives that never got printed before. So that has helped me get past the frustration of missing my camera and not being behind it out in nature. Regular work with the printing, that's good in its own way. But I can feel the new thrust is going to be using some film.

MS. LARSEN: Great. That's good.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And I'm very pleased about it.

MS. LARSEN: Well, I would think you would be. My goodness. That's where the energy is. That's where the adventure is.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So in terms of my history, leaving New England after Ireland was a turning point. Going to the Southwest, that was a long period continuing with my personal religious and esoteric studies, as well as getting involved with some new landscape out in the Southwest. Getting to Japan. That whole period was very stable in that direction. A lot of teaching still. A lot of workshops, et cetera. Right up to 1989, which was the 150th birthday of photography. I did nothing in the United States. I lived in Europe for five months. Lived out of a suitcase in Europe for five months because I was invited to two or three exhibitions they wanted from me, lectures. I must have done six or seven workshops through Finland and Belgium and Italy. I also went through Norway looking at the stave churches trying to find some photographs there. So I photographed. Taught. I did all that in this long, long period that contributed to really feeling wasted when I got back. And that's what prompted me to go to the West Coast. 1989, I got back in the fall, and my tongue was hanging out. I stayed with my son, who had already bought his house in Maine, before I went back to Santa Fe. Tried to catch my breath here. And then I went back to Santa Fe and thought, there's too much work. I'm tired. Rent a place by the sea in Big Sur and take the rest. Rent a piano and -

MS. LARSEN: Sounds idyllic. Sounds great.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Absolutely idyllic. But it was the very place where I - after - once I got set in, and it took me a few weeks, then I took the fall.

MS. LARSEN: Yes. That was the big turning point.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Right there, over the edge. Bam.

MS. LARSEN: Wow.

MR. CAPONIGRO: So that was the turning point, yes. And since that time, as I say, the last eight years has been a crucible, a true crucible daily. And I'm in the bowl, and there's this big pestle, mortar and pestle, business, grinding, grinding, and still.

MS. LARSEN: Do you feel like you've never recovered from that accident, or are you feeling that you are recovered in a -

MR. CAPONIGRO: It left some dents. It left some dents.

MS. LARSEN: I think most things that happen to us that are profound like that, we're never the same. But you find your equilibrium again and move on.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. But the equilibrium I'm finding - because I've gone through a lot of heck. I've tried the doctors. I've tried the acupuncturists. I've tried the chiropractors. And I still use them. They each have their specialty that can be helpful. But I've spent a lot of time in trying to get it fixed, and forgetting that it has its own time of fixing itself. So in the last two years, I've decided I really don't want to turn myself over to someone I think is going to repair the damage. I'm sick and tired of thinking about it. And I'm feeling better already that I'm not going to be sitting in somebody's office waiting, but rather living with it because I do see that it goes in and out, up and down. Yes, it hurts today. I mean, my knees are not in good shape. And some days, maybe the weather affects them. All right, so I move a little slower today. Other days, it's working okay.

MS. LARSEN: Yes.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And that's what I have to work with.

MS. LARSEN: Well, we all - you know, I have an old friend who says we're all three-dimensional. We all - there's nobody perfect, nobody untroubled.

MR. CAPONIGRO: [Laughs.]

MS. LARSEN: You know, some people seem so. But, you know, we all have our dents as we go through life.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. Well, and the last eight years has shown me that one has to partake in the process of letting go, that you join it in spirit. And then, well, okay. I've already got this much. But that much will get me there. I'm not going to give that much to the M.D. who wants me to live on these pills as an experimentation. That's going to be a real waste of time, not to mention some side effects. All of that, I think, okay. Enough, everything. Enough. I've got enough to work with.

MS. LARSEN: Well, you certainly have a beautiful place, and well-honed equipment, both mentally and otherwise.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. In the last eight years, putting it together little by little, little by little. I knew I had to stop this. I need this. I don't need that. And I think I'm ready to photograph unencumbered from this day forward. I've

even given up my trip to Ireland to focus here and work with these shells and work the Maine landscape. I want to be centered. I don't need the stress of packing for the trip, and I'm going to be maybe a month, and get jet lag and waste time there with that, and come back here with more jet lag, and - no.

MS. LARSEN: The life you've described is of a pilgrim and wanderer and a seeker and someone who's, you know, adding one thing to the next thing and really, truly adding, putting things together, but on a trajectory, on a path. Pilgrim in the landscape which comes to the fore.

MR. CAPONIGRO: Yes. As I said to my son just last night. We were having dinner, and his student was with him there, who asked me, "What's your next project? And where would you really like to go to photograph?" I don't want to go anywhere until I can make five really good images in my own back yard.

MS. LARSEN: That sounds very wise.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And just the concentration of that, the attitude of that instead of, oh, wouldn't it be great to get away and - yes, I'd love to see my beloved Ireland. But I want to be able to spend time with her. Rather, I will go at another time. Then that will be possible. For now, it seems like everything has arranged itself, and I've got it sufficiently ordered that I can work effectively, from the coffee pot in the kitchen into the living room where most of my shells and my camera are set up.

MS. LARSEN: And the beautiful woods.

MR. CAPONIGRO: And the woods.

MS. LARSEN: And the home, which is taking shape. Okay. I think that's great. Is that a wrap?

MR. CAPONIGRO: Thank goodness.

[END TAPE 7, SIDE A]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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