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Oral history interview with Irena Brynner,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Irena Brynner on April 26 and 27, 2001. The interview took place in New York, New York and was conducted by Arline M. Fisch for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Irena Brynner and Arline M. Fisch have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The transcript was also edited by Antonia Gardner for grammar and punctuation. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written prose.

Interview

MS. FISCH: This is Arline Fisch interviewing Irena Brynner at her home and studio in New York City on April 26, 2001, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Irena, tell me when and where were you born.

MS. BRYNNER: I was born on the 1st of December, 1917, in Vladivostok.

MS. FISCH: And what was that region of Russia called where Vladivostok is?

MS. BRYNNER: Primorski Krai.

MS. FISCH: I always thought of it as Siberia, but I know it isn't Siberia.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, when I am asked now where is it, I say it's far eastern Siberia. I think it's more comprehensible to people.

MS. FISCH: Yes.

You had a most unusual childhood growing up in Vladivostok in an extended family. Tell me about your family.

MS. BRYNNER: My mother was a doctor very early in her life. At 24, she was a full doctor, a psychiatrist. My father was a lawyer by profession, a businessman. And we lived two families together: my mother's sister, who was a singer, and her husband, my father's brother. So two sisters married to two brothers. And our two families lived together in the beginning in Vladivostok in a big house.

And so because we had two women musicians, I don't remember going to sleep ever without hearing some music. My mother had an instrumental trio and my father was a tenor; his brother was a baritone, so there were always singing ensembles. So this Russian classical music was really part of my life from the beginning.

MS. FISCH: Did you have brothers and sisters?

MS. BRYNNER: No, I was an only child. My "brother" and "sister" were Vera and Yul.

MS. FISCH: So they were really your cousins.

MS. BRYNNER: They were double cousins. You know, same blood. And till I was 10, we lived together in the same house, same apartment, and then they left for Manchuria, Harbin, to go to school, and for the first time, I was alone.

MS. FISCH: Was that hard after having playmates?

MS. BRYNNER: It was very hard, yes. It was hard. I replaced my companions with dolls. And for instance, I looked at myself in the mirror. "Mirror" in Russian is "zerkalo." So I called myself Irena Zerkalova. And neither my dolls nor me, we never talked; we always sang to each other.

MS. FISCH: Well, I know that music and theater and art were all important aspects of your family life and that your family was very musical. In addition to the singing at home, what else did you do in the arts?

MS. BRYNNER: I always did drawings. I started very early to do portraits of people. And my father painted a little bit. To the theater and to concerts, I think I was three or four when my mother started taking me.

MS. FISCH: So the cultural life of Vladivostok was a very rich one.

MS. BRYNNER: It was. It was a rich one, yes. You know, operas came from the center, and it was all important. And you know, it was very interesting, the theater. There was the theater that was called Golden Horn because, you know, the bay was called the Golden Horn. And it still exists, when I went in '92.

MS. FISCH: The theater was still there?

MS. BRYNNER: The theater. Unfortunately, I couldn't see the big hall because I think the ceiling fell in, so they were redoing it. So I sang my concerts in the little hall of that. But the entrance and the box office were exactly as what they were when I was a little girl.

MS. FISCH: What a wonderful memory that must have brought back.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: So your father was a painter.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, he painted. He wasn't a painter, really.

MS. FISCH: Were there other visual artists in your family?

MS. BRYNNER: Not really, no. I don't think so.

MS. FISCH: Where do you think your ability to draw portraits came from, the interest?

MS. BRYNNER: Maybe from past lives, I don't know. [Laughs.] Maybe somewhere I was a sculptor.

MS. FISCH: When and how did you leave Vladivostok?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, you see, my family's business was the last private business in the Soviet Union. They didn't know the shipping business, so they left them working.

MS. FISCH: You mean the government didn't know the shipping business.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. But in 1930, the taxation became absolutely – you couldn't swallow it, it was so high, and the whole attitude started to be so different. We never knew, in the evening, whether my father would come from work or be arrested on the way home. We had a bag for this occasion prepared. And at night we sometimes had hallucinations of hearing the doorbell. And coming from the theater, we always looked to see if there was a car in front of our building.

MS. FISCH: So it was a very stressful time.

MS. BRYNNER: It was a very stressful time. Very. And we had to run away. For my father it was very difficult. He adored Vladivostok, and he had a hard time believing that that could happen. But they would have been arrested, and then what would happen with me? And as I was the center of their life, you know, everything had to be done so I would be safe.

And we had two choices, either to go by foot over the mountains with some Chinese guides, or, as it was a shipping business, take the last ship, a British ship that was coming to father's address. He asked the captain, Captain Baker, it was, to pick us up in the open sea with our Chinese who helped us to get a Chinese little sloop. *Yuliyuli* they call them, because they had this one – what do you call it?

MS. FISCH: Oar?

MS. BRYNNER: Oar, yes. And we went out. It was a very foggy day. You couldn't see two meters. And very windy. The waves were huge. But we decided we'll go to the Russian island that was across the bay, and we will pretend that we are going to buy a goat, so if they catch us, we were there because we went to buy a goat. And we did go and we talked about this goat, and we came back. And we were supposed to meet him at 3:00. He only appeared at 9:00. They decided that father would escape on this boat, so they searched the boat everywhere, even a double bottom, you know.

MS. FISCH: Hull?

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. And that's what delayed it. And we thought he wouldn't come. And then all of a sudden we heard this – [Ms. Brynner makes a sound like a foghorn] – very low thing, and this huge thing appeared in front of us. And we all had to run up this ladder. And you know, in a dream sometimes you have a feeling that you run and you don't move? That's the feeling I had when I was running up this thing.

MS. FISCH: So it was a very scary experience.

MS. BRYNNER: It was just an emotional thing, very emotional. Yes, because if we had missed him, if we had returned, we would have been arrested.

MS. FISCH: Yes, so it was very important.

MS. BRYNNER: We were my mother, my father, his sister, her husband, their three kids, and me. So we were four adults and four children.

MS. FISCH: You escaped, in the end.

MS. BRYNNER: It's the end of Russia, leaving everything, you know.

MS. FISCH: Right. Where did you live for the next few years?

MS. BRYNNER: In Dairen [on the southern tip of the Liaotung peninsula, in the Kwantung Leased Territory of Manchuria]. It was called Kwantung Territory. It's a port, Japanese port, it was. And we found a little house with a little pointed roof, so we called it a gnome house. [Laughs.] And we lived there. And in the winter, I went to school in Harbin.

MS. FISCH: So in the summer you lived in -

MS. BRYNNER: In the summer we lived there, and in the winter, my mother and I, we again had apartments together with my mother's sister's family, in the same house. They had one half and we had the other half, and father came every weekend to us. And I went to school there, YMCA high school.

MS. FISCH: Isn't that interesting.

MS. BRYNNER: There was an American director, but the classes were done by the old-fashioned Russian school. For some reason, we had English in English, and English literature, and ancient history and hygiene, that was in English. Why, I have no idea.

MS. FISCH: And what were the other classes in, Russian?

MS. BRYNNER: Oh, it was all in Russian, yes.

MS. FISCH: I'm going to stop right here.

[Break.]

MS. FISCH: Much of your early education in Vladivostok was with private teachers and tutors. Why was that?

MS. BRYNNER: We were dirty bourgeois. We were not allowed in any public schools so we wouldn't contaminate the pure proletarian children. So we had private teachers. One teacher had to be sent from the government, and we couldn't stand her. She was a very unpleasant lady. She taught us geography and political science.

MS. FISCH: Oh, how appropriate for a government teacher.

MS. BRYNNER: [Laughs.] But otherwise, you know, just there was some military man who was a friend of father's, who taught us mathematics. And it was awfully bad. I had a cousin that also escaped with us. Her father was sent to Siberia, arrested and sent, so her mother and father were in Siberia and she decided that she wanted to come with us. And we went through this school together with her. We spent all day together. But during the classes, it was absolutely necessary for us to correspond. We had a whole system under the table. And I think that every child needs some kind of outlet of bad behavior, you know? The elderly man who taught us mathematics, we once glued him to the chair. We put the glue on the chair. The poor man couldn't get up from that chair. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: So you didn't really miss being in a school with other children?

MS. BRYNNER: I think we did. And what we also did, those children in the street, you know, they knew who lived around. They were told that we were bad, bourgeois things, so they threw stones at us and they were really nasty. In response, we would chew dry peas and spit at them from the balcony, and their mothers would complain how bad we were. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: Well, do you think that having this kind of private education gave you a better education than if you had gone to regular school?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, listen, that was such a beginning. When we went away from Russia, I was 13, so I got to the fourth grade in Harbin. And this YMCA school was a very good school.

MS. FISCH: After the YMCA school, you graduated from that and you went to Switzerland to study?

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. You see, my father's origin was Switzerland. That is, his father, my grandfather, was from a doctor's family in Switzerland, that comes from Argau. At the age of 14, my grandfather decided that he wants to go away from Switzerland; it's too small for him. And that's the story tells, that he found a place on some boat. They say that it was a pirate's boat. Whether that's a story or not, I have no idea.

But anyway, in two years it brought him to Japan, and there he found a job as an office boy with some British gentleman. And this British man liked him very much and gave him an education. In the meantime, he married a Japanese woman. He had a Japanese family. And then this British man decided that he wants to have a branch of his office in Vladivostok, and so he sent him in 1873 to Vladivostok. That was pioneering. It was the first business office in Vladivostok. Vladivostok started to be settled in, I think, '67, so you see it was -

MS. FISCH: It was very early.

MS. BRYNNER: - very early. And so that's why my father felt that he wanted me to know that part of my origin, to go to Switzerland to study.

MS. FISCH: And where did you go to school?

MS. BRYNNER: I went to school in Lausanne, and it was at that time a beautiful, little, charming university town. It isn't anymore. It grew up, unfortunately.

MS. FISCH: And did you go to the university or the art school?

MS. BRYNNER: I went to the art school mainly, but I took courses at the university.

MS. FISCH: And what did you study?

MS. BRYNNER: I studied all the classical arts - drawing, painting, sculpture.

MS. FISCH: What was your favorite?

MS. BRYNNER: Sculpture. I loved painting, and for some reason I loved still life. I could do that. I still have a trunk full of my paintings. But as a child, I already was doing it. Really what I wanted to be was a natural scientist, but I came to Switzerland not knowing one word of French, so how could I go to university to do anything serious?

MS. FISCH: So your choice of going to art school was actually based on something you were interested in but wasn't your absolute first choice.

MS. BRYNNER: When I was in school, I loved to draw those specimens, you know, with animals, with insects; I just loved that. They called me a walking aquarium because I always had the - [laughs].

MS. FISCH: What were your studies like at the art school? You said they were sort of traditional studies of drawing, painting.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, you know, the big collections of all kinds of objects so that you would know how to build, the composition, and so on. And we did endless amounts of plaster Roman and Greek heads. We did lots of things. We had a very good painting teacher. And sculpture, I don't think it was a very good school of sculpture. My first head, I think, was a mortuary mask of the two of them. They were not very inspired.

MS. FISCH: It wasn't very lively.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: Did you ever have any live models?

MS. BRYNNER: Oh, yes, we always had the live model.

MS. FISCH: Then after you finished art school, you went back to -

MS. BRYNNER: Well, actually, I didn't finish by a few months because the war was starting. In order to get back home, we had to leave Switzerland to get back to Manchuria. We came back in '39. In the meantime, my father had built a new home for us, which was beautiful and wonderful.

MS. FISCH: And this was in –

MS. BRYNNER: In Dairen. It was a different life there. There were lots of different friends whom I didn't know before, my age. And we had a very interesting life. We organized a drama circle and we put on plays regularly, and we had meetings where we read literature and so on. My mother continued to have her trios. There were Americans and there were Japanese musicians that came, so she counted in all the languages. [Phrase in Japanese.] And I turned pages always and I sang already. I didn't know how, but I sang. I sang from when I was a tiny little tot. And we gave concerts in the hospitals and things like that.

MS. FISCH: What kind of a population did Dairen have at that time? Was it very international?

MS. BRYNNER: There were lots of foreign businesses, Americans and British and Swedish. And so there was this club. It was very colonial, I would say, you know?

MS. FISCH: Colonial rather than international.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. That always disturbed me terribly, and later on in China, you never mixed with people of the country. I hated those clubs and I hated all this bridge playing and so on, you know. I never mixed with that. I tried to go to their parties, and at the first party they were offering all those mixed drinks, and for the first time in my life, I got drunk. I couldn't feel myself. I remember until now this feeling that I was touching myself and I wasn't feeling myself. [Laughs.] And that just turned me completely away from those parties. We had our own Russian parties, you know.

MS. FISCH: And what did you do during the day? Did you continue to work as an artist?

MS. BRYNNER: Oh, I painted. I took lessons. I had a Russian painter who taught me. Sculpture, I just worked completely on my own. I had no sculpture teacher. But I did lots of portraits and sculpture. And oh, you know, I said that I can paint only when I have an inspiration; otherwise, why should a painter paint, if you don't have an inspiration? There was no discipline in me whatsoever. But I did it. I worked. And I did lots of photography, also. I had my own dark room. My father had done everything, so that I could do anything I wanted to do.

And then Pearl Harbor happened. My father was an honorary Swedish and French consul, and he became a Swiss consul. When the war started, they asked him to be a special delegate to protect British and American interests. So, for instance, the Maryknoll mission, the Red Cross was supposed to feed them. They never did anything about it. So it's my family that fed the whole Maryknoll mission while they were interned.

And father evacuated the British. He came back from taking them to the boat with a horrible pain in the chest, and it was angina. At that time they didn't know how to treat it. The next day he was a little better, but the following morning he woke up with horrible pain again, and he died. In three days. He wasn't 50 yet.

MS. FISCH: How terrible.

MS. BRYNNER: It was in May, and he would have been 50 in November.

MS. FISCH: So you and your mother remained in China.

MS. BRYNNER: We remained in China. The governor of Dairen was awfully good to my father. They were good friends. But after a while, he said that we had to go away. That Japanese military mission decided that my father had been a spy for British and Americans, and so they started to persecute us, my mother and me. We went to visit relatives in Harbin, and we couldn't get back. They wouldn't allow us to go back home.

We found out when we came back that five of our friends were arrested, tortured. And so when we came back, nobody wanted to know us. The people were afraid. Some people that still wanted to have contact with us, we used to go to the beach and swim far away and talk there with people, because on the street, if they saw us on one side, they would go on the other side just not to meet us. And there were immigrants who tried to play with the Japanese, and they would come to my father's grave and were really nasty.

MS. FISCH: So it was a difficult five years –

MS. BRYNNER: It was very difficult. It was very difficult. You know, I was protected from everything when my father was there. And all of a sudden I had to find out what life was about. My two uncles, my father's brothers – the house was built by my father for us, but he was not a very good businessman. He had written a letter that said, "You want another apartment, we'll do that for you, but the house is mine while I am alive."

MS. FISCH: "'While' I am alive."

MS. BRYNNER: While I am alive. So they said – you know, it's like a sweepstakes. He wrote it wrong, "It's mine

until death." But he died three years later. Everybody who knew my father knew his life meant to him our lives also. So they wanted us to get out of the house. So, you know, it was everything. And my mother was completely lost in this also, completely crushed by my father's death. And so I had to take over all of a sudden.

MS. FISCH: And how old were you?

MS. BRYNNER: I was 25. But I was very much of a child at 25.

MS. FISCH: An immature 25.

MS. BRYNNER: A very immature 25.

MS. FISCH: So then in 1946 you went to San Francisco.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. With the end of the war, as soon as we could get out of China, we went to San Francisco. We chose San Francisco because we had friends who had been our friends in Dairen, and they moved to San Francisco. There was a man who had two houses in the Richmond District, and so he said, "You come, and we'll meet you and you'll have an apartment in my house." And so we came this way there.

And it was difficult. It took me five years to adapt to the American way of thinking.

MS. FISCH: I think it was very brave to choose to go to a city you had never been to before.

MS. BRYNNER: But there would be no city that I knew anywhere outside of Russia and China.

MS. FISCH: Well, you'd been to Switzerland, though.

MS. BRYNNER: I'll tell you, for me during the war, if people were talking about what was going on, I couldn't stand it. I had to go out of the room. I just couldn't bear it. And I was afraid that there was still this tension and difficulty and pain in Europe. I was afraid to face it.

MS. FISCH: So you chose to go to America because it was a peaceful place.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: Was it a good place for you to develop yourself?

MS. BRYNNER: I think so. I liked San Francisco. I wouldn't choose to live there always. I think that it's a little bit of a cliquish place, you know. If you are well known, you are welcome anywhere. Otherwise, you may spoil this elite group of people. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: Now, when you came to San Francisco, you first studied sculpture with several people.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. Yes.

MS. FISCH: Whom did you study with?

MS. BRYNNER: Michael.

MS. FISCH: Frank. Was it Franz Bergman?

MS. BRYNNER: Oh, no, that was jewelry.

MS. FISCH: Ah, that was jewelry.

MS. BRYNNER: That is jewelry.

MS. FISCH: In sculpture you studied with -

MS. BRYNNER: No, first - can't think of his name at all. Michael. He is not a well-known sculptor.

MS. FISCH: Then you studied with Ralph -

MS. BRYNNER: Ralph Stackpole. I met Ralph and that was a big love of my life, Ralph. He was such a wonderful person. And I studied all the compositions. He introduced me to modern art, really, because I didn't understand abstract art. And I remember the first time we went to a show of murals, and he explained them to me. And all of a sudden I felt what it meant, you know - or not meant, but it gave me pleasure.

MS. FISCH: Before that, your studies had been primarily rather traditional.

MS. BRYNNER: Classical. Yes. Traditional.

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A.]

MS. BRYNNER: The first time I was introduced to stone, I also did small maquettes in clay, you know, just to know what I am doing, and in a larger size I worked with stone. He had a beautiful stone yard where he worked. And it was a wonderful experience.

MS. FISCH: Did you do figurative work in stone, or abstract work?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, it was figurative, but really quite abstract. Quite abstract. One of the things was this figure without – negative forms. For the first time I was really interested in abstract art, and I didn't touch jewelry yet.

MS. FISCH: When did you start working in jewelry? It wasn't too long afterwards.

MS. BRYNNER: No. Ralph left, and I continued to go through this yard. Through him I got acquainted with Frank Merwin, an architect, and actually we became lovers for a very long time. That was my first love experience.

MS. FISCH: Was his last name Merwin?

MS. BRYNNER: Merwin, yes.

MS. FISCH: And he was an architect.

MS. BRYNNER: Frank Merwin. Yes. He had built my house on Culebra Terrace in San Francisco, which the whole project was a nightmare. My mother was not too enthused about my relationship, and Frank was always broke and I always tried to help him.

MS. FISCH: But he built you a wonderful house.

MS. BRYNNER: Wonderful house. He was a really very talented, wonderful architect.

MS. FISCH: And how did he get you started in working in jewelry, or was that someone else?

MS. BRYNNER: No, I decided myself. I tried to find the ways of working, you know.

MS. FISCH: Do you mean a way of working for money?

MS. BRYNNER: For money. I never earned money before that. And I was Catholic at that time, and I went to the parish, and I taught art. That's how I made my first earnings. I taught art in three Catholic schools. And I went to the priest there and I told him, you know, do you have advice for me in what I could do involving art somehow. And he said, "You do sculpture! Well, that's marvelous. People always die, so just learn to do lettering." [Laughs.] I said thank you, and I thought I better not ask any advice from any priest anymore. [Laughs.] And I went to Labor School, which brought me lots of trouble at that time.

MS. FISCH: What kind of school?

MS. BRYNNER: Labor School.

MS. FISCH: Labor School?

MS. BRYNNER: There was a Labor School. I took drawing and things like that.

MS. FISCH: So this was kind of a training school for employment?

MS. BRYNNER: No, it was just called a Labor School, but it was just an art school.

MS. FISCH: Oh, it was an art school.

MS. BRYNNER: It was a very good art school in San Francisco. And I tried to do pottery. I thought because I did so much sculpture, you know, and then somehow it was too restrictive for me. I guess I didn't know how to use my imagination in that field. And then I saw the sculpture of Claire Falkenstein.

MS. FISCH: I was really interested in that. Where did you see her work?

MS. BRYNNER: Just on somebody. Somebody had a band, a silver band, and here hung a completely free – what

do you call them – mobile, you know? And I thought, my God, but that is sculpture! I don't have to go away from sculpture, I just will change the size and approach, and it has to be in relation to the human body! That was a revelation to me.

And so first I went to Caroline Rosene to work as an apprentice. And she was very enthused in the beginning. And then this bad character trait that I was talking to you about rose up, where I say what I think. That didn't exactly endear us to one another. And it was difficult to work for her. She was paying me something like 60 cents an hour, and every time I broke a saw blade – when I was starting, I didn't know – she was very upset about it. So just two months we worked, and then it didn't work.

Then Bergman was looking. That is through Frank I got to him. And he was both a jeweler and a potter. It was before Christmas, about two months before Christmas, and he said, "You sit and do all my jewelry, and I'll do my pottery." And so I had to go through the whole thing, and he was so wonderful. He paid me half of what he got from the store. Everything, the whole approach was different.

MS. FISCH: Were you working in silver or gold?

MS. BRYNNER: In silver. And there were lots of constructed pieces and I learned how to solder now too, but calmly. Nobody was angry at me. And he was a very interesting man. I really enjoyed doing it. And he said, "Don't quit it. Don't quit it. You definitely have something for it."

I went to adult education classes where they taught me where to buy materials and so on and so on. Then we moved away from the Richmond District. We bought a house on Broderick Street in Marina, and I had a whole room for my workshop. But I didn't have much money to do anything, so I had a washing machine motor for polishing, and a metal ironing board was the place on which I soldered. And I had a little alcohol torch and Bunsen burner that were my first soldering equipment.

MS. FISCH: It's amazing you were able to get the silver hot enough to solder with that kind of heat. Did you use a mouth torch?

MS. BRYNNER: No, I never learned to do that. Well, I started; first when I worked still with Bergman, I made a few cufflinks for myself also. And I went to Fraser's. Do you remember, there was a beautiful furniture and craft shop, Fraser's? I went to them and showed it. I said that I worked with Bergman and he told me that I could go there. And they looked at all that I brought, and they loved the cufflinks, and they said, "Well, if you have more of those, bring some more." So I said, "Sure, sure," and went and quickly made some more. And that was my beginning.

And then I participated in all the fairs, open-air art fairs.

MS. FISCH: Were there a lot of those at the time?

MS. BRYNNER: Oh, yes. Every year we had – actually, you see, Margaret De Patta was really our goddess in this. She guided us and she helped us all a lot. We met regularly. We started meeting together and then we decided to call this group the Metal Arts Guild.

MS. FISCH: That was the Metal Arts Guild. [The group still exists today.]

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. And the first show when we started – because before anybody could bring anything, and there were horrid things, you know – and it was in the – what do they call it – Palace of Fine Arts?

MS. FISCH: Palace of Fine Arts?

MS. BRYNNER: You know, the old –

MS. FISCH: The old Maybeck Building. Is that the one?

MS. BRYNNER: It's where the World's Fair was.

MS. FISCH: Right.

MS. BRYNNER: And that was first time that we – I remember I sat in a huge glass case, and everybody had to bring their things. And somebody else was there that, if I wasn't sure, I called somebody and we accepted or not accepted.

MS. FISCH: Oh, so you were the jury.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, we were sorting, kind of. And that was really the beginning of real professional organization.

MS. FISCH: Who else belonged to that organization?

MS. BRYNNER: Byron Wilson. Bob Winston was with us. Merry [Renk], certainly. Fran – what is her name?

MS. FISCH: Florence Resnikoff?

MS. BRYNNER: Florence Resnikoff. Well, you know, I'm bad with names, but all this group was there. And we were really like a family. It was wonderful.

MS. FISCH: And did you meet regularly as well –

MS. BRYNNER: We met generally with Margaret. And, you know, Margaret was very much a Bauhaus school person. And she always said, "Well, you know, if you put a circle here and you put a triangle here, you have to be able to explain why are you doing that." I said, "I can't, Margaret. I live by intuition. I do my work by intuition. I can't explain. I feel that that's where it belongs. That's why I do it. That's all I can explain." [Laughs.] And in those groups, we also introduced forging, the accent on three-dimensional jewelry.

MS. FISCH: And did someone come to teach that, or Margaret introduced it to people?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, she suggested it. I think that we had somebody who showed us how to forge, and, you know, you really didn't learn that. And I think I started in 1950. I think it was in 1952 or so I started teaching in the adult education classes. And that was the best school I could have had. I had classes of 36 people. Can you imagine that?

MS. FISCH: Wow.

MS. BRYNNER: It was a nightmare, but it was very interesting.

MS. FISCH: And what kind of facilities were there?

MS. BRYNNER: Oh, they had wonderful facilities. You could do anything.

MS. FISCH: Where was this?

MS. BRYNNER: It was in a big school, a public school in Marina.

MS. FISCH: In the Marina District.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. And I taught there until I left for New York. And in '56 I decided that I wanted to go – because, you know, I was recognized by press very quickly. Anspacher – what is her first name? – Caroline Anspacher was a famous journalist in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Somebody gave her mother a pair of my earrings, and she called me and asked me for an interview. She bought a pin to go with it. And I had a half-page article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Then I decided that we needed our own house, and I found a beautiful lot on Russian Hill, borrowed all I could borrow, and we had built – Frank had built this house for us, and we got an AIA award for that house. And there I had a studio with a skylight, and it was just wonderful.

MS. FISCH: And did you sell your work also through galleries by then?

MS. BRYNNER: I'll show you afterwards. I had catalogues, little catalogues with little photographs that I had sent to all kinds of gift shops all over.

MS. FISCH: This is a catalogue you made?

MS. BRYNNER: I made it. And I had about 50, 60 outlets that I was sending to.

MS. FISCH: So it was all over the country, not just in San Francisco.

MS. BRYNNER: It was all over the country, all over the country. And what is this big Swedish, Danish, whatever it is –

MS. FISCH: Bonnier's in New York, or Georg Jensen?

MS. BRYNNER: Georg Jensen bought my things. So, you know, I did well with it. I was charging something so little for things that it came out that I was making 50 cents an hour, something like that. And in Berkeley, there was a big outlet that both Merry [Renk] and I gave things to. And with Merry, it worked beautifully. Merry would find a new place, she would tell me, and I would go and immediately I would tell about her, you know. So we kind of

pushed each other.

MS. FISCH: Oh, that was very nice.

MS. BRYNNER: So I had a good tie with Merry. And, you know, they gave me a huge order, first really big order, and I saw that if I did it, I would get broke, you know? So I wrote to them that, you know, I just can't do it, I have to raise my prices. And they wrote to me it's time to do it.

MS. FISCH: So did you do all the business yourself?

MS. BRYNNER: I did everything myself there. I had to know the finances for everything, which kills me now that I can't. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: But none of the galleries you worked with acted as an agent for you to sell your work in other places?

MS. BRYNNER: No.

MS. FISCH: You did that all by yourself.

MS. BRYNNER: I did it by myself. And we had very different feelings about Nanny with Merry. I think Merry didn't like her particularly.

MS. FISCH: I don't remember.

MS. BRYNNER: Because when I told her that I thought that she was so wonderful – Benderson, I think her name was. I had wonderful relations. She really helped me a lot. She encouraged me. She was a big person in my life.

MS. FISCH: And I remember reading about Nanny's gallery before I moved to California, but by the time I got to California, it had already closed, so I never actually saw it.

MS. BRYNNER: She was this little, very lively woman. And what she liked, she liked; she pushed.

MS. FISCH: And the gallery was where?

MS. BRYNNER: Right in the center. Not far away from the square, you know. I don't remember the name.

MS. FISCH: So she had a very busy clientele.

MS. BRYNNER: Very busy. Very. Very.

MS. FISCH: And how many artists did she sell?

MS. BRYNNER: I wouldn't know, but I had a feeling that we all went through it.

MS. FISCH: So she was receptive to promoting local people.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. Once I had a Japanese who nearly stole my thing. I had a pendant that I was doing in silver with a crystal hanging, and all of a sudden Nanny calls me and says, "Do you know that somebody is selling this thing for half the price?" Some Japanese bought it from her or from me, I don't know. And they started. But somehow I got with them and talked with them and they stopped it.

MS. FISCH: So she was indeed very supportive of artists, I mean, if she was willing to call and tell you that.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. But those open-air art shows were wonderful, really. You had contact with people. We even went to state fairs with our shows.

MS. FISCH: Well, tell me a little bit about – do you remember the San Francisco arts festivals?

MS. BRYNNER: Those were the open-air art shows.

MS. FISCH: I see. Those were all run by the city.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: Because now, street fairs are run by everybody. I mean, all organizations run separate things. But at that time it was more –

MS. BRYNNER: We just had this. And as I say, before it was kind of, you know, amateurish things, knitted things

and, you know. But when we started, it really became much more professional.

MS. FISCH: So how long did you stay in San Francisco?

MS. BRYNNER: From '46 to '56.

MS. FISCH: Can you say exactly?

MS. BRYNNER: Eleven years, actually. In '57 I moved. I came to New York because I had all those articles. Also, a big boost to me was we already were in my new house on Culebra Terrace, and I woke up one morning feeling that there was someone in my room. And I opened my eyes and there was a man at the foot of my bed, going through my handbags. And I sat down and said, "What do you think you are doing?" And a gun came to my face, and he said, "Shut up, you silly bitch. And put your hands up." And I said, "I don't keep a gun under my pillow. Why?"

"Do as I say, or I'll conk you with this gun on the head." Okay. I understood that I have to do what I am told. But I kept talking with him all the time. He said, "Are you alone?" I said, "There is my mother in the other room. If you touch her or harm her, you'll be really responsible." So he said, "All right. Tell her that I am going there." So my mother was asleep.

"Mama, wake up, don't get scared, we have a man with a gun in the house." And he went in and I got up and went after him. He was so shaky. He started pointing Mama's binoculars at me instead of his gun, he was so nervous. But see, we had this house that had gardens in the back, and I think from the other people's gardens he watched. We had no curtains yet. We just moved into the house. And he knew exactly where my mother kept the money. And he came right there and went right there where the purse was. He took the purse. And I said, "Well, take the money. You don't need the purse." And he took my mother's binoculars, Zeiss binoculars, and this money. And he was too busy to chase me back to my bed. He tied me up.

At 6:00, the press started calling me because Yul was with *The King and I* in San Francisco at that time. So next day we had huge articles with big letters, "Kin of Yul Brynner Robbed." After that, I came to the post office, and they told me, "How did you pull off that stunt?" [Laughs.] I said, "Believe me, I wouldn't like to pull it again."

MS. FISCH: So that was a sort of catalyst for your thinking about moving.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, that, and I went to New York just to find a place to have a show of my work, and I was very brazen. First of all, I went to the Museum of Modern Art, and I said, two years that I'm doing it, and now I need to meet somebody in the museum who understands jewelry and who could tell me whether it's good or not good. I want to have an opinion of the Museum of Modern Art. And it was Grete Daniels that I met, and we became friends.

MS. FISCH: So you immediately had this wonderful contact.

MS. BRYNNER: I had this contact, and she sent me to somebody I don't remember, and this lady told me there is a purely just jewelry gallery, Walker & Eberling. It was on the 11th floor on 48th Street and Madison, something like that. And that's where I had my first show.

MS. FISCH: What kind of jewelry did they handle? All kinds?

MS. BRYNNER: They didn't have modern jewelry. They had ordinary, traditional, expensive jewelry. They gave me stones. I had a 64-carat gem, a green tourmaline that I made a ring with. It was wonderful to work on that show. And so that gave me an idea. I came back and I said, "Well, the heck with the house," which was just built three years before. I said, "We'll move to New York. That's where I want to live. We'll move to New York." And we packed everything, rented the house and moved to New York.

But that show was wonderful because they sent me - you see, after the show, I started my own shop when I rented the place, you know. David Campbell had built my little shop in the lobby of the house. I rented the little space in the lobby. And David built a beautiful shop with a window to the street. You remember. And that was extraordinary because this Walker & Eberling, they sent their people without asking me to pay anything to them. People that bought my things from them became my clients.

MS. FISCH: Well, that was very generous of them.

MS. BRYNNER: Very generous. But I don't think they needed anything like me, you know. Then already I started to have my shop. And for instance, there was a couple, Blodel. You know the Blodels, the same family that have in Seattle those - was a forester, you know? And they loved my things. And they were really like my sponsors. Every year he bought two important pieces, for her birthday and for Christmas. They were just wonderful. And all my clients became my friends. It was wonderful.

And then all of a sudden, in – what was it – in '62, I believe, I got a letter from Victor D'Amico, from MoMA, asking me to teach. They had some old man that used to teach that retired. And it was absolutely extraordinary. He gave me carte blanche to do whatever I wanted. He gave me a young man that helped me, Dick Palmer, with whom we're still friends. And he helped me to organize. I had to buy all the tools, everything. I organized the whole program. And I had extraordinary people.

MS. FISCH: Now, where was the class?

MS. BRYNNER: Classes were in the basement.

MS. FISCH: Of the museum building?

MS. BRYNNER: Of the museum building.

MS. FISCH: And that was called – I think I read somewhere it was called an institute?

MS. BRYNNER: Institute, yes, something.

MS. FISCH: The Art Center of the Institute of Modern Art.

MS. BRYNNER: Right.

MS. FISCH: But it was actually part of MoMA.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: And Victor D'Amico was...?

MS. BRYNNER: Was the director.

MS. FISCH: Was the director of the education program.

MS. BRYNNER: And he was an inordinately extraordinary person, really a wonderful person. I still keep his letter where he wrote to me in Switzerland that he always feels guilty that he never helped me organize a show in MoMA because I was an extraordinary teacher and an extraordinary jeweler.

MS. FISCH: Well, I remember MoMA did have one contemporary jewelry exhibition, but I don't remember when that was. It might have been in the mid-'50s, before you came to New York.

MS. BRYNNER: Before I came.

MS. FISCH: But they never did it again. They only ever did one.

MS. BRYNNER: No. And, you know, Noma [Copley] was in my class. Then there was an extraordinary man, Dr. Mo.

MS. FISCH: Doctor?

MS. BRYNNER: He was a philosopher.

MS. FISCH: Dr. M –

MS. BRYNNER: M-o.

MS. FISCH: M-o?

MS. BRYNNER: He was a wonderful person. Joanne Agle.

MS. FISCH: Now, these were all students.

MS. BRYNNER: They were all really extraordinary people, also. I had, you know, the cream of –

MS. FISCH: Now, were these classes held at night or during the day?

MS. BRYNNER: At night.

MS. FISCH: At night.

MS. BRYNNER: I think we had two evenings or something like that.

MS. FISCH: Two evenings a week?

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: With the same group?

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: And how many students did you have?

MS. BRYNNER: Twelve.

MS. FISCH: So it was a reasonable number.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

[END TAPE 1.]

MS. FISCH: This is Arline Fisch interviewing Irena Brynner at her home and studio in New York City, on April 26, 2001, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This is Tape No. 2.

We were talking about your teaching, and I'd like to explore that a little bit more. I know that you first started teaching jewelry in San Francisco.

MS. BRYNNER: In San Francisco in adult education classes.

MS. FISCH: And then your next teaching was at the Institute of Modern Art, connected with MoMA.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: And there you had a small number of students who were very intensely interested.

MS. BRYNNER: Intense. It was amazing. And for me it was really a lesson, fantastic. Some of the students already worked a little bit, you know, not complete beginners. And I could have any tools, any machinery I needed. And I was always very much pushed and encouraged by Victor D'Amico. He was an extraordinary person.

MS. FISCH: Did you also teach in your own workshop after the museum closed that program? Did you have students in your own workshop?

MS. BRYNNER: Not really. No, not really, because, you know, I had my shop. My mother was a handicapped person. She was half blind. She never went outside alone. So, a little bit keeping house, I had to do all the shopping. And doing my work, I couldn't work in my shop. It was too small. My whole shop was five feet by nine feet, that's all. You know, like a little cigar shop. So I could do waxes there. I couldn't do any work. So I really had no time for that.

MS. FISCH: Then you later also taught at the Craft Students League.

MS. BRYNNER: I was still in Europe when they wrote to me that they would like to have me come and teach there, Craft Students League. It was nice. In the beginning, there was a very nice director. And then she was planning to become a rabbi, and so she left.

MS. FISCH: What kind of classes did you have at the Craft Students League?

MS. BRYNNER: I had only advanced students. I didn't take beginners. And I had a water welder, a big, powerful water welder; so four people could work simultaneously on it. I was teaching some techniques that hardly anybody did.

MS. FISCH: And did people take courses over and over again, so that you had students over a long period of time?

MS. BRYNNER: Oh, yes. Yes. I taught there over 10 years.

MS. FISCH: What do you enjoy about teaching?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I have a very strong streak in my character. I always want to share whatever gives me pleasure. And I enjoyed tremendously sharing my knowledge and whatever I had. And I have one pupil who is

my closest friend, Trudy Jeremias, who studied only with me. And she's a very well liked teacher now. She has taught in two schools in Long Island for many years already. But she has been with me really since '64. She started at MoMA.

MS. FISCH: Well, I know that I read somewhere that you are strongly in favor of individual instruction, of encouraging an individual voice. And I wonder how you accomplish that in a classroom situation.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, if you have only 12 people and you have a three-hour class, you can. I think that it's important that each pupil not just learns the technique, but learns what he wants to express and to help him to develop in that direction.

MS. FISCH: So did you give projects, assignments, or -

MS. BRYNNER: No, I generally worked them on their own assignments. I helped them to develop it, and I criticized and suggested that that's wrong or that's right, you know.

MS. FISCH: And what kinds of techniques other than the water welding did you teach?

MS. BRYNNER: We did forging and construction and wax work. You know, actually water welding and the wax are very similar techniques, only one in a very low temperature level, the other in a very high level. You melt the edges, you fuse together. It's very similar.

MS. FISCH: What kinds of metal did they work in?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, some worked in gold and silver. I don't think that anybody worked in copper. You see, I was afraid for them to work in copper because it gives fumes, and in the Craft Students League there wasn't a good exhaust system. So I didn't want people to faint afterwards.

MS. FISCH: So they worked in silver and gold.

MS. BRYNNER: Silver and gold.

MS. FISCH: And what kinds of objects did they make? Did they make mostly rings, or did they have time to be more adventurous?

MS. BRYNNER: No, they did all kinds. For instance, one pupil that had been with me since MoMA and came back to Craft Students, she did a headdress out of all different shapes. They were all forged and they were all shaped, you know. So, very different things, and necklaces and pins. I think that lots of people did pins, brooches.

MS. FISCH: It has a format that's very frontal.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: And people don't have to think about the back side of anything, so it's very appealing.

Did you also have students working with stones, with precious stones?

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. But if they worked with very precious stones, you know, we didn't have fine enough tools. If they were afraid and doing really fine things, I encouraged them to give it to the specialists before. Like a fine diamond, better to put by a specialist.

MS. FISCH: And when they worked in wax, did you send the waxes out to be cast?

MS. BRYNNER: Casting. We didn't have casting. And you see, most of the classes that they give now in wax, it's carving. And I worked with soft wax by building up.

MS. FISCH: So that's a very different approach.

MS. BRYNNER: It's a very different technique, very different.

MS. FISCH: And how did you develop that?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, in San Francisco I had oxygen. And here when I lived on 55th Street, I asked the fire department and they said that if you have an oxygen tank in your apartment, it doesn't matter where the fire starts, you will be at fault, so we don't encourage it. So as I told you, I worked with Presto-Lite, which I hated. I didn't feel that I could do a really fine work. So I started doing wax working. I started to do lots of casting. And that was also the moment where, when I moved to New York, MoMA had - what is the architect, Spanish architect?

MS. FISCH: Gaudi.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, Gaudi had this fantastic show. In MoMA they had the “peep show.” It was big things of, you know, the street places, and you looked in and it seems that you are right there seeing the real thing. And I was so taken by Gaudi that I think in about three weeks, somebody came in and looked and said, “Oh, that ring looks like Gaudi!” And I realized that apparently, from this very geometric, very contemporary architectural influence, I all of a sudden started to go into very organic shapes. And wax working also helped that because I was so completely free and it was easy to do. You know, wax is really cheating lots of things. It’s so easy to make a form, and it’s really sculpting.

MS. FISCH: And who did your casting for you?

MS. BRYNNER: Billanti.

MS. FISCH: Billanti. And did the students also send their work to Billanti?

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. When I came back from Europe, that was a big disappointment to me because we were really personal friends, and all of a sudden, if I didn’t give a certain amount of work, they wouldn’t give me a credit. I didn’t want to work that way, so I finally changed to another caster. I was just offended by that.

MS. FISCH: But it’s easy to find places to do things here.

MS. BRYNNER: There are many good casters here, yes.

MS. FISCH: You have an advantage, living in New York, for doing that.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. But, you know, now I do lots of work with a water welder. Actually, now I do because I work with Mobilia. They don’t mind that I use the elements from old times and turn them into something new. I do lots of chains now using old elements and putting them in a completely different way.

MS. FISCH: Old elements that you had made?

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. Oh, yes.

MS. FISCH: In 1968 you wrote a book that is sort of in the form of a teaching guide, called *Jewelry as an Art Form*. What was that like, preparing that book?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, first book was –

MS. FISCH: It had a different name. [*Modern Jewelry, Design and Technique*, New York, Reinhold Book Corp. 1968]

MS. BRYNNER: Had a different name, had a different look. Actually, I wanted to show my development in this art. And then Reinhold –

MS. FISCH: Van Nostrand?

MS. BRYNNER: Reinhold. What is the name?

MS. FISCH: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, Van Nostrand Reinhold. They asked me, because I was teaching at MoMA – that’s what brought them to me – and they said that they wanted a teaching thing. And I said I already wrote a book, and it has no teaching. And what I suggested was that I keep the book that I wrote, and I will read it to you and you see whether you can accept it, and we will do all the teaching things in the form of photographs with titles. They accepted it. I read it to them, they liked it, and that’s how it started.

And the second book was published in ‘70 – it was much later, the art form. Oh, no, it was ‘68, you are right. But they revised slightly the thing. There is another article in it in the beginning, because that was done as a catalogue for my show in Switzerland.

MS. FISCH: So there’s actually a little essay in French at the beginning.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: But is it basically the same book?

MS. BRYNNER: Same book.

MS. FISCH: Was it a successful venture for you? I mean, did it –

MS. BRYNNER: It sold quite a bit. And you know, what was for me very precious, when I came to this show of ACC – in connection with – SNAG, that was in New York – all of a sudden, I stand there and there is a handsome young man with long hair, rushes to me, takes me in his arms, and said, “Oh, Irena, your book, I owe everything to your book. You were such an influence” – Bob Ebendorf.

MS. FISCH: Well, there weren’t very many jewelry books around when your book was published, so I think it was very influential.

MS. BRYNNER: It was. And every time I met with a group of people, people always thanked me for my book, so that was a wonderful thing. Financially, well, it sold, but, you know, it didn’t –

MS. FISCH: You don’t make a lot of money on books, like that.

MS. BRYNNER: No. No.

MS. FISCH: That’s true. But have you ever thought about doing another book?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I would love to do this one, you know, in a different form, adding things. But I would love to find anybody that wanted – as I say, at this point I don’t have enough energy to push around and, you know.

MS. FISCH: In doing the book, which is very much a photographic procedure from one to the other, you had to have a really good photographer to work with you.

MS. BRYNNER: I had a very good photographer, a Chinese photographer, Tommy Yee, who was a friend of Yul’s and did a lot of photographs of him on the stage. And there are lots of his photographs, and I still have photographs from the Japanese. And as you saw, I have lots of new photographs. That was Louise Decoppet who did my photographs, and she comes once in a while to visit and we do whatever I can do.

MS. FISCH: When you were doing the photographs for the book, did you do that in your studio?

MS. BRYNNER: No, I gave it to the photographer to do.

MS. FISCH: No, I mean your hands are in those process photographs.

MS. BRYNNER: Oh, sometimes, yes.

MS. FISCH: So that was done in your studio?

MS. BRYNNER: Probably in my studio, yes. Because when I lived on 55th Street, I had a very nice studio.

MS. FISCH: Because it’s difficult to do those kinds of stage one, stage two, stage three photographs.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. Also, you know, when I started working with the water welder and I had photographs for the process of doing that, that was in my studio, certainly. It had to be.

MS. FISCH: So you would set up and the photographer would be there, and then he would just photograph step one and then step two and then step three.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, while I was working, photographing.

MS. FISCH: While you were working. But that’s a difficult process.

MS. BRYNNER: It is a difficult process, but it’s very rewarding when it comes out. I have lots of working photographs.

MS. FISCH: Well, on another subject, have you ever found that being a woman artist was difficult?

MS. BRYNNER: No. I’ll tell you, in America I never felt it at all. Never even came to my mind. In fact, all those women artists and so on, I always said, Why? I never felt it here. Maybe the first time I felt that I have to show that I can be just as rude and just as businesslike as anybody else was when I had my show at Walker & Eberling. Mr. Walker was – you know, it’s a family that has the gallery, and Eberling was purely a businessman. And I can remember the first time I came and he said, “Well, show me your merchandise.” I said, “Show you what?” “Your merchandise.” I said, “I don’t have merchandise, I have pieces of art.” And every time he would talk with me in this tone, I answered him exactly in the same tone. And that is the only time where I felt that I have to prove to him that I’m not just a little woman that you can push around.

In Europe, that's another story. In Europe, I had a show in Paris, and I gave it to the agent, you know, and it comes back. And I wait for it a month. It doesn't come. I said, "What is the matter? I need my work."

"The Customs won't let it out. They said you didn't put the stamping right." You know, in Europe they're horrible with those stampings.

MS. FISCH: Hallmarking.

MS. BRYNNER: Hallmarking, yes. The metal, if you have a little drop of silver, don't you dare mark it as a gold. Even if you just have a finding of a different metal, that's what you have to put.

And I said, "Well, they have let it all go to Paris with the same marks, the same stamping, so what's the matter?"

"Well, you have to go and talk yourself; I can't manage to do anything."

So I go there, and he said, "You have 16 pieces that are not stamped, hallmarked."

I said, "That's not true. How did you let the things go out of the country without stamps, without the hallmark?"

"Oh, I have no idea."

So I sit down and I find all the marks on the pieces.

MS. FISCH: He just didn't look hard enough.

MS. BRYNNER: And then I said, "Why are you doing that? Because I am a woman, you think that you can do that?"

"Well, you have to admit that it's not so often that we have to deal with women."

I said, "Well, that doesn't give you a right to behave that way."

But otherwise, I really didn't feel that I was mistreated.

MS. FISCH: Do you think jewelry is a good profession for women?

MS. BRYNNER: I enjoyed it. I chose it. So I guess I do.

MS. FISCH: Well, there are many women in the field now, and probably many of your students were women.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. Well, I think that Noma [Copley] became a professional. She came to me, she didn't know a thing. And she wanted to do ties. You know, the - yes, tie.

MS. FISCH: Yes, the regular tie.

MS. BRYNNER: It was so funny. She was quite a wonderful person.

Well, my working with the water welder you were also interested in, right?

MS. FISCH: Yes.

MS. BRYNNER: I started to tell you that they told me that I couldn't have oxygen tanks. And then I started looking for something that is not explosive, and somebody told me that there is - at that time it was called Henes Walter Welder. It was Mr. Henes who developed it. He was a wonderful man, and it was in New Mexico that he had the -

MS. FISCH: The factory?

MS. BRYNNER: - factory. And I went to him and he explained everything and showed me everything how and what. And I started working just with a water welder, nothing else, since '68. It gave me such a fantastic new perspective, you know. And I worked so much with wax, and all of a sudden, I saw here I am doing same thing, but isn't at a high-level temperature.

MS. FISCH: Now, do you have to wear dark glasses when you do this?

MS. BRYNNER: Not really. It's not like platinum, you know.

MS. FISCH: But it's not like welding, where you have such a hot flame.

MS. BRYNNER: It depends on the background on what you do. Generally, it's not the metal that gives this very high light; it's what your piece is lying on. Now, with my eyes that have trouble, I do wear dark glasses.

MS. FISCH: Do you normally work on charcoal block?

MS. BRYNNER: No. There are those special things, you know.

MS. FISCH: Soldering blocks. I didn't know whether you had to use something different for the welding.

MS. BRYNNER: Remember, we used asbestos.

MS. FISCH: I know.

MS. BRYNNER: [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: Not anymore.

MS. BRYNNER: No.

MS. FISCH: So you just use normal soldering blocks of different kinds.

MS. BRYNNER: Normal soldering blocks.

MS. FISCH: Your personal life and your professional career were always closely connected because you had your studio in your home.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. And I lived with my mother always.

MS. FISCH: And also, you developed friends and clients simultaneously.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: So that your clients were your friends, and your friends were your clients.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, that's right, and students.

MS. FISCH: And how did that happen? Because you're a very gregarious person or because people were attracted to your work? Or why did that happen, do you think?

MS. BRYNNER: Very naturally. I have no idea, really, how. Our students became close. Well, already in San Francisco I started working, you know, and there the students, mainly, were my friends but now also, you know, in these open-air art shows, you met lots of people, and then when you get into the newspapers, you know, people get more interested. And then amongst our group of jewelers that worked together, we were really like a big family. This Metal Arts Guild was very, very closely knit.

MS. FISCH: So you liked that relationship of personal and professional career.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: Does it have any negative aspects?

MS. BRYNNER: I don't think I felt any of it, because there are clients that are clients and somehow they remain just clients. And there are friends that want to have your work and it becomes a different thing also. I like to do individual work, and especially if you know a person, you know their taste, you know their inclinations, and you can make a piece that really becomes a part of them, not just a decoration, because I think that's where your work is successful, when it becomes a part of you.

MS. FISCH: And you can develop that relationship with people that you know.

MS. BRYNNER: Right.

MS. FISCH: In 1972, you moved to Geneva.

MS. BRYNNER: You see, what was happening in New York, I think from '69 and up, there was lots of violence. People, when they opened their door, they were pushed in and raped. And in my shop, it started to become, you know, I had alarm buttons on the telephone and on the surface of the thing, on the floor, and the same in my

apartment. And I don't know if you are acquainted with it. When you have this alarm, sometimes it goes on without any reason. So you start to have night visitors from the security places. And it's really a nightmare.

And when we moved into the house where we lived, there was an owner who lived right underneath us. Then he moved away and he turned half of his apartment into a business, half he rented. Then even that went away. We were in a whole brownstone living just my mother and me. And then it became a little scary because if somebody gets on the roof of those brownstones, you know, there are lots of them, anybody can climb from one to another. And at least once in three weeks, we had to call the police because somebody was on the roof.

And my mother was just saying, you know, "I'm really tired of being constantly scared for you," because in my shop, the policeman used to come and say, "You're a sitting duck here." Twice people tried to steal away something while I was looking elsewhere. And I really was scared. I really didn't want to leave, but I started writing to Switzerland.

MS. FISCH: Did you have friends in Geneva, or family?

MS. BRYNNER: Not in Geneva itself, but I knew Max in Zurich, and -

MS. FISCH: Max Froehlich.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, Froehlich. And I had a family of Moretti, who were my friends. They were in Lucarno. But I had still school friends that were in Lausanne with me, now they are in Yverdon. You know. So I had friends. We moved to Switzerland. Finally I agreed that we move. And a friend of mine rented - I said we can't afford to stay in a hotel, so would you please find something for me. And this Moretti from Lucarno, she found a little apartment. And there was a nightclub on the first floor. "No, no, we rent only to families." So she signed a one-year contract. It was a bordello.

MS. FISCH: That must have been exciting.

MS. BRYNNER: At night, fights and things, and very unpleasant. And we had to go to some lawyer to get out of this thing. It was a tiny room. It was like half of this room. The beds came down from the walls; the table came down from the wall. You push everything to the wall, and then you can move. So my mother calls it our alma mater - [laughs].

MS. FISCH: But you found a much nicer place to live.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, we had to buy. And you know, I had this - [end of tape].

[END TAPE 2 SIDE A.]

MS. BRYNNER: There was whole line of people already waiting for this apartment. So I called Yul - in California, he was at that moment, or I don't know where he was - and I said, "Will you please lend me \$25,000, and I promise you I'll put my house in San Francisco on sale, so I'll return this money." And this way, we got this apartment, which was, you know, just there were two rooms on two sides, a separate kitchen, and a big hall in the middle. So it just made a section for my mother and for me.

MS. FISCH: And you were able to make your studio there as well?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, in the room I lived, I had a studio. It was amazing to me to see how my mother was 80 years old already, and in three weeks she was just like a little bird making a nest for me. You know, in three weeks we had our apartment livable, and our things came, our piano came.

MS. FISCH: It's amazing to me that you moved so much, a piano and -

MS. BRYNNER: Well, we moved the piano. That was really the main thing. And, you know, the curios, the rugs, and things like that. You should have seen it when I moved here. I had 135 cases. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: Now, how were you able to start your business in Geneva? Was that difficult?

MS. BRYNNER: That was very difficult. First of all, Americans didn't want to consider me as an American anymore. In Montreal - or Toronto. Where was the World Show?

MS. FISCH: In Toronto.

MS. BRYNNER: Toronto. And I begged people from here to have my things. They said, "No, you'll move to Switzerland, you can't do it as an American." And the Swiss didn't want them. They said, "You're an American designer."

MS. FISCH: So suddenly you were a person without a country.

MS. BRYNNER: Without a country. And I went to Gilbert Albert, and I said to him, "Well, you're well known here and I am well known in New York, so I think we should know each other. Do you have any suggestions for me?"

"Oh, yes, don't do anything without asking my advice." And he sent me to some gallery, which was a disaster, a complete disaster. It was a painting gallery. They had nothing to do with jewelry. They took the things because he told them. I quickly understood that I better ask other advice. [Laughs.] And just little by little, I had to work my way really very hard.

Oh, no I had really - see, I nearly forgot that. It was a fantastic break for me. I think it was a Labor Day or some kind of a big American day that they had a ball in a club. I had no date. I had no escort. I went all alone. I had a black dress that my mother knitted for me, and I put this big brooch that is in the back of my book with a black opal, you know, here. And I went there, and some nice English family invited me to sit by their table because they saw I was alone.

And during the dinner, all of a sudden some woman rushes to me and says, "Who did your jewelry?"

I said, "I did."

"There is my card. Please call me."

She had just two weeks before received a job of public relations for a big jewelry shop, store, and they asked her to organize a show with some new, contemporary jewelry. So right away I had a show. I asked them to give me six months or something like that. And I had hardly anything. I really sat down and worked, worked like hell. And Yul was in Europe at that time. So when they heard that Yul could come to the opening, you know, at some point I asked them what is more important for you, his bald head or my jewelry? [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: Probably both.

MS. BRYNNER: [Laughs.] And it was a most beautiful show. It was all white, special things, you know.

MS. FISCH: Special cases?

MS. BRYNNER: Cases. Like stands like that, hanging. It was very nice, but the opening was like, 300 people came to the opening. I don't know for me or for Yul. And in about three days, they come very excitedly. I signed a contract with them that I give them my price, what they do with it I don't care. They can triple it if they want. I want to get my price. They agreed. They came and they said, "Ah, we sold a necklace, a 6,000 franc necklace."

"Well," I said, "that's wonderful."

"Yes, we have a little problem."

"What is the problem?"

"We gave them a discount of \$1,000."

I said, "Well, that's your problem."

"Our problem? No, it's your problem."

I said, "But you agreed to give me that."

"Yes, but we are telling you that we have this problem, that we have to take off, and we're not going to take it off our price, it comes off your price."

I said, "I don't agree with that."

"Oh, you don't agree? Well, we'll lose, but you'll lose, too. Nobody will come from our shop to your gallery."

I sat there like in a tomb, with nobody else coming to see my jewelry.

MS. FISCH: Was the gallery part of the shop?

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. Whoever strolled there, fine, but they didn't send anybody. It was the most disgusting experience I ever had.

MS. FISCH: Well, and it seems so counterproductive because they were going to get part of what was sold.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. The owner was an American.

MS. FISCH: That doesn't excuse it.

MS. BRYNNER: No. It was very, very unpleasant.

It really took me 10 years to prove to Swiss that I am Swiss. I have a Swiss passport. And for instance, they have a national jewelry show every year. And I begged them to take me. "No, you're American." And then I went all the time and took classes of Ikebana, you know. And they had a huge show in the big, big museum of pottery, and there were 75 bouquets of Ikebana. And the director of the museum, this gallery, this museum, said, "You know, Irena, I'll give you a big showcase, glass showcase, and you put your work in it, and next to it, put your Ikebana." And my little gold island was like in a sea of flowers. It was beautiful.

And a young woman comes to me and says, "I love your things. We have a museum and we would love to have your show. Come and look at the museum. If you like it, we will give you a retrospective show." Well, you don't get an invitation like that every day.

And it was the Musée de L'Horlogerie et de L'émaillerie. It's a beautiful house, you know, beautiful building. And they gave me the whole second floor. I had a glass division between the corridor where you came in, where I could put all my sculptures, like this one was hanging there, you know, and the big one that is under the piano was standing in the middle of the room. And there was a professional decorator that put it together.

And they started by putting some brown background. I said, "No, I want yellow background." And they said, "But this is gold." I said, "I want yellow background." So we had a matte warm yellow background, and on that there were cases, you know, little boxes, covered with the same color satin, shiny. It made it so beautiful, the same color in a different material. And in the middle were flat cases where was all retrospective thing, you know, going back. And those were all –

MS. FISCH: So the things on the wall were current pieces.

MS. BRYNNER: Current pieces.

MS. FISCH: And were you able to sell those pieces, or were they only for exhibition?

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. Well, no. But everybody wanted my pieces after that. They didn't sell it there.

MS. FISCH: They didn't sell from there, but it created a market.

MS. BRYNNER: It was really the most beautiful exhibit. That's how I got to the Renwick, because this woman, the director of this gallery, she sent offers of having that show everywhere. And the Smithsonian picked it up. That was not a very good show because they didn't ask what I wanted. They had put this old, dark red background. It was around in the bottom part, you know, around this corridor.

MS. FISCH: Not the best place.

MS. BRYNNER: It was not the best place. And I was really completely alone there because at the same time, they had organized a show of Russian portraits from Russia, and for the opening night, they decided to have a concert. And they invited one of the dissidents from there to sing. She was really a vulgar, bad singer, and the Russians got so mad at it that they said, "We are not leaving the gallery things here," and they packed up and left.

MS. FISCH: So they took their exhibition away?

MS. BRYNNER: They took that exhibition away. So I was alone in the whole Renwick gallery. And they didn't do a good job for me. They didn't take names. But the opening, my dear, it was the – because everybody whom I knew who had my things, my customers, came wearing their work. It was so amazing. I hadn't seen people, you know, for 10 years or more, 12 years. And to see all those old friends wearing my things was extraordinary.

And the Renwick was not giving the reception. It was the ambassador, Swiss ambassador, embassy, that organized the reception. So when they started those speeches at the opening, first it was a Renwick man that said, "We are so proud to present our American designer," and then the Swiss ambassador came out and said, "We're so proud to present our Swiss designer." I said, "Well, I don't have to tell them that I am international." [Laughs.] It was a wonderful, wonderful experience, really.

MS. FISCH: And did that show travel anywhere else?

MS. BRYNNER: No, that was all.

MS. FISCH: In 1984 you decided to come back to New York City.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. I lost my mother in '75, and I still, you see, stayed –

MS. FISCH: Quite a long time.

MS. BRYNNER: Quite a long time after, because I think that I felt that I had to prove, not to everybody else but mainly to myself, that I can work anywhere. I can manage to work anywhere. And so I stayed there until really I had no difficulty. I had two, three shows a year in different cities, different galleries. You know, there they don't keep your things. They just give you a show and there you go. And it worked fine for me.

MS. FISCH: So you were able to move work that didn't sell in one place and have it in the next show in another place.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: That's really an ideal way to work.

MS. BRYNNER: Somehow it worked very easily. Certainly what I missed was the space of America, because my show, I had two shows in Paris, and it's a nightmare to travel, to bring a show into another country in Europe. They made me go from one Customs to another Customs. I was anxious to be on time. The train waits for me. Thank goodness it did. But, you know, it's a nerve-wracking thing. And then afterwards, as I told you, when it was coming back I couldn't get it.

MS. FISCH: What made you decide to come back to New York?

MS. BRYNNER: I really don't like Europe. I had wonderful friends in Switzerland, but the whole general thing, I felt much more at home in New York than anywhere else. I wouldn't come back to San Francisco, but New York, I really feel that this is one city where I fit. I feel good in it. Every time I come here, the creative energy of New York is so strong, you feel it. It agrees with me.

MS. FISCH: I'm sure it was difficult to come back.

MS. BRYNNER: It was very difficult. I never reestablished my status when I was leaving from here, when I left, you know, in '72. I came back, I couldn't find any gallery that would take me. I went to one. They had no idea who I was. And at this stage of the game to explain what I did and how and what, you know, it's very difficult. It's very degrading. And finally, that's how I got for a few years to Aaron Faber, because that was one person that remembered me and knew me.

MS. FISCH: And that's the gallery on 53rd Street.

MS. BRYNNER: 53rd. First time, he put my things on the window, whole window. Immediately he sold a \$6,000 necklace, right away. When you mix my – I don't know what is with my work. It doesn't mix with other people's work. When you put me as a part of a whole thing, somehow my things don't sell. And that's what he started to do. He wouldn't put me anywhere but mixed with other people. And I said, "You promised me a show." And he said, "Well, maybe in 10 years." And I said, "You know, I am 70 years old; that's rather ironic to offer me a show in 10 years."

MS. FISCH: Were there other galleries in New York City that could have handled your work, do you think?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I tried. No, I had a gallery that was wonderful for a while. What did they call it?

MS. FISCH: Artium.

MS. BRYNNER: Artium, yes. And they were doing beautifully for me. They really did very well for me.

MS. FISCH: That was Svetlana?

MS. BRYNNER: Svetlana. And they disappeared. Well, the building was sold, and the new owner didn't want two enterprises on one floor, and they had to give it up. And they had spent so much money in putting it up together and it was a beautiful gallery.

MS. FISCH: It was. And didn't they come out of Aaron Faber's gallery?

MS. BRYNNER: She came out of, yes.

MS. FISCH: Did you know her, then, from Faber?

MS. BRYNNER: She knew me, I didn't know her. And that was wonderful. I really was very sorry. It would have gone if she would have continued.

MS. FISCH: It was a beautiful space.

MS. BRYNNER: Beautiful space. And, you know, I did interesting things then. I never managed to really keep things going as they used to go.

MS. FISCH: Well, had the jewelry scene changed a lot in the time you were gone?

MS. BRYNNER: Apparently, yes.

MS. FISCH: Looking at the work that was available from other artists, had it changed a lot?

MS. BRYNNER: I think it did. I think it did. But somehow I didn't manage to get back in touch with those craftsmen anymore. The American Craft Museum is so unfriendly that somehow through the museum you don't meet people, you know?

MS. FISCH: But you had still come clients in New York from before, or did you have to start back all over again?

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, I had to start all over because either they were dead or they were too old, you know. That was 12 years, and we were not young people.

MS. FISCH: So how did you do that?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I had a very hard time. I had a very hard time. If I had been able to find a friend that was willing to help me, I would have very hard time. I tried to live on less than \$1,000 a month, and that's awfully difficult.

MS. FISCH: Very difficult in New York City.

MS. BRYNNER: I couldn't go to any concerts or anything like that, only if somebody invited me. And this friend, it's really interesting because this is a person that I was very close with her mother, and her mother died very early from cancer. And she left a letter to me where she willed her family to me. Well, I wasn't interested at all in her husband, but this girl, we lost each other for a while, and then she found me. And I said she's my willed daughter. And she helps me to survive. And, you know, she will get it all back. It's like a loan.

MS. FISCH: But you do still make jewelry, don't you?

MS. BRYNNER: I do make jewelry, and Mobilia is the one that carries my things. And in the beginning, they sold some things, and then there are years that nothing happens. So I can't count. All of a sudden this year and last year, there were some sales, which, you know, even little sales; that helps me, I think. Last year I got something like four or five thousand dollars from them, but it helped me tremendously.

And what I do with my life, I spend money on my singing lessons or an accompanist, or I don't take lessons anymore. And I go to lots of chamber concerts. That's what I really like - you know, my amusement is that.

MS. FISCH: Well, I know that you're very interested in other art forms, but primarily music, I guess.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, music very much. Oh, I go to the museums and so on, you know. I keep on being interested in visual art. But music is a lot for me. And when I moved here in '84, I decided - actually, I decided already in Switzerland that I want to take singing lessons. I tried there; nothing came out of it. And when I came here, that's the first thing I said, please tell me with whom I can study. And I found a person that I studied with. And I worked very seriously because I sang lots of gypsy songs with a very chesty voice, so I had to train my voice to become a head voice. And it was big work. Well, after 16 years, I stopped taking any lessons, but every year ever since I started studying, I give a recital. And in spite of my 83-1/2 years, my voice sounds very young.

MS. FISCH: What do you sing?

MS. BRYNNER: I sing mainly Russian classical music, chamber music. And I have a tremendous library of music because Yul's sister Vera was a singer. Her mother was a singer. So all this music came to me. So I have an endless choice of repertoire.

MS. FISCH: Is Russian classical music like German lieder?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, it's like a lieder. It isn't like German lieder. It is much more romantic, let's say. There are some musicians here and in Europe that I don't consider Russian music. I think it can be very beautiful. It's

underrated, very often. And just feeling that I am giving this, sharing this knowledge with people. I never have a big audience. You know, again, I have to get an agent or something to do it. I just spend money on getting the concert and getting tremendous pleasure of sharing it with people.

MS. FISCH: How long is a concert?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, generally it's an hour.

MS. FISCH: How many works do you sing?

MS. BRYNNER: About 20. So I have to learn all the words, you know. That gives a little gymnastics for my brain. And when I started - you know, Yul died in '85, and it was very difficult. His death was very difficult. He was dying for five weeks. He went into a coma three times, but his wife believed that Buddhist monks could revive him no matter what, and slightly forced the doctors to revive him from three comas, which was very cruel. And I spent about 10, nine hours by his bed every day. I would come home and lie on the bed, and I felt like, you know, like a bell that just tolled. And that's how I felt, my whole body like that. So singing really helped me then tremendously.

And then I had a friend who was stolen from me, which was also a very difficult thing. All that, I think, all those stresses gave my own cancer to me. And I had a mastectomy in '89, and the doctor told me that he can't give me any good prognosis, so I thought I won't see the first Christmas. It happened in September. As you see, it's now 11 Christmases that I'm still alive.

MS. FISCH: Doctors don't always tell the truth. They don't always know the truth.

MS. BRYNNER: And I had another bout with the same cancer, went into my neck, into a gland. But, well, it's three years now. So you never know, but you always hope.

MS. FISCH: Does the singing interact with your jewelry? I mean, do they balance each other, or are they totally separate?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I have a friend who tells me that my singing sounds to him the same way as my jewelry, that there is a similarity.

MS. FISCH: How do you feel about it?

MS. BRYNNER: I think one adds to another. You know, there are so many things in life that I don't know if you can really understand or analyze them with your head. Like religion. I think it's in you, it's in your heart, and you really can't reason with it. And as I say, that I think that most of my life I live by intuition. And I sing, I have to feel.

My last concert was the best because, first of all, I did it all on my own without any teachers, so I had to achieve what I wanted. And I have a musician friend in Washington who helped me a little; you know, just putting the [points ?] in. And you have to get it so deeply inside it becomes a part of you. And if you really tell the story, like my nephew, Yul's son, said, "I had a feeling that I was looking at little excerpts of opera," that it was so much really telling the story.

MS. FISCH: Well, in your jewelry - I know you work intuitively, but do you also have a story to tell?

MS. BRYNNER: I don't think so. But I have -

[END TAPE 2 SIDE B.]

MS. FISCH: This is Arline Fisch interviewing Irena Brynner at her home and studio in New York City, on April 27th, 2001, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This is Tape No. 3.

MS. FISCH: Irena, let's talk about the work itself. Your earliest work was quite geometric in form, but always very three-dimensional. And what kinds of processes did you use for this early work when you first started?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, three-dimensional, I think it's natural because I was a sculptor before that. And my apprenticeship was with people who did lots of constructed things, so I was cutting out the pieces and soldering them together. And I remember, for instance, one pair of earrings. I had an idea that I'll curve one side slightly off, and there will be wires like it's ropes that are pulling this edge upwards, and then a square bar on the other side, and they were cufflinks. So it was a functional, also, idea of a design.

They were all very simple. The most complicated that I did first was a constructed ring, which was completely enclosed, so there was this empty space inside. And I went through a learning process on it because there were two holes for the pearls, which I plugged with wires to solder, and when I heated it, the whole thing went apart because the hot air pushed everything apart. So I cried for about an hour and then started doing it all over again. [Laughs.]

But, you know, it was also, I think the influence – Margaret De Patta influenced all of us. My things were much more intuitive, I would say. It's because, as I said before, I do everything by intuition. So I couldn't exactly explain everything I was doing. But also I was close to contemporary architecture. So all that was the influence of my first work.

MS. FISCH: Then you started learning to forge, and that made a big difference.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. That was because I wanted, I remember, to make a necklace, and I was figuring out how to put the connections, how I will close it together. And then I wanted to make a round wire flat, and I started hammering it. And to my greatest, wonderful surprise, I discovered that it became a spring, so I could bend it and it stayed that way, and I could, just slightly pushing it apart, put it on my neck without any catches or anything. That was the beginning of all my open necklaces. And then I started to forge and weave it together, the things. There's a necklace with a faience, the Egyptian faience, that is in the Louvre, in the Musée des Arts Decoratif.

MS. FISCH: We looked at a pair of earrings that are from that same time.

MS. BRYNNER: And a pair of earrings also, yes. And you see, each discovery, because I was learning, it was a miraculous discovery for me.

MS. FISCH: And when you were doing these early constructions, were you mostly working with silver? When did you switch to gold?

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, in the beginning I worked all in silver. And then Yul, my cousin, Yul Brynner, invited me to have a show in Beverly Hills, which was a disastrous thing. But anyway, I was invited to the set of *The Ten Commandments*. They were just opening it. And Cecil B. De Mille, Edward G. Robinson, you know, everybody there, and everybody said, "You know, we're interested in gold things." And I understood that, first of all, I will be earning much better than in silver.

MS. FISCH: In gold.

MS. BRYNNER: In gold, yes. And it's more interesting and it's more beautiful. Unfortunately, I didn't know about the carats much. Everybody worked in 14 carat, so I worked in 14 carat. It's later that I discovered that I don't like 14 carat, I like 18 carat or 22 carat. So that's when I started. So it was in about the very early '50s.

MS. FISCH: And when did you start working in wax? I mean, that was also quite early.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, also in the '50s I started learning. I went to Mills College. Bob Winston gave me a lesson of how to work in wax, what to do with wax and how to cast it. There I made a ring and until now I repeat that ring. I didn't do that much cast work in San Francisco, but when I moved to New York and I had difficulties of getting the right kind of a flame that I wanted to do really very fine work, I decided that I can try and work in wax. And that is when I got acquainted with Gaudi's work.

MS. FISCH: With the architect?

MS. BRYNNER: The architect. And all of a sudden, my straightforward contemporary designs started to become organic.

MS. FISCH: Do you think the change to organic form was prompted by the technique that you had to work with, or was it more your intuitive feelings about it, and the technique allowed you to do that?

MS. BRYNNER: I think it was first intuitive. I was really struck by Gaudi, so strongly that I didn't even realize. About three weeks after I saw his work, it started to reflect into my work. And I didn't know. Somebody said, "Oh, but this work looks like Gaudi." So I thought, my God, it must be very strong. And yes, the fact that I was working in wax helped me very much because you're much freer to do things. It's easier to do.

MS. FISCH: But it's also closely related to sculpture.

MS. BRYNNER: It is, yes. You see, when I saw this Falkenstein's work, I felt that I don't have to compromise; it can be sculpture, sculpture in relation to the body, human body. And I think it developed stronger and stronger in me as I was going on, as I was learning. Well, Bob Winston maybe had some influence, but his work is much

bigger and, you know, there isn't this -

MS. FISCH: It's not as refined as your work.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. I didn't want to say myself, but yes. My work has much finesse in it, you know, and more of a woman in it, I think.

MS. FISCH: Now, have you always made sculpture at the same time that you were making jewelry, or did you do that in a separate period?

MS. BRYNNER: No, I did lots of sculpture before I started jewelry. You know, when I started making jewelry and starting to make my living out of it, I also taught in Catholic schools at the same time, all kind of art, papier-mache, everything you want to do. We did drawing, sculpture, whatever. But it was a big struggle to start. I had no money, really, to establish a good workshop, so I was working very primitively. And I didn't have much time. I did some painting, which was less physically taxing.

MS. FISCH: But when you came to New York and started your workshop in New York, did you have time then to make some sculpture? Because I see that there are some small sculptures here.

MS. BRYNNER: Little sculptures I did a lot, yes. Big sculptures, no. No, but - yes, I still had a desire. You're right. You see, you're bringing my mind back to the facts.

I wanted to do welding. When I started working with a Henes water welder, that gave me the idea that I also wanted to do big welding. And I found some sculptor that allowed me to use his workshop and showed to me how to do big welding because I never did it before. So I did this *Requiem to the Earth*, this round sculpture. And that was my first experience. And I loved it, and I decided I do want to do something bigger. And again, I met some sculptor who has a studio upstate, and I rented a little cottage from him and worked in his studio. I did this big boulder thing that you can see under my piano here. And that piece came out exactly as I wanted. And, you know, it's such a rare thing to, when you finish a piece, to see what you really wanted to do. And the following year, I think it was '69 - when did the man land on the Moon?

MS. FISCH: '69.

MS. BRYNNER: '69. So that's when I did this *Pregnant Rocket*, the seven-foot sculpture, which was physically very, very difficult. It's iron, all forged and all welded. And to bend it, I had no strength in my hands to do it, so sometimes I had to lie on it to bend it the way I wanted. But it was a tremendous joy. I did some more things, which I think I left in Europe, because I took all of it. No, this big sculpture stayed here with a friend.

MS. FISCH: How did you feel about working at that scale? I mean, clearly, you've said it gave you great joy, but -

MS. BRYNNER: It gave me great joy, but there was something very wonderful to doing both scales, to be able to do a huge and to be able to do a tiny, little, refined thing. And as I said, this - well, we didn't start yet talking about the water welding.

MS. FISCH: Well, why don't we do that now, because your use of that particular equipment seemed to give you a whole new vocabulary of form -

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. Working in an apartment, you have to find ways of finding welding equipment or soldering equipment that will not explode and is not a threat to the apartment, to the building. So that's when I found this Henes water welder.

MS. FISCH: How did you find it?

MS. BRYNNER: There was some woman, some jeweler that came around either to the classes or I met her somewhere in one of the meetings, and she said that that's what she just found and it's fantastic. "Come and see it." I went to her place to see it and I was absolutely taken by it. And then I went directly to Mr. Henes, and he showed to me what and how, and I got my first water welder.

MS. FISCH: Did it take a long time to learn to use it?

MS. BRYNNER: Not really. I think that all through my work, I adapted to finding my way out, you know. And nobody could show me that because, you know, nobody worked in this thing. So I just tried it and it worked. And I saw immediately that there is a tremendous similarity in the technique of working with wax and the water welder, because you melt the edges, you heat the points of fusing, only one is in a very high temperature because water welder goes to 3,500 degrees Fahrenheit. So it's a big difference. But it opened absolutely endless possibilities of what can be done. And I really swear by that machine, you know.

MS. FISCH: Well, you're one of the few people, contemporary jewelers that I know in this country who uses one. I'm not sure why it wasn't more widely used in the United States. I mean, certainly European jewelers found a similar kind of equipment and use it a lot.

MS. BRYNNER: Do they do use it? I'm not now acquainted with what's going on there.

MS. FISCH: Well, a lot more people seem to use that kind of welder.

MS. BRYNNER: When I was in Switzerland, I brought mine there. And there was, in this Musée de L'Horlogerie et de L'émaillerie, there was a man, a technical man, you know, who built his own. And whenever I ran into trouble, he always helped me with it.

MS. FISCH: Now, it is something that uses electricity; isn't that right?

MS. BRYNNER: Absolutely. In mine there are two tanks with distilled water with electrolyte liquid. It's electrolyte liquid that is already diluted to the right proportions. And when electricity goes through this liquid, it divides the water into oxy-hydrogen gas. And then there is a booster. There is a special container that has a fluxed alcohol, which this gas goes through so that you have a fluxed flame already, clean flame. And you change the tips from a bigger – there is a number 14, which is huge, you can do really small sculptures with it, and then there is such a tiny one that you barely see that there is a flame. You can use it on a very fine wire.

MS. FISCH: So it has a very broad range.

MS. BRYNNER: It has a very broad range. And that's where you really need constant contact with it. For instance, with my sickness and with my cancer and all my things, you know, I just hardly worked at all for a while. And it is disastrous because, like with everything else, to be good, you have to be intimate with it.

MS. FISCH: You have to be in practice.

MS. BRYNNER: In practice, yes. You know, so you have to feel what it is doing.

MS. FISCH: But it clearly is a piece of equipment that you feel very comfortable with.

MS. BRYNNER: I feel very comfortable with it.

MS. FISCH: I mean, I'm really amazed at the piece that you showed me that is made totally with the water welder and has these beautiful surface textures.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. You see, that was again a trial. I took a big piece of gold. Just before that, I made a similar piece cast. And you see, one thing brings ideas to another. When I came to Billanti to pick it up, he said, "Oh, Irena, I don't know what will happen to me when you see it." There was a big hole in the square that I did that didn't cast out. I looked at it, and I said, "My God, but that made it!" [Laughs.] That made the piece.

MS. FISCH: You liked it better.

MS. BRYNNER: It was just what it needed, you know! And that gave me an idea of the open spaces and this, and that's how I started this. And I decided I'll try and make a piece with the water welder, doing anything I would want to do in wax.

MS. FISCH: So you approached the metal exactly as the wax.

MS. BRYNNER: Exactly as I would approach wax. And I wanted the surface to be like it's hammered or like it has, you know, indentations. And I tried just to barely touch with the flame so it would just start to melt that surface. And this piece, it has raised surfaces, it has this hammered look of the surface, it has holes in it.

MS. FISCH: And the edges are all –

MS. BRYNNER: And the edges are all melted. And you melt it different. You make a very thin line or you make it thicker, and it gives a completely different, very sculptural effect.

MS. FISCH: I think it's amazing how closely the process resembles working in wax. I hadn't realized that.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I think that it was because I work in both media a lot.

MS. FISCH: You saw the connection.

MS. BRYNNER: That I saw the connection. Because, you know, it's difficult to think that wax and melting gold could be the same thing, working in 3,500 Fahrenheit with a little torch, you know. And for instance, I'm very old-

fashioned in working wax. I don't like to use these electric things, you know, that you melt, and those pencil -

MS. FISCH: Oh, you mean the heating elements.

MS. BRYNNER: Those heating pencils. I just use an old-fashioned spatula. I heat it on the alcohol lamp and I work with that. I feel that I have much more control that way. I think that if I would work with the other, I would probably adapt just as well, but that's my funny part.

MS. FISCH: And there is another piece that used that same water-welding process. It's a small brooch. Tell me about that piece, because it looks very different from this big piece we just looked at.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I did lots of things. Especially for earrings it's also good because you want the earring to be as light as possible. And you can take a very thin gauge; you can take even 24 gauge if you want here. Because, first of all, I hammer the piece. I forge them. I shape them.

MS. FISCH: So that's what gave this one that texture.

MS. BRYNNER: That gives the texture, and it gives also hardness to the metal. And then, you see, with the water welder, you don't have to heat the whole piece when you solder. You can spot solder, spot weld.

MS. FISCH: So it doesn't soften the metal.

MS. BRYNNER: You don't have to heat the whole thing. So when I melt the edge, the middle doesn't get that hot, you know, so it doesn't lose its -

MS. FISCH: Doesn't soften.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. And by having a thicker melted edge, it also gives a stability so that the whole thing can be sturdy and yet be very light. And I think that in lots of cases - even the brooches, you know, you put it on the lightest dress and it doesn't pull it down.

MS. FISCH: Well, this particular brooch is made of several parts.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I had done a lot of that. There are separate, like leaf shapes, and I forge them and I melt them and then I work like a sculpture. I put all those elements together. I have - well, you see I have a sculpture, which is cast which it's - [Ms. Brynner is blowing off the dust].

MS. FISCH: It's dusty. [Laughs.]

MS. BRYNNER: [Laughs.] It's my fingerprints. And you see, it's a similar idea. And I did brooches like that.

MS. FISCH: What I like about both the sculpture and that brooch is that the leaf-like elements are set against each other in a very dimensional way.

MS. BRYNNER: Right, like a sculpture. And you know, that, you really cannot analyze. You just have to start working and seeing and feeling what it is doing.

MS. FISCH: But this one also has two stones in it. Did those come later, or you knew from the beginning?

MS. BRYNNER: Oh, no, no, from the - whether you make a drawing -- I once in a while do a drawing, but generally I have in my head what I want. And then I start. And sometimes my method becomes more expensive, like what I'm doing now, because I didn't work for a long time. And I want to do those cufflinks with niobium inside the metal. I already did two different ways to make it work.

MS. FISCH: So you may make some mistakes.

MS. BRYNNER: I do make mistakes. You have to allow yourself to do that.

MS. FISCH: Well, the nice part about gold is it can be recycled.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, that is true. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: It's not so expensive to make mistakes.

MS. FISCH: And it won't stick to niobium, so it won't mix with it. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: But I so much like the ways in which the leaves are at angles to each other. Are they soldered together on the back?

MS. BRYNNER: They're welded.

MS. FISCH: Welded.

MS. BRYNNER: Maybe in some places. But mostly when I do those things, I don't use solder at all. You know, it's nice because you can just take a thin wire and it will work exactly like solder.

MS. FISCH: So in welding, you're using more 18-carat gold as the welding rod.

MS. BRYNNER: Right. Right.

MS. FISCH: It's an unusual approach, I think, because most jewelers use solder –

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: – and are not skilled enough in welding to feel comfortable.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, it's true that if you are not skilled enough, it's very easy to make a hole. And in this design, you really don't. It happens, then you start making more holes to make it work. [Laughs.] Well, this is made out of elements also put together, but cast elements, you know. Wax elements you put together.

MS. FISCH: So is this in general the approach that you use, that you assemble elements rather than working from a solid?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, it's not on everything, but once in a while. You see, that was a very early piece, and that's also assembled elements.

MS. FISCH: Well, in your cast work, you actually cast multiple elements.

MS. BRYNNER: Right.

MS. FISCH: And then choose them to assemble.

MS. BRYNNER: No, no, no. This one was all put together in wax.

MS. FISCH: Ah.

MS. BRYNNER: You make all those elements in wax and you put them together and you cast the whole thing.

MS. FISCH: In wax. I see. So that one was cast totally.

MS. BRYNNER: Totally, yes. Most of the things, yes. So, you know, forging, casting, melting the edges.

MS. FISCH: Tell me a little bit about the earrings that you make, because they're really quite a unique system. There are two kinds of earrings that you make. One is wire that goes around the ear.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. I call them wraparound earrings.

MS. FISCH: Wraparound earrings. And those have to be custom fitted, I would think.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, because lots of people that saw my things wanted to copy it, and then they come and they say, "It doesn't work. People can't wear it." Because if it is not fitted exactly to your ear, the wire will start pressing a little bit somewhere in the back. You can't stand it. It really hurts.

MS. FISCH: And do most people have ears that aren't the same?

MS. BRYNNER: No, never the same. Never the same. And you know, I actually started doing those things, those wraparound things – I had a little lady customer, she was a doctor's wife; she was a tiny, little gray-haired lady that always wore light beige dresses, and she had no lobe, you know? And earrings didn't stay on her. And I started doing this kind of thing. Even if she just would put not a wraparound, we did something that went inside the ear.

MS. FISCH: But then you also did develop a whole series of earrings that actually clip on because the spring is in the design.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. Well, I never had a hole in my ear. The commercial backs, you know, with the spring, they hurt. If you screw it too tight, it's painful. And I felt that, you know – actually, when I started forging, I forged earrings in two directions, for the back and for the front, just making a loop that I could slide on the ear lobe. And

I discovered that if I will forge it very nicely also, the bent part that goes on the lobe, it has enough spring that by adjusting the thickness between those two forged pieces, it will make a nice, comfortable spring that will not pinch you in one place but will distribute this tightening thing on the lobe and will hold. And that started me on all my earrings based on that. Instead of a commercial back, I did this kind of a thing.

Later, when I came back from Europe, I discovered that most of the women got used to pierced ears and didn't want to adjust to that. So, you know, I had to change.

MS. FISCH: You had to adjust.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, yes, I had to adjust.

MS. FISCH: I think that's such an inventive way of holding the earrings on. I especially like these large ones where part of it comes up onto the cheek, and I think that's a very beautiful, graceful idea.

MS. BRYNNER: I have, again, somewhere in my safe - I lost one, but I'll show you this one. That was one of the first ones that I described to you that I did.

MS. FISCH: Oh, yes. It's just a very simple forged kind of S shape with a -

MS. BRYNNER: Very simple, yes. It's again a sculpture. You know, like Diego - not Diego Rivera, what was his name, who -

MS. FISCH: Calder, you mean? [or Jose Rivera]

[END TAPE 3 SIDE A.]

MS. BRYNNER: Wonderful, yes. Well, they were different thicknesses round forms going into swirling.

MS. FISCH: And you were very inspired by that.

MS. BRYNNER: Very much, yes.

MS. FISCH: Are you also inspired by particular materials? I know that you are working with niobium as black, as a black material, and I'm interested in how you discovered that niobium would be black, because most people use it because it has the other colors.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I first met this material, I think, what year, it was '80-something, right?

MS. FISCH: At the SNAG conference in New York City.

MS. BRYNNER: The conference in SNAG.

MS. FISCH: I think it was '83 or '84.

MS. BRYNNER: Not, '4. I moved here in - so it was '83, probably. And they were showing what niobium can do. And they showed all those pinks, which I didn't like at all, and then there was a piece lying that was black. And I said, "And this? And this?"

"Oh, that. Just you heat it and it becomes black."

And that's what I wanted. So that was the first time. I immediately ordered some niobium, and already going back to Switzerland, started working on niobium because I thought, well, combining this beautiful black with gold will be absolutely fantastic.

MS. FISCH: Well, it's a stunning combination. It has some drawbacks.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, niobium, you can't solder anything to niobium, so the only way you can attach things; it's either wraparound or riveting. So that's what I did. I did a whole show for Switzerland based on black and gold.

MS. FISCH: And I'll bet it was a huge success.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. I sold practically everything, yes.

MS. FISCH: And you continued to work in that combination?

MS. BRYNNER: I continued. I used to use silver and oxidize it. Well, now, whenever I can, I use not silver but niobium because it doesn't rub off.

MS. FISCH: And it weighs about the same as silver.

MS. BRYNNER: I think so, yes.

MS. FISCH: And it also is soft enough that you can hammer it and forge it?

MS. BRYNNER: You can hammer it; you can forge it. That's the difference between niobium and titanium. Titanium you can only bend. And this you can shape, really. Well, I really am very dedicated to that metal.

MS. FISCH: Well, I very much like this necklace, which is one of your linear spring forged lines, but this one's in niobium instead of in gold.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, it's in niobium. Well, this is the smaller part, riveted on. And then there is this [garland ?] that comes down, and they're all attached by wire and curls.

MS. FISCH: And I notice that you sometimes make jewelry that can be worn in more than one way.

MS. BRYNNER: This particular necklace with this long dangling pendant can be worn as a necklace, or you can put it as a hair ornament, and this long dangly thing becomes like an earring coming down, one of those shoulder dusters. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: And do people respond to that idea that it can be more than one thing?

MS. BRYNNER: There are certain people that do like it. There are people that, you know, want everything conventional.

MS. FISCH: My experience has been that people think it's an interesting idea, but they never use the other possibility.

MS. BRYNNER: [Laughs.] Yes. Let somebody else try it. Right?

MS. FISCH: What are your sources of inspiration?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, in the beginning, there was one source, and it's a very funny one. I remember I was buying gold in some office in San Francisco, and they had these huge scales, you know, that had these long wires coming down, becoming wider and wider, and then the tray, holding it. And I had an earring very much done. From that I had many earrings that really were inspired by that. So that wasn't a very poetic inspiration, but it worked very poetically. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: But your sources of inspiration, then, come from things that you see that trigger an idea?

MS. BRYNNER: When I became more organic, lots of natural things, certainly, inspire you, you know. But I don't know that - like, you know, I would say that, well, you know, for instance, the sculpture there, it definitely was inspired by [Alberto] Giacometti. You can see it, those long forms.

MS. FISCH: But this piece, this necklace, also has those very long forms. But was that inspired by the sculpture or did it just come because of the process?

MS. BRYNNER: I don't think so. I think it was just a decorative idea of a very lacy - I wanted it to be a man's jewelry, like an old-fashioned lace jabot, you know, coming down. That was the idea.

MS. FISCH: That was the idea.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. So I guess there are some ideas. Maybe I'm not so conscious of them when I do it. And once I did some medal for someone, for a priest. And when he started to tell me everything I had in that medal, I said, my God, I never thought I was that clever. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: Well, when you do work for clients, do you make drawings for them first or do you make models, or do you talk to them? How do you deal with clients?

MS. BRYNNER: I generally do very primitive drawings. And if they are not sure, then I prefer to do a wax model.

MS. FISCH: So you make very simple drawings, and then a model?

MS. BRYNNER: Very simple drawings. And then when I want to be sure that - you know, if people are - you know, for instance, I started giving ads in the *New Yorker* a long time ago, in the '50s and '60s. And all of a sudden I get a telephone call from Ohio, and the woman said, "I'm sending to you three" - or four or six, I don't remember - "diamonds. And this ring that you had in the *New Yorker*, I would like those diamonds incorporated

into that." So she sends me those diamonds and gives me the size of the ring, and I did the ring and sent it to her. And then after a while, and they paid me, and then the woman comes with my ring like that to my shop. Then her husband says, "It's her birthday. I'm sending you a beautiful amber. Make a necklace."

"What kind of a necklace?"

"Well, you know her; you do whatever."

So that's wonderful. But there are people that, you know, "Well, maybe." Well, then I'd rather do a wax model, even sometimes painted gold so they have all the -

MS. FISCH: So they have a good visual image.

MS. BRYNNER: Right. And this way, you know. But you never know.

MS. FISCH: Did you often have clients that brought you stones and you had to respond to those?

MS. BRYNNER: Sometimes. Yes, sometimes. Well, you know, in that book there is this very open, lacy, big necklace. The woman, she gathered all the - those are this Blodel family. She took all the old diamond jewelry she had and she brought it to me. There were 60-some stones in that, even more, I think. The biggest was 3 carats. And I made that necklace for her.

MS. FISCH: Using all of the stones?

MS. BRYNNER: But I knew her, you know. It was gold with oxidized inside so all this lace thing looked even thinner, you know. And with the gold, with those diamonds, it was absolutely fantastic.

MS. FISCH: But you knew her very well.

MS. BRYNNER: I knew her very well. She had lots of my things.

MS. FISCH: So she knew what she would like.

MS. BRYNNER: Right. Right. Yes. Well, there were difficult clients. I had one who would come and stand while I am working. And finally, once it was, you know, going on so that I took the stones, I said, "Here are the stones. Take them and go home. I can't work that way. Either you trust me or you don't trust me." You have to do it sometimes because, you know, I was getting sick from it and I didn't want to.

MS. FISCH: How do you decide if a piece is good and is finished? When you work intuitively, you don't necessarily have a finished product exactly drawn out, and so you have to arrive at what you think is good and finished.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, you feel it.

MS. FISCH: So it's, again, an intuitive situation.

MS. BRYNNER: It's again the same thing like, you know, this last sculpture that I told you that I made of this Nigar [sp], conductor. And he said, "Oh, it starts to look, it looks like me." I said, "No, I don't feel you in it." And all of a sudden, I felt, "That's you. That's you." I stop. I don't touch it anymore. And it's the same thing. And I feel very much that if I do a piece for you, I have to finish it and do it in such a way that when you put it on, you don't feel that, "Oh, I have put a very special decoration on me." I would like you to feel that it's part of you, that it belongs there.

MS. FISCH: Well, talk a little bit about your idea of how jewelry should be, because you have some interesting thoughts about how jewelry should enhance the person.

MS. BRYNNER: I think that it should be a part of the person. I don't think that when you walk in, you just see the jewelry and you don't see the person. You really should see the whole thing. And it's very important that it somehow responds to your nature. It shouldn't be a foreign thing. I think that the person has to enhance the jewelry, as the jewelry has to enhance the person.

MS. FISCH: That's an interesting way of expressing it.

Have comments from critics ever affected your work?

MS. BRYNNER: Never. Never. I read it because it's interesting to see what people think, but, you know, it's I who do it, so I have to be true to myself when I do it. I cannot - just recently I had a case. A girl bought some

Venetian glass, as I call them, sausages. Long glass gray and black things. And she said, "I want it with your chain. And this is the chain I want, and I don't know how many." I said, "I don't think it will be good."

"No, no, it will be good. You'll see."

I did it, and she came, and I said, "Do you like it?" She said, "No." I said, "Well, I hate it." [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: But you had to prove it to her.

MS. BRYNNER: I had to prove it.

MS. FISCH: Well, I think that you have a very distinctive voice in your work. And I don't know that you have a style that you can describe in one word.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, there are too many styles, really, in my style, though I think that my signature is in all the work. But the style of the work can be very different. True?

MS. FISCH: Yes, I think that's true.

Is there anything else in the work that you would like to comment on in particular, or shall we move on?

MS. BRYNNER: No. Let's move on.

MS. FISCH: I know that you were very involved in the community of artists in the Bay Area of San Francisco for 10 years and that you participated in the activities of that community.

MS. BRYNNER: Right. Right.

MS. FISCH: Tell me a little bit about the kinds of activities.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, we worked together. And again, Margaret De Patta was our guide. And we would meet and we would discuss the designs and how you come to the designs. And sometimes we disagreed completely, you know. Taking Margaret De Patta, Bob Winston and myself and Merry, we're all very different. But we were all just the young ones, you know. We didn't have such a strong voice as Margaret had.

But she initiated us to start doing some forging and hollowware. And really those seminars of hollowware gave me the idea that, you know, I want to hammer things and I want to forge things. And we were really like family. And all those art festivals, you know, where we all got together to organize, to build the whole thing, to put it together to jewelry.

Somehow, it never worked here. The first time, when I just moved here, we had that also. There were artists and, you know, all kinds of artists that were together. When I came back this time from Europe, I completely lost the contact with all that, though I taught, you know. But with my students I had contact.

MS. FISCH: But you weren't involved in the jewelry community again.

MS. BRYNNER: No. You see, before, the craft museum was like our home. We all met there at every opening, and, you know, everything was closed to us. It became a very foreign organization.

MS. FISCH: Well, Ronnie Pearson once said to me it was so different being in the craft community in the '50s because everybody knew everybody.

MS. BRYNNER: Right. Right.

MS. FISCH: And as the field gets bigger, that's not so easy to do.

MS. BRYNNER: And, you see, when I went first time to this conference I told you I went to, of the -

MS. FISCH: Of the American Craft Council?

MS. BRYNNER: No, SNAG. I felt so good. You know, they said they'll help me with my book, and yes, sure, sure, tell us what you would like to do, maybe next time you'll be - and when I offered anything, I offered to do my retrospective of my work in slides and do the lecture, they said they have much more interesting programs than that offered to them. And when I said about the book, they said, oh, that's too complicated. So, you know, I thought I found a family, but they didn't give a damn what I do and how I do it.

MS. FISCH: Well, I think it's gone in several different directions.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes.

MS. FISCH: So you haven't been involved in those organizations very much.

MS. BRYNNER: No, not at all. Since I came, somehow I didn't - you know, if you have a contact, you try to make a contact yourself. In order that it will be factual and real, the other person has to respond the same way. You cannot keep hammering only from your side. And somehow it never happened. Whether it's my fault or not, you know, you never know.

MS. FISCH: Do you read any craft and art periodicals?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I get *Metalsmith* magazine. I used to get *American Crafts*, but they all of a sudden took it off the membership thing. And though I told them to let me know how it is, I would like to get it, they never did, and I just decided, well, hell.

MS. FISCH: So do you read any magazines from Europe? Are those of importance to you?

MS. BRYNNER: Once in a while I look at them. I have a friend who gets them. But I just can't stand getting more magazines and more papers.

MS. FISCH: We all have that problem.

Let's talk a little bit about the exhibitions, which were the vehicle by which you presented the work that you've done. When did you first exhibit your work? That would have been in San Francisco.

MS. BRYNNER: In San Francisco, yes. In San Francisco, those open-air festivals. The women artists, I participated with them. And the first time some organization - I think they were not women artists, I don't know what they were, but some kind of American women's organization invited me. That was my very first thing. They invited me to talk. I had about 14 slides at that time. That's how much in the beginning it was. I think it was still in 1950. And I came out and I thought, well, I'll tell them my background. You know, there is a lot to tell there. And then I'll show the slides.

A woman who was introducing me told my whole background. I had nothing to tell. [Laughs.] When I was nervous before speaking, I always had nausea. I didn't know how I would stay there. So I was showing those slides and trying to talk. I managed to stretch it to a half-hour, and then I had to go to the bathroom to throw up. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: Oh, dear.

MS. BRYNNER: That was my first -

MS. FISCH: Not a good beginning.

MS. BRYNNER: - first American success story. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: But you did also participate in many national exhibitions. I mean, when I was looking through your books yesterday -

MS. BRYNNER: It really started mainly when I came to America - to New York. Then my first time I showed in the little craft museum, it was very nice.

MS. FISCH: Oh, the Little Gallery, it was called.

MS. BRYNNER: Little Gallery. And then I had a one-man show in that museum.

MS. FISCH: And at that time it was called the Museum of Contemporary Crafts.

MS. BRYNNER: Right. And David Campbell was the director, and David Campbell was one of my very closest friends. He had built my shop for me. And the first summer we were here, he invited me to live in their summer house in New Hampshire, which was fantastic. He took me to all the meetings there of craftsmen, and I started meeting craftsmen. So I found the place to live on 55th Street, where also I couldn't manage to start working, so I decided that I wanted to have a shop. And that's when David built that shop.

I rented the end of the lobby, which had a window. So it was an ideal thing because I didn't need any galleries. I had my exhibit in the window, and whoever wanted to could walk in. In the evening I had a carousel standing in the window going on, after the theater period. And then I didn't have to manipulate with all those prices. You know, I had my price, and that was my price.

MS. FISCH: But you did participate in national competitions and also international competitions.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, I did, in England, and in all those international big shows I took part. And that was through Mrs. Webb and David Campbell.

MS. FISCH: And was that significant in terms of developing your career?

MS. BRYNNER: Absolutely. Absolutely. That gives you a feeling of self-prestige. You know, you start to believe that, yes, you can do it, you are good, so go on. You know? And yes, I felt very proud about it. And one of the really fantastic shows for me – and that was later on – was in Switzerland, this big retrospective in the Musée de L’Horlogerie et de L’émaillerie [in Geneva].

MS. FISCH: Explain about that exhibition, because it later traveled.

MS. BRYNNER: It later traveled. Well, I don’t know if I told it here or not, but I did Ikebana, and there was a big, big show in a big pottery museum in Geneva of Ikebana. And the curator of that show said to me that I’ll give you a big case, showcase, and you put your jewelry and your sculpture in and make Ikebana to go next to it. So I had like a little gold island in a sea of flowers. There were 75 bouquets of flowers. And a young woman came to me and said, “I love your work, and I am from this museum. And you come and look at it, and if you like it, I would like to give you a show, a one-man show.” That was the first contemporary show in that museum.

MS. FISCH: And you did talk earlier about how it was displayed. It sounds very beautiful.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, because they offered a brown background or something, and I said it was just my idea, but I love the combination of the same colors in different materials, so would you please do a matte yellow background, and on that we’ll put those boxes for display of yellow satin, and the gold on that. And it was absolutely fabulous. Those three different yellow materials worked fantastically. That was all around the walls. They gave me the whole second floor of the museum, called the Main Room. So on the walls were those cases in yellow, and in the middle from one side to another was a line of flat cases. Those were retrospective pieces of the earlier work that was shown there. And there was a big glass division between the entrance and the hall where we had put hanging sculptures and big pieces. And I had a beautiful workbench where I worked every day. At a certain hour I came and worked. So I met people all the time. And the opening was beautiful.

MS. FISCH: So that was a most successful exhibition.

MS. BRYNNER: It was wonderful. You couldn’t sell anything from there. But really, after this show, the Swiss, who didn’t want to accept me as a Swiss designer, to them I was an American designer, they started to invite me to the national shows and so on.

MS. FISCH: So it had a very important effect.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, I was established in Switzerland, yes.

MS. FISCH: Well, museums have also collected your work. And I wonder how that has happened. Have they purchased work from you, or have you given them work, and have other people given your work?

MS. BRYNNER: In Europe, in Darmstadt, the museum bought it. That was long ago. Goldsmith Hall has a little ring of mine. Also they bought it from my shop. And Geneva has some of my things given to them and they purchased some things. The Montreal Museum purchased everything.

MS. FISCH: And they have quite a large collection.

MS. BRYNNER: No, they have – what they purchased are just two pieces. Two pieces. And I don’t remember, I gave them something. They were going to purchase this thing. Everything was done, then all of a sudden they said no, they decided not to. So that was disappointing. And, well, Cooper-Hewitt, I gave.

MS. FISCH: How many pieces did you give them?

MS. BRYNNER: I decided to give a retrospective group. I have 12 pieces that I gave them. Cooper – Renwick, one of my pupils said that I gave her so much by my lessons that she wanted to somehow celebrate it in that museum, and she purchased already when I moved here, she purchased this emerald cluster necklace and gave it to them. And then I decided that I wanted to give them another one, so I gave the second one.

MS. FISCH: The Oakland Museum has –

MS. BRYNNER: The Boston Museum has my piece which somebody gave. I don’t know who.

MS. FISCH: Joan Watkins, I think.

MS. BRYNNER: I think so, yes. And the Oakland Museum, you know, I have all those old things, and I thought, well, I'll give that. Because with my age and everything, you know, I started to think that I would like my things to be in the museums and not just in private hands.

MS. FISCH: So which museums would you like to have the representative collection?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I asked the Oakland Museum if they would, and I know that one of my clients that has a beautiful collection. She has about, I don't know, seven or eight pieces of really beautiful gold and diamonds, and she just wrote a will where she is leaving it to the Cooper-Hewitt.

MS. FISCH: So they will have actually the largest number.

MS. BRYNNER: They will have a large collection. And I would like to have Louvre. I gave them three pieces. I approached them when I was in Paris. I went and met a person and asked her, and she said, "Well, you have to send the slides and there is a special committee that will have to accept it or not accept it." I waited a whole year before they accepted.

[END TAPE 3 SIDE B. NOTE: IT APPEARS THE WRONG SIDE OF THE TAPE WAS PUT ON, AND RECORDING COVERS JUST A COUPLE OF MINUTES BEFORE IT FLIPS TO REVERSE SIDE.]

MS. FISCH: Arline Fisch interviewing Irene Brynner at her home and studio in New York City, on April 27th, 2001, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This is Tape No. 4.

I wanted to hear a bit about your experiences in St. Petersburg. I believe you had an exhibition there, or you were invited to have an exhibition.

MS. BRYNNER: No, I didn't have an exhibition. Again, I was a juror for the Faberge competition of the young St. Petersburg jewelers.

MS. FISCH: What year was this?

MS. BRYNNER: It was three years ago. And so we all presented. Each juror talked in front of them. And actually, I think I was the most interesting for them because I was the only one that was really a jeweler and didn't have a gallery or a shop or a collection or, you know. And I talked Russian. And I have very good, professional slides.

[END TAPE 4 SIDE A.]

[Joined in progress.]

MS. BRYNNER: Afterwards I sent them all the magazines of jewelry, you know, periodicals, whatever I could. I sent, I think, four cases to them. Everything I had collected I sent to them because they really need it very badly. And one of the young men all of a sudden came to me and said, "I'm so ashamed, I'm so ashamed."

I said, "What are you ashamed of?"

"I thought that I invented earrings that go around the ear, and you had shown yours like that."

I said, "Well, I felt the same thing many years ago and discovered that they were starting to make them in the 16th century, so don't worry." [Laughs.]

But there it was very nicely done. They had made a big reception for my presenting things to them.

MS. FISCH: You actually were giving them some work.

MS. BRYNNER: I was giving them. I gave them three gold boxes, little, tiny boxes, pillboxes. And I had one necklace, which I don't - in '69, you know, when the man went to the moon? It was a forged kind of open piece in front and with a big tourmalinated quartz sphere, and I called it Sputnik. At that time everybody was angry with me here; why didn't I call it Vanguard, not Sputnik? [Laughs.] But because I called it Sputnik, I thought that that will be a natural thing to give to the Hermitage.

So at this big reception, I gave it to them, and the director embraced me. And I said, "You know what I would love to do is sing." They have a beautiful - did you see their little concert hall in the Hermitage?

MS. FISCH: I don't think so.

MS. BRYNNER: It was built for Catherine the Great, a little round theater, absolutely beautiful, like a gem. And he said, "Oh, it's difficult." I said, "I don't want an official concert given by you, I just want one hour of time of this theater where I could invite my friends and the jewelers and the people from the museum to come and listen to me." He gave me that time. And that was wonderful.

It has a strange acoustics. You don't hear either yourself or the piano very well on the stage, but the sound that goes out is fantastic. So that was quite an experience. And then he was very enthused about my work and everything, and said that in a year, my things will be exhibited and then he will find them a permanent place. Well, there are lots of promises that never come out right. I don't know where that is.

MS. FISCH: So you don't know if it's on display.

MS. BRYNNER: I don't know. That exhibit never took place. And they took all my materials to redo my book, jewelry book, and just last year they told me that they don't have enough funds to do it. And when I talked to the director when he was here, he said, "I never heard about it." So I should really start writing again. But it was very nice.

And to me the biggest compliment was the man that keeps in storage those things, and he repairs all the things. He is really a master craftsman. When he got those things and I came there, he said, "Did you do it all yourself?" I said yes. And he said, "Well, I congratulate you." I said, "Well, that's the biggest compliment I got in the Hermitage." [Laughs.] You know when a professional person does that, it's very nice.

MS. FISCH: Yes. Well, in 1992, I think it was, you made a trip back to Vladivostok. Tell me about that.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. I heard my distant cousin went there, and she said that they opened this museum, the Arseniev Museum, that is honoring all the pioneers of Vladivostok. My grandfather was an honorary citizen of Vladivostok because he was one of the founders of it. Vladivostok started to be settled in '68, I think, somewhere around there.

MS. FISCH: 1868.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. And my grandfather came there in '73. So she said write to them because they're looking for anybody from the Brynner family because, you know, it was an important family there, started the shipping business, and it's a very important port. So I wrote to them and, you know, I said that I do this and that and that and I would love to come and give concerts.

And I got a letter, "Yes, we want your show of jewelry and your sculpture and your painting." I said, "Well, stop. I cannot bring sculpture or endless paintings. I will bring a few pieces of jewelry. But I do want to give concerts."

So first they wanted to have six concerts in two weeks, something like that. Then they went to four, and finally to two. So I came there. I was met in Khabarovsk. I was immediately struck by this. There was a group of people that came from Harbin with all the merchandise that they were - you know, it's a speculation group. And they were so rude. I was sitting. There were two people from the plane, one from Sakhalin, the other I don't know, who were protecting me. You know, they were by me. And she got a cart for me, and a girl comes and takes this cart.

I said, "Come on. That's my cart."

"I need it."

I said, "Well, I need it too." And she was so rude that I called her a bad Russian name. She looked at me and she said, "You remember." I said, "I remember everything, so leave me alone." [Laughs.] But they were really rude people, you know.

And then we spent the night in Khabarovsk, and then we went on the train to Vladivostok. Oh, no, during the night we went. That's right. And you know, you went on that train. Did you see those sheets?

MS. FISCH: The linen sheets.

MR. BRYNNER: I said I wanted so much to steal one.

MS. FISCH: It was like being in the 19th century, though.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes. And you know, I traveled on the Trans-Siberian train in 1930 when I was a child. And then when we came to the station, we were coming, I was standing there, and I see there is a crowd of young people standing with a huge bouquet and a television camera. I said, "Whom are they meeting?" They said, "You!" I said I never came as a star, so that's very interesting. [Laughs.]

And the whole thing was, you know, I was like a walking legend for them because the legend of Brynner family was there. My grandfather had also mines, lead and silver mines, I don't know what. And they had, you know, a good reputation. And it was very, very special. So everybody wanted to meet me.

In the 10 days or two weeks I was there, I had no time to go anywhere, you know? I went and met private artists. I went to the museum. And [Nicolai] Schtukenberg, the painter, was our dear friend. And I asked them, "Do you have any paintings of Schtukenberg?" And she said, "Oh, yes, we have more than 100 paintings of his. Most of it is from his wife, and the other part is from the Brynner collection." So they brought out every painting to show me. And I met university people. And it was very disappointing to them because they wanted to know how the education was done in Harbin. Well, I learned there, but I really couldn't tell them what the system was.

I went to visit all the apartments that I lived in. And now they divided that apartment into two parts, so it wasn't the same thing, but at first I couldn't get to my apartment because the dog was barking and the woman said she can't let me in. So I went and looked at the apartment where my aunt lived before and they were very nice there.

And then during one of the meetings, which were nonstop, a woman comes to me and she says, "You know, I have arranged for you to go and see your apartment. We have to go right away. The woman couldn't let you in because her mother was dying. And the other thing that I'll tell you that will be interesting for you, I lived for 34 years in one room of your apartment." So I went and visited that place, and somehow I could imagine what it was. And then that was the second period of my life in Vladivostok.

And where I was born, that building was taken by maritime offices. And they had completely redone. It's little, tiny rooms of brown and beige metal, you know, those little nooks. And I went through, they took me through that whole apartment, and I told them what it was before. And I said, "Oh, here was a fireplace," so they immediately went, "Oh, that's right, we can still" - and they said, "There is a strange thing. One room, big room, is all in tiles." I said, "It was our bathroom." And I said, "There was also a big porcelain bathtub." Well, it seems that when the Bolsheviks took over this thing, they took the bathtub on the roof, and now it's too heavy to take it down. [Laughs.]

But in Vladivostok, you know, there are lots of buildings that are the same, the streets. And they thought that we lived, the last period, we lived in a different house. So they brought me and said, "That's your house." I said, "No, no, that's not my house."

MS. FISCH: So you remembered.

MS. BRYNNER: So I remembered exactly where it was, and it's all in bad shape, you know. But, you know, it was all very distant, and it was like with a zoom camera all of a sudden this whole past entered not just close to me, but into my heart, really. And we went to the summer house where there was also the place where the Brynners were buried. But it seems that as soon as the communists came, they pulled all the corpses out. And it's also half-destroyed. Our little house where we lived has no roof.

MS. FISCH: So it was kind of a mixture of wonderful memories and sad ones.

MS. BRYNNER: It was. And oh, I should really find this thing and show you. There's a rock beach in back of that house, and there is a rock where I was sitting like a little birdie when I was a tiny, little child. And I took a picture on that same stone when I visited it.

MS. FISCH: And I see this poster up on the wall announcing your concerts.

MS. BRYNNER: That was all over Vladivostok, yes.

MS. FISCH: That must have been thrilling.

MS. BRYNNER: It was thrilling. And the concert was very thrilling. You know, people were coming. And then I had a meeting with all the citizens of Vladivostok, and I remembered some shops, and people that were of that period, you know, shared it with me. And then some man in the back says to me, "Well, if you like it so much here and you enjoy being here so much, so why don't you move here?" I said, "Well, you know, I'm used to taking a hot shower in the morning in my bathroom, and here I live in a luxurious hotel but there is no hot water. I have to go to some friends to take a shower. [Laughs.] I don't think at my age I can live in this kind of a thing."

MS. FISCH: So it was a wonderful visit, but you didn't want to return permanently.

MS. BRYNNER: I wouldn't like to live anywhere in Russia. I think that the hardship of those 70 years made some people hard. And there are lots of people that come here that I respect; they really try to do their best. But there are so many that believe that they can steal and cheat and get what they want. That I don't enjoy. I really

wouldn't, you know. And anyway, I wouldn't like to live there. I would like to visit there more if I could.

MS. FISCH: Tell me, when did you begin to study singing seriously?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I sang all my life, you know. Since we were little children we sang with accompaniment always. And my mother was a pianist, so I always. And in Switzerland, everybody adored me to sing the gypsy songs, and a cappella, without any accompaniment. Whatever anybody wanted, I sang.

And when I came here, and at the end of Mama's life, she said, "You know, your voice, instead of disappearing with age is becoming stronger and more interesting. I think you should really think of studying." And that stayed with me. I tried to find somebody after her death. Mama died in '75, after three years that we lived in Switzerland. And that didn't work. But I started getting discs to accompany me, you know, and sometimes I had a pianist that came.

And when I moved here in '84, I said to my friends, "Would you please find me a good singing teacher?" I was 67. And they said, "Well, Raymond is the best teacher you can find." I said, "Okay." I said, "Only I don't want it as any kind of a friendly gesture. I want to pay as you always are paid." And I started working with him very seriously because to get all this voice out of my chest into my head was a big work. And I worked 16 years with him, until I decided I can work by myself.

MS. FISCH: How does the singing interact with your career as a jeweler? Is there a balance that you need to find, or they just blend together, or they stay separate?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I never thought of this, but just recently somebody said to me, who is also a singer, that my singing and my jewelry look alike, so that there is a refinement and precision that he feels in my singing as he sees in my jewelry. So I guess there should be. Both are very deeply in me, so when it is very sincere and deep, I think there should be some similarity.

MS. FISCH: But you don't have any difficulty finding the time to do both things?

MS. BRYNNER: Oh, sure I find the time. And I was writing my memoirs for 10 years, you know. Three things like that, that takes time. And the worst thing, which I say this is such a bad joke, that we have in life our old age, and we want to still accomplish more things and we don't have as much energy to do it. Inside your soul, your heart, your head says, "I'm young, I still have lots to do," and your body says, "Stop a little, eh?" [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: But you're going to be giving a concert soon.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I generally do it towards autumn. I don't rush. The concert that I did before, I would like to repeat many times because it's really a very good concert. And you see, there aren't that many people who bring a whole program of Russian music, really good Russian music. So even if I don't have a big audience, I still bring this Russian culture to the people.

MS. FISCH: How often do you give a concert? Once a year?

MS. BRYNNER: Once a year, yes. And then sometimes even here I get about eight people, 10 people. And, you see, I have a natural stage. [Laughs.] But when all of a sudden you feel that you do with the voice what you want and you can express - for instance, this last concert that I did, it has a very important poetic part in it. And it really shouldn't be just sung. It's very important to understand what I am singing about. It's really like telling a little story, each one. You know, it's important that it's a full thing.

And Yul's son, Rocky, he said to me, "You know, I really had a feeling like I am looking at little excerpts of opera, like I could see what you are doing." So that was very rewarding. And it give me a tremendous - I have a very funny - I always have - maybe that's why I talk so much - I need to share whatever touches me, I need to share with other people.

MS. FISCH: And singing is a way to do that.

MS. BRYNNER: Singing is a wonderful way of doing it, yes.

MS. FISCH: And I think I asked you before, but I'm not sure it's on tape, what kinds of music you sing.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I mostly sing Russian classical music, starting with Glinka, which was one of the early composers, and Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff, and going to Shostakovich and Prokofiev and Stravinsky. One year I gave 200 years of music with Pushkin, starting with Glinka and going to Stravinsky. And once in a while I mix, but, you know, I think that in me is really Russian music much more than any other.

One concert I did 16th century and 20th century music. And I did four groups-Russian, Italian, English

Elizabethan songs, and French.

MS. FISCH: But your heart is really with the Russian music.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, for instance, I would love to sing lieder, German lieder, but I don't know German. And I don't feel that I can really deeply give the thing if I am not familiar with each word, you know? I can learn the words, but they're not in me.

MS. FISCH: Well, you mentioned your written memoir. I'd like if you'd tell us a little bit about that.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, after being in Vladivostok, mainly, I felt that my life was so varied and different from most of the people here, and anyway, that I should somehow record it. And being in Vladivostok, that brought all of it, and my back memories are very, very sharp, very good. I remember myself since I was about three.

But I started by memories of smells that bring, you know - going to this country place of ours, and then the beginning of the Revolution and my mother and father getting together. And then they moved to Vladivostok, and that's where I was born, and born prematurely, so the doctor said, "Oh, don't fuss about her because she won't survive." Well, with my mother's love, I did survive.

I think in some way it's really a development of a person. I'm not doing any kind of a political or historical thing. I don't pretend to know to do that. I just tell exactly what I remembered, how I felt it and how my life went, and then how I get into this art and my development in art and all my shows and tribulations. There are all of my little love affairs and things like that.

MS. FISCH: Well, do you have any plans to publish this memoir?

MS. BRYNNER: Oh, I would love it. If I'll find a publisher, I certainly would like to. Right now I am putting the photographs, illustrating it, which is a difficult thing. My tendency is to put too many things and I have to pull it out all the time because I cannot overwhelm the memoirs with photographs. But I think it will be much more meaningful and interesting if there are illustrations, photographs.

MS. FISCH: And you have lots of family photographs.

MS. BRYNNER: I have lots, yes.

MS. FISCH: Even though you've moved around so much.

MS. BRYNNER: Yes, still I have them. Still I have. I don't know how, because, you see, when we left Dairen - well, from Vladivostok somebody brought something. I don't know how it was. Well, because yes, sure, my mother's sister, she left legally from Russia and she had all those things. So from there we have all the childhood pictures.

And then when we left Dairen, the American consulate rented our house. And we had a huge wine cellar. And they wrote to us and said, "You know, your wine will just get lost; would you sell it to us for \$125?" I always remember it. It was so funny, this \$125. And I wrote to them, "Please take the wine cellar, but when you will be leaving Dairen, please send to us our curios, our rugs and books." And that's how I have some of the things.

MS. FISCH: Well, I'll certainly hope that you find time to finish these memoirs.

MS. BRYNNER: Oh, I've finished them. Yes, they are finished.

MS. FISCH: Because they read very well. I thoroughly enjoyed reading what you sent.

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I'm glad.

MS. FISCH: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about, or do you feel we've covered what you'd like to say?

MS. BRYNNER: Well, I think we did cover most of the things.

I wish we would have something where more unity could come to the jewelry world.

MS. FISCH: That would be nice.

MS. BRYNNER: That would be nice.

MS. FISCH: Well, thank you very much.

MS. BRYNNER: Thank you. I enjoyed our little meeting.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated... November 14, 2003