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**Oral history interview with Ruth Adler Schnee,  
2002 November 24-30**

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**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project For Craft and Decorative Arts in America

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Ruth Adler Schnee on November 24-30, 2002. The interview took place in Southfield, Michigan and was conducted by Anita Schnee 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.

Ruth Adler Schnee and Anita Schnee have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. \*\* Sections in curly brackets have been inserted into the appropriate section of the interview from additional recollections recorded at the conclusion. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written prose.

## Interview

ANITA SCHNEE: This is Anita Schnee interviewing Ruth Adler Schnee at Mrs. Schnee's home and studio in Southfield, Michigan, on Sunday, November 24th for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disk number one.

Okay, Ruth, if you could put the glass down, be very gentle with it because that mike will pick it up.

So let's start this by finding out where and when you were born.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I was born in Frankfurt am Main and it was the year 1923, May 13th.

ANITA SCHNEE: And let's just talk a little bit about your parents, if you would.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: My parents, Marie and Joseph Adler, came from an old Frankfurt family, going back as far as I know since 1365, particularly my dad's family. My mother's family came from outside of Frankfurt, but in those days it was very important that families reach far back and that everyone knew the history of that family.

{This note pertains to tape one where I am talking about our family history, which I'm mentioning goes back to 1365, I believe. I should mention here that my dad's ancestors, beginning with the Schwelm family, were first mentioned in the annals of the city of Frankfurt in 1530. The Jews had been living in Frankfurt in ghettos for a hundred years, and David Schwelm, whose last name was bestowed on him after living many years in the city of Schwelm in Westfalen, was first mentioned. He had four sons and in 1556 he lived with his brother Mosche, who was the founder of the Hahn family, and Isaac, who was the founder of the Rothschild family in the Haus zum Hahn. Historically, the houses in Frankfurt were always named according to the people that lived in them.

ANITA SCHNEE: And this is coming from the family history that Papi wrote, right?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, my dad was a great archivist and incredibly interested in genealogy.

Additionally, I think I should add here that in the tiny hamlet of Abenheim in Germany, and this is located near the Rhine River, northwest of Worms, Marcus Spiegel was born on December 8th, 1829, and that was a family that could trace its roots to the 16th century.

According to the family legend, and I think this would be of interest here, the house that he was born in had a large Spiegel, which is in German a mirror in front of the home, and in those days, when Napoleon liberated the ghettos, the Jews were given the surnames of the houses that they lived in, and it was that Marcus Spiegel who started the Spiegel Company in Chicago, and I think the rest is mail-order history.

The Schwelms and the Spiegels were related.

I should also mention that the first time a profession was mentioned in connection with the name of Schwelm was with Hayum Jacob Schwelm who was a dealer in clothes, and that was around 1689 to 1720, because up to then Jews had not been allowed to be merchants. They were moneylenders.

That store seemed to have been in the family and was inherited by David Beer Schwelm.

ANITA SCHNEE: I'm sorry, Mom, which store?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The dress and clothes shop that I just mentioned. He was the first one that got permission to do that, according to the annals of the city of Frankfurt. He had permission to trade outside the ghetto and dealt in second-hand dresses and sale of used furniture.

Until that time, as I mentioned before, the Jews were officially allowed only lending of money or exchange of coins brought in by travelers or merchants during the annual Frankfurt trade fairs.

David Beer Schwelm must have prospered because he was able to give his son Simon a well-rounded education and Simon, my great-grandfather, registered and opened a book, and Antiquariat store at the Schaefergasse 10 in Frankfurt and that I think was the beginning of the bookstore that really belonged to the family and, as I mentioned before, was in the same house until the Nazi regime.

In 1836, Karl Adler, my grandfather, became assistant in that bookshop and worked there. And in 1884, according to the history of Frankfurt, or 1887, he then registered as owner of that store.}

My dad's family – was in the book and antique business. The bookstore in Frankfurt. Was in the same family, in the same house for many, many years, as mentioned.

My dad has always said the reason he couldn't research the family further is because in 1365 there was a big fire and the records were destroyed.

My dad in his youth was active in the family bookstore. My maternal grandfather was in the wine business. He was extremely successful in that business, delivering to the court of Belgium. He was friends with the King of Belgium. And I think my grandmother on my mother's side, Helene Née Schoenhof, grew up in the leather business. My mother was always very proud that her great-grandfather brought the Singer sewing machine to America, but in the early 1920s left for Germany again – couldn't get accustomed to America.

At any rate, that was the family background, middle class. They felt very strongly that they were German rather than Jews. There was very little religious observance. They knew the philosophy, the music, the poetry of the Jewish religion, but they did not practice it in a formal way.

ANITA SCHNEE: What was the context of the Jews, the rest of the Jews? How did they compare to the rest of the Jews in Germany, if you know?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That circle was pretty much the same thinking. They felt very strongly that they were Germans and identified with German politics and the German intellectual milieu in those days.

ANITA SCHNEE: Was this most Germans, could you say, in Germany – most Jews in Germany were like that or were they –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, in that circle they were. I can't – first of all, I was too young. We left Frankfurt when I was four. But they were very proud of their German tradition and the fact that they as tradesmen in Germany were able to make a success of it.

{Oh my god. Also on this tape, I just want to insert a little bit about my parents' meeting, which was in 1921. My dad was working in the bookstore – and incidentally, I forgot to mention that my grandmother's maiden name was Schwelm, and this is why I referred to the Schwelm family previously.

My dad had the intention of going on a buying trip, and on the way, he had planned to stop in Munich where my mother was studying at the Hans Hofmann School. She was the youngest daughter of Ernst Salomon, and I have referred to him as being a wine merchant, and it is said that even as a little girl, she already loved the feeling for symmetry, color and painting and studied – [phone ringing.]

And as I said before, my mother loved color. She was one of the few students who had been allowed to work in the Staedel Gallery in Frankfurt in her spare time to copy the famous painters, and that was a very special honor. But she wanted to work and live at the center of art and literature and surrounded by the new ideas and the new culture that was – that she had read about and with people who lived for these new expressions in art and design.

She admired the painters of the Blue Rider [Der Blaue Reiter] like Kokoshka, Herschelman and many others, and that brought her to Munich and eventually then to the Bauhaus. She studied calligraphy, and I have her Bauhaus portfolios, which I absolutely cherish, because they are perfect.

According to my dad, that was really her place. It was the center of the art revolution. He mentioned it many times. She found the basis of her thinking and the environment that really shaped her future.

She was not a good cook. In fact, she never cooked. We had a staff in Germany. I don't remember my mother ever entering the kitchen except possibly for planning meals. According to my dad, they inherited my grandfather's cook when they were married, and not until the Nazi emigration did my mother learn to cook.

ANITA SCHNEE: But she really did learn because in my own childhood we used to just fall all over particularly her baked goods – unbelievable.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes. Okay. So when you were born – where – which apartment were you born?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I can't tell you that. I don't have any recollection. But I think my parents lived in the Eschersheimer Landstrasse. I remember the apartment incredibly well. In fact, I think I could probably draw a floor plan of that apartment, although we left it when I was about four, and moved to Düsseldorf.

{Again, tape one, I neglected to mention a little about the modern apartment that we had in

Düsseldorf. I remember my dad coming in one afternoon with a Signac painting. He had worked with a gallery owner, and I have the feeling that he did not get paid for that work. It was a modern gallery, and he took it out in a painting.

I have a feeling that by that time he got smart, because when he found the apartment for the Klees in Düsseldorf, they were not able to pay him the commission and offered, Paul Klee offered him some of his paintings from the studio and my dad would not accept them at that time because, famous words, he said, "Mr. Klee, I cannot support my children or feed my children with your paintings." But in this case, he took the Signac, and I am ever so happy he did. It's hanging in our – although it was torn, as I mentioned, during the Kristallnacht activity, the Nazis totally tore it. My mother had it restored. It is a beautiful watercolor that hangs in our dining room and is my great joy.}

ANITA SCHNEE: And what were the circumstances of your move from Frankfurt to Düsseldorf?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think my dad was unhappy with being involved in the family business. It was I think quite restricting to him. And when he moved to Düsseldorf – when he moved the family to Düsseldorf – he became active in real estate and German real estate is not the way it is in this country; it is really investments and brokering and that type of thing.

And he was – I think he had connections in Düsseldorf, and my mother, I have a feeling, was only too happy to move to Düsseldorf because it was a modern city, it was considered the Paris of West Germany, and it was totally different from the Frankfurt environment because Frankfurt was a very, very old city, very traditional.

And so I think they welcomed starting new in fresh, new, modern surroundings. And that then became their circle of friends really.

ANITA SCHNEE: And about what year was that, do you remember, that you moved?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think it was either 1927 or 1929. I can't be that sure about it.

ANITA SCHNEE: So you remember the first apartment. That was the one you were talking about the floor plan.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: And now this one that you moved to in Frankfurt, where was that?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: In Düsseldorf.

ANITA SCHNEE: I'm sorry.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: We moved to Düsseldorf.

That was in the Zietenstrasse. I think Zieten, if my memory – my German history is correct, Zieten was a military person.

It was a very modern apartment. I loved it. Sunny, not like the Frankfurt apartment, which was sort of antique. The apartment in Frankfurt was wonderful because I remember the Kachelofen [tiled stove], which was the fireplace in my dad's study. It was old tiles, and it's interesting that in Frankfurt, I remember the apartment being very traditional. It was furnished in Biedermeier furniture.

ANITA SCHNEE: And that was what era in Germany, Biedermeier?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Biedermeier was – oh dear, I should have studied my art history better but I think – see, the Baroque period was really more for the upper echelon, the royalty, and then when Biedermeier came in, it was available to the common people because it was a lot simpler in style than Baroque, it was bourgeois.

And my parents' apartment was Biedermeier but also Thonet furniture.

ANITA SCHNEE: That's in Frankfurt still?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: In Frankfurt.

When they were married they went to Czechoslovakia, to the Thonet factory and bought the new Bentwood chairs that were available at that time.

And so the Frankfurt apartment was mixed with Biedermeier and Thonet furniture but one room was reserved for strictly being Biedermeier and that was the parlor. That was very important to my mother.

ANITA SCHNEE: And she entertained there, she received tea? Did she serve tea there and that sort of thing?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. Let me think. I remember very well objecting to the Biedermeier furniture, as little as I was, saying it's so old-fashioned looking. And my mother – I hear her say it – said, "When you get older, you will appreciate that one mixes the classic old with the new." And I think that has sort of been the thread in my life. I've never forgotten it. Because the paintings were – that I remember from the Frankfurt days were Ingres, who I felt this was much too traditional in style, and it's curious now that I think about it that I should have objected to that. I didn't know much about art history, nothing. I mean, I was only four or six years old. But when we moved to Düsseldorf, it was a totally different scene.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well now, if I could just interrupt and backup, Mom, where would a four or five year old be exposed to Ingres?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, we had him on the wall. My mother was very careful to explain all that to us and I very much took it in. But then when we went to Düsseldorf, it was a much more contemporary look in the place that we lived in.

ANITA SCHNEE: What do you mean when you say contemporary? Contemporary to that time?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, the house was modern. The apartment house was – perhaps one shouldn't call it modern. It was between Art Deco and modern, the architecture, and I think my mother tried to furnish the place in Art Deco – not necessarily Art Deco but much more modern style.

If I remember this correctly, and I hope I do, they called in an architect by the name of [Bernard] Pfau, P-F-A-U, who was familiar with – he was not a Bauhaus devotee, but he was embedded in that culture and he designed that apartment for them. In fact, he lived with us for two weeks because he felt – and I don't think it was ever expressed that way; I was much too young to be involved in that – but that's how my parents wanted it so that he would familiarize himself with their style of living.

ANITA SCHNEE: So he lived with them to just – and I know a lot of times in your work you talk about knowing the client's culture. Is this the same concept that he went so far even as to live with the people to see the patterns of their life?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, absolutely, and my parents welcomed that.

ANITA SCHNEE: He was at the breakfast table and things like that?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. My parents insisted on it because they felt that's the only way he could design for them.

In any case, that Düsseldorf apartment was very much more to what I liked to live with. I remember my mother and he created what my mother used to call a winter garden in the master bedroom – a place with white marble chips where she could have her cactus plants. The fact that my brother fell into the cactus plants and had all the prickles all over him didn't seem to be important to them. But I remember that he sat for hours and pulled them out of his hands. In any case, that was Düsseldorf.

And then in Düsseldorf, as I got to be a little bit older, I remember parties and functions that my parents had in their place with artists of the area and particularly a sculptor by the name of [Leopold] Fleischhacker, who was one of their very good friends and they had a son and I was very friendly with him. But Fleischhacker's work was contemporary, definitely, and I really very much enjoyed it. I was not at the parties, mind you, because we were not allowed to the parties. In fact, we were not allowed to eat at the dinner table. We were delegated to the kitchen where we had a little table to eat with Anni, our wonderful nanny. But that kind of life lasted until 1936, I would say.

{In line with the Düsseldorf experience, I also have mentioned the sculptor Fleischhacker. On my trip back to Düsseldorf, the city had asked me to come. They paid for my trip.

ANITA SCHNEE: Do you remember what year that was?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That was the first time we went back to Germany.

ANITA SCHNEE: The '60s.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: In 1958. The city was very proud to be the city where Fleischhacker worked, and the powers-that-be there took us to the cemetery where Fleischhacker's work had in some cases been destroyed by the Nazis, but in other cases had been re-erected, gravestones that he designed were re-erected in an Art Deco style that I thought was extremely beautiful. I really loved his work.

I also mentioned the Klees in that tape having lived in Lausanne. It was not Lausanne; it was Berne, and it was in Berne that I visited them. It was during the time of the automobile road races. I was a great admirer of Hans Stuck who raced in Alfa Romeo cars. We just had a little Opel in Germany, but the Alfa Romeo styling at age 13 blew me away. I loved it. And I would sit – and I bought the same headdress, linen headdress that Hans Stuck raced in. I wore it. I sat by the side of the highway waiting for him to race by. And, of course, it was just seconds – just a turning of the head, it was so fast – but I didn't mind sitting there for hours in the sun. That was the time when I also visited the Klees, a totally different picture, of course, but as I mentioned before, Frau Klee was an incredible cook, and they were just wonderfully genial people.}

ANITA SCHNEE: So let's back up a little bit and just talk about what your school was like in those days before Hitler. Let's stay talking about before Hitler for a while.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: First I went to the Blüscherschule, which was, if I remember it correctly – of course, this was in Düsseldorf – a Montessori teaching method. And I remember the first day of coming to school and Fraülein Uihline was my teacher. I came in a brilliant yellow sweater that my mother had knitted just for this occasion, and Fraülein Uihline stood in front of the class, and when she saw me come through the door, she raised her arms and she said, “Ah, die strahlende sonne,” which means, “Ah, now comes the radiant sun,” and it made me feel warm and welcome all over.

I was not very good in math. I was very bad in gymnastics, which is extremely important in Germany. But I loved to draw, and I loved – I loved school, I really did.

No, I think that was Müller Lyzeum later.

Then when I graduated from the Blüscherschule, which was I think in American terms the grade school, my parents sent me to a private school, which was the Müller Lyzeum.

ANITA SCHNEE: Mom, before you go on to that one, we have a number of drawings that you did when you were that young, very young. Where did you do the drawings? Did you do them in school, did you do them at home?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, I did them at home. That was not schoolwork. I loved to create my own little world with little people who did all kinds of little things. And when I came home – I mean, the school day was very, very long in Germany because you have the academic classes in the morning and then the gymnastics and all the sports in the afternoon. Then you came home for lunch and then you had the sports and then, if I remember this correctly – and this is probably not in grade school but later on at the Müller Lyzeum – you had to come back into class and do sewing and that kind of thing.

In any case, the little people that I drew in those days – I did that I think on Sundays or early mornings. I just was enchanted with creating little scenes, whether they were interiors or landscapes or whatever they were. They had to have my little people in them. And when I did the landscapes, for instance, I concentrated on weeping willows because they were easily recognizable. All the other trees I couldn't draw. So everything has weeping willows.

[Laughter.]

ANITA SCHNEE: But not because you were sad?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, no. Weeping willows I could draw you know, they have a very definite silhouette.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay. Then you went on to the Müller Lyzeum.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Müller Lyzeum. Okay, it was a private school, a very fancy private school. We used to come to class with white gloves. Frau Witt, Frau von Witt [Director], who came from a very distinguished Prussian military family and was very regal, with white hair mounted on her head – but she was wonderful. I liked her very much. But every time we passed her in the hall, we had to curtsy.

But there I met a type of young girl that came from a higher than middle class background. Isabella von Bülow was one of my friends – of course, von Bülow was active in the German government, they had a beautiful estate with a moat all around, like the medieval castles – another one was Gisela Grütters [niece to Rudolph Serkin].



I cannot remember very much about the lesson plan at the Müller Lyzeum except that Frau von Witt was very strict about having the rabbi come in once a week to teach the Jewish students.

ANITA SCHNEE: And there were how many?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't think there were many. It was a very small group. But I remember the social side of the Müller Lyzeum better than the academic.

I should take that really back because after – I can't remember the dates – I think it was '35 – after '35 the Nazis created a lesson plan and were determined to interject their own philosophy. We had to learn to throw hand grenades. We had to concentrate on more domestic art than academic. And, of course, after 1936 – or in 1936, we were delegated to the back of the classroom where we could hardly hear the lesson plan and were very rarely called upon, and then Hitler published the Nuremberg Laws, and that was the end of my German schooling.

But the friends that I made at the Müller Lyzeum I retained. And to my astonishment, they corresponded with me, under threat, because you were not allowed to have Jewish friends, of course, as a Christian.

But Gisela Grütters came from a Christian/Jewish family. Her father I think was Jewish, her mother was not, or maybe it was the other way around; I can't remember exactly. But one of her parents came from the Busch family and, of course, the Busch family has become extremely well-known in the musical world the Busch Quartet with Adolf Busch and Rudolph Serkin was part of that family.

In any case, I spent weekends with the Grütters' family in Oberkassel, which was the little town across the Rhine River. Those weekends were unforgettable because there was a great deal of music. They used to have chamber music every evening, almost every day through the day, and I remember Rudi am Klavier always. This, of course, was Rudolph Serkin.

So that was my introduction to chamber music, which I have loved to this day.

{I should also mention that I played the recorder at age 10. I loved the instrument. I loved it not for the tone, but for its sculptural shape and the beautiful rose wood texture. When I was subsequently asked to joint the "Children's symphony," I was not asked to play my recorder. I was delegated to the last seat, where I played "Nightingale" and triangle. I have asked many of our American musician friends if they are familiar with this wonderful little instrument. No one knows of it.

I have discovered that it was mentioned by Mozart. Haydn, in one of his symphonies created a part for it. It was the perfect toy for me. It meant that a beautiful little table sat next to me with a well designed glass pitcher. The instrument itself is a little shiny square brass container, filled with water. One blows into the spout, out comes the shrill song of the nightingale. Of course the container had to be filled many times, which I diligently performed, splashing the water everywhere. The triangle shape was attractive. I had affixed a lovely red ribbon to it, where by I held it.}

Those were the days at the Müller Lyzeum. Then in '36 when I was not allowed to come to a German school, my parents sent me to La Ramée in Lausanne. My brother was sent to England to school and I was sent to Lausanne. La Ramée was a finishing school on the Lake of Geneva, absolutely beautifully situated. It was a glorious building but extremely strict and my parents thought I would learn French because the Swiss region of France, of course, is high French. I did not learn French. I was much too unhappy there. I didn't really fit in. The young girls – it was strictly a girls' school – came from England and Austria. They came from all over Europe. And I just didn't feel

welcome. I couldn't communicate. I did not know English. Of course, I didn't know French at all. But it was a very unhappy time. I felt like Heidi, my Swiss literary heroine, who yearned for the mountains when she was sent to the city. With me it was just the opposite.

In fact, I once left. I just walked out of the school and they found me on the highway, because I thought I could walk back to Germany to my parents.

ANITA SCHNEE: How old were you then, do you remember?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, in '36 I was 13 years old.

ANITA SCHNEE: You were there only one year?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think it was not even a year. It was short of a year because my mother came, and I think she particularly mostly came to pay them because you couldn't send monies out of Germany, and I think, if I remember this correctly, my dad's bank account had been immediately closed after Hitler arrived.

But my mother came and was very angry at me. She said, "It's so beautiful here. I do not understand why you're so unhappy." But I felt like Heidi. I was homesick, and homesick is a horrible illness.

I have no remembrance of a lesson plan. I just remember that I had tennis lessons. I had a lovely tennis outfit, which I adored, and that was the only reason I took those lessons. It was made out of raw silk. I had designed it myself – it was sleeveless and it had a short, little pleated skirt. And one day I ran across the foyer – I was late for my lessons. I had my racket and tennis balls in my arms and slipped on the white marble floor of the foyer just in front of the director. The balls bounced all over the floor. She almost tripped over them and I was very much – I was just horrified and also got a calling down, of course.

I do remember the wonderful colors of the mountains and the sun going down over the mountains and the fires that were lit in the mountains to honor the Independence Day. That is my only recollection really of Lausanne.

And also the fact that we made a trip up to Mont Blanc and I got very, very sick with altitude sickness and stuck my head out of the bus and vomited all the way up Mont Blanc to the Mer de Glace, I was reprimanded for that. That was the kind of discipline one had to have in that school.

The other thing I remember is that when I first came to Lausanne – my parents insisted that I was old enough to travel from Düsseldorf to Lausanne by myself. It meant crossing the border. I was absolutely petrified at the idea that I had to deal with the Nazi border patrol. My parents were very unhappy that I couldn't handle that, and so they got Cooke & Co. to meet me at the border and shepherd me across to the Swiss side. My dad was furious that he had to pay for that because they felt at age 13 one should really be able to handle that sort of thing, but I couldn't. So that's my life in Lausanne.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, Mom, you mentioned designing the tennis dress.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: How did it come about that you were able to design clothes and then did you make them?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, no. I didn't make them. My parents used to go to Paris to buy my wardrobe and my brother's every year. And I mostly was happy with what my mother picked most of the time, except once and I think I told you about that. She came back with a kelly green and white wool – what do you call those tweeds, Harris tweed – plaid dress. In hindsight I think it was really a beautiful dress. I loved pleated skirts because I liked the pattern of it and the way they moved when you walked, but that dress had a white pique collar, which was okay too, but a large black taffeta bow in the middle of my chest where the colors met. I did not want to wear that dress. My mother insisted and in those days, of course, you did what your parents wanted and what you were told to do.

So the day we went to the zoo my mother said, "That is the dress you are to wear," and after much struggle, I wore it. And when we got to the monkey cage at the zoo, the monkeys all gathered in front of me in the cage and started laughing. I was absolutely mortified, and from that day on, I absolutely would not wear that dress because the monkeys had laughed at me.

ANITA SCHNEE: But getting back to the tennis outfit – how it was that you were able to design and have your own clothes.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: My parents really gave me freedom to design things and, of course, I'm eternally grateful for that because it sort of pointed into my career. That dress was custom-made for me, because by 1936 we were no longer allowed to go into shops as Jews – or I should say, shops were not allowed to trade with Jews, whether it was a grocery shop or dress shop or whatever. So from 1936 on, a lot of my clothes were custom-made.

I remember I had a green wool dress, which also I loved, that I designed and was custom-made for me, particularly to come to America, and that green wool dress is what I used to wear to high school at Cass Technical High School. It was totally out of sync with the rest of the high school students, but it was all I had.

{The other thing that I should have mentioned, how Anni would bring us groceries late at night. I mentioned that we were not allowed to visit, to shop for groceries, I neglected to say that the Jewish stores at that point had all been closed, and we were not allowed to market in Christian stores. I think that is important.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, getting back to Papi [father] and Mutti's [mother] circle – oh, I have it in Frankfurt. That's going back a ways. You had that guest book that you were looking at and you were –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, there are some names there I think that were in Frankfurt. One of the names that – I particularly remember and I hope this was Frankfurt and not Düsseldorf – I'm not sure about it. We need to look at the guest book again. But Tilly Wertheim was my mother's great friend. She was the sister of Eric Mendelsohn, the great architect, who worked in Tel Aviv, Israel. And Tilly would make regular trips to Israel – at that time it was Palestine – and brought back beautiful embroidered kaftans for us. She herself wore Yemenite embroidery on her clothes – which I loved and particularly remember.

My parents' circle in Düsseldorf was the people like Paul Klee, whom I then met in Lausanne when the Klees were living in Switzerland, and Fleischhacker was Düsseldorf, and I should also remember Lotte Juchacz, whose mother was at the Reichstag. She was one of the diplomats and I was really very impressed with Juchacz because she was the first woman lawyer that I met, and at that time I was 11 or 12 years old but I was very impressed; she was stunning, and I thought every lawyer

should look that way and should be a woman. Thinking back to those years I now realize how much my parents influenced me.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, also before we did this interview, we looked at actual pictures of the Frankfurt apartment and you were able to recognize a lot of the items in that apartment. Do you want to say anything about those, or do they sort of speak for themselves? I mean, you could even look in and see the floor plan and talk about the situation there. No? Nothing comes up for that?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, I thought I had already covered that. The Frankfurt apartment had the Biedermeier Zimmer. It had the tile fireplace in my dad's study. It had a chandelier that my mother had designed. My dad's study had the Biedermeier desk that we now have downstairs. And I remember that Mutti designed the chandelier – which was totally destroyed by the Nazis. I liked that chandelier actually. It was, I thought, a little heavy, but I loved the chandelier in the Biedermeier Zimmer because it was little beads – pearls, little glass beads – what they call echt [real] Biedermeier, E-C-H-T, which means truly Biedermeier. They glistened in the sun and changed colors when the lights went on.

My parents also had a bell pull, which was made out of those glass beads. In fact, the key pull that I have on that little vitrine, the Biedermeier vitrine, which I inherited from my parents, has that same beadwork. It all matched very well. My mother was very conscious of those things. She kept her social stationary in a leather folder with the same beadwork imbedded on the front. I still have it.

ANITA SCHNEE: Talk a little bit about her experience at the Bauhaus.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: She never talked about it. I don't know – the only thing I know about her introduction to the Bauhaus was that my grandfather, who was of considerable importance in her life –

ANITA SCHNEE: That would be her father Ernst Salomon?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes – was absolutely aghast at the idea that she should want to join those artists at the Bauhaus and, as I said many times, I don't think my grandmother, his wife, was living anymore. She died when my mother was at a very early age, in her early teens I think. But my grandfather, Opa, was totally aghast at such a thing. It was totally out of his sphere. He was convinced she would come back a Communist or pregnant, and my mother went anyway. She went to Munich anyway.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, this was one year after the Bauhaus had been founded, is that right, 1920?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, yes, but before then she was in Munich at the Hans Hofmann School where she painted. And in Munich was her first encounter with the Nazi Party, which took over the beer halls. My mother attended that and saw the fanaticism of that group. And then later, of course, in 1933 when we lived in Düsseldorf, my dad had become an important advisor to the steel industry: Krupp, Mannesmann, Thyssen. The industry actually was in Duisburg but the heads, the CEOs of the industry, lived in Düsseldorf.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay, let's keep this still with pre-Hitler, if we can. We'll get there. I just also wanted you to talk a little bit about the family circle and the travel to Taunus and Ostende. Remember you talked about how the family would gather and we looked at the diaries and the photographs of that. So just re-describe a little bit about how that was, how the family gathered. And actually that will lead us into the Hitler years, because I remember you told that one incident of the family

members standing up and saying, “We may never do this again.”

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, this was the winter of '33. We were already in Düsseldorf.

ANITA SCHNEE: But before that, before Hitler you used to go – see, it creates a certain climate or picture of how you would go into the Taunus, what the Taunus was, what you did there, that sort of thing, vacation. If you could just get – for the record, talk about that a little bit, just describe.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, when we – of course, when we lived in Frankfurt the family was close and we saw each other almost every day, but once we moved from Frankfurt, the family planned get-togethers. In the winter they would meet in the Taunus over the Christmas holidays and in the summer they would meet in Ostende [Belgium].

And that was always great fun for me because that was the time when I saw my cousins. I did not have a close relationship with them. They had been brought up in a totally different atmosphere. Their parents were merchants, and intellectually, it was like night and day. But we had fun together and especially in Ostende, and I think also in the Taunus we skied together, but I have a particular remembrance of the winter or the December of 1932, when it was very clear to everyone that we may not see each other again, because it was imminent that Hitler would be put in charge and take over the Reichstag and, of course, it turned to be true January 30th, 1933.

And that date is emblazoned in my memory because I remember immediately the swastika flags coming out of the windows. And I mean I don't know where – that certainly had not been the German flag up to that time but everyone had a swastika flag, everyone, overnight had a brown uniform, an SS or SR uniform, brown or black. But what I was trying to say is that my mother had been exposed to that in Munich in the early 1920s and she had seen the cult-like attraction of Fascism and was really very concerned about it.

ANITA SCHNEE: Do you think that made her more ready to move when the Nazis finally came, more than your dad because he hadn't seen the Munich situation? Possible anyway? It's just a thought.

So talk more about –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, Mutti, we moved – you mean our move to America?

ANITA SCHNEE: Right, that she had foreseen –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Our move to America had nothing to do with my mother foreseeing that. It was instigated by the Nazis because when my dad was pushed out of Dachau concentration camp he had to sign an agreement that we would leave immediately – Germany.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay, okay. So that – sorry.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: So that instigated that.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: But my mother's concern was that January in 1933 when my dad came back from a meeting at the Breidenbacher Hof and with a statement that Hitler had just been voted in by these industrialists and he had not raised his voice because he himself at that time felt that, number one, this was a move against communism, a move to a better Germany. He assured my mother that this would not in any way touch us because he had the Iron Cross, he had fought in

World War I, which was considerable, and he felt that would be on his record and the fact that these people knew that he was very much in the German tradition.

ANITA SCHNEE: So talk a little bit about how that process unfolded for you and your experience at school, on the streets, how you began to feel the Hitler incursions.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, as I said before, I was not allowed to go to school after '36.

ANITA SCHNEE: There were intervening years there, '33 to '36. You were still in school, were you not? You didn't talk about the teachers.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I talked about the fact that they sat us in the last row. That my German friends kept true to me.

ANITA SCHNEE: The dress you wore, that one story about the belt.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That was at the Müller Lyzeum. No, I did say that we could hardly hear the lesson plan, being way back in the last row. I was always poor at math and we had an instructor by the name of Liszt, who maintained that he was related to the famous composer. When I did not know my math lesson – he called me to the front of the class and took the belt off my beautiful French wool dress – it was light blue with a little pique collar and a blue calf leather belt with a brass buckle; I remember that to this day – and he took that belt and hit me because I didn't know the lesson. And that was really the general climate in the classroom. The Jewish students were regarded as trash.

ANITA SCHNEE: But, I'm sorry, I may be confused but that was not during the Hitler years, that was pre-Hitler that that incident happened?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I said it happened at the Müller Lyzeum.

ANITA SCHNEE: I guess I've lost a little track of the dates there. The Müller Lyzeum was when? What date was that?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I came to school, to the Blüscherschule when I was 5-years old and that was in 1928, so we already lived in Düsseldorf in 1928. I think there were four years, and I'm not sure about the years there, so that would have put us into 1932, 1933. And the next three years was at the Müller Lyzeum.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, I see. But that was during Hitler.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay. So then the Nuremberg Laws in '36.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, and that was important to my brother and myself, because those laws dictated that no Jewish family could have staff in their household and so our Anni, my nanny, had to leave.

And as I mentioned before, we were not allowed to shop for groceries or clothes or any kind of shopping in Christian stores. My parents got Anni a position or a job in a very fine Feinkost Geschäft, which was really like what's the name of that wonderful shop in England.

ANITA SCHNEE: Marks & Spencer, Marks & Spencer?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, Marks & Spencer is not a fine shop.

ANITA SCHNEE: Harrods, Fortnum's.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Fortnum & Mason. It was that kind of a store. And she was able to spirit out – of that store groceries for us. So between 11 and 12 at night she would ring the doorbell and bring us bags of things that we were able to eat.

{ANITA SCHNEE: You weren't able to buy your food.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Right, in Christian stores and Jewish stores were closed by the Nazis.}

I'm not sure I answered that question. I can't remember the question.

ANITA SCHNEE: The question was just talk about the atmosphere and your experience post-Nuremberg laws.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, that's part of it.

ANITA SCHNEE: So there was an incident you were on the street, weren't you, attacked? You told me about that, came home bleeding. I guess that's part of the mythology that isn't true. You went to –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, the thing I can remember is that the Müller Lyzeum had a summer house. I think it was in the Westerwald. I'm not sure exactly where it is. And the Müller Lyzeum, of course, was a girls' school, all girls' school. We all would move to that summer place for four weeks. It was a lovely place with beautiful gardens and marble chips on the walks, and I fell once and cut up my knee and really badly bled. And they refused to even give me Band-Aids to stop the bleeding. And that was pretty traumatic because I hurt and I couldn't get help – it should have really had stitches for my knee. I still have the scar.

But as far as walking on the street, that was on the 8th of November when they came to destroy our house. The Nazis broke in. Luckily, we were not home because a neighbor had warned us that they were on their way. And we walked the streets and saw the destruction and how the Nazis threw furniture through the windows onto the street.

As a family – it became clear that four people walking on the street was much too conspicuous. So we split up. My parents went their way, and my brother and I went our own way and luckily met a neighbor who took us in. Her husband was an architect and that was incredible courage, because, of course, you were liable to get shot if you took in German kids – I mean, Jewish kids.

ANITA SCHNEE: Do you remember their names?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: {I had not remembered the family that took us in, my brother and myself, during Kristallnacht. It was an architect's wife who took us in and their name was Hahn, H-A-H-N, and I think that refers to everything that I neglected to speak about in that tape.}

I knew the names. I just know that her husband was an architect and the concierge saw that she took us in and immediately called the Gestapo to tell them that she was hiding Jewish kids – and then the Gestapo called her and said that they were on their way and so my brother and I had to

leave. We went back to our apartment, our old apartment, only to find that the door had been ripped off, the windows were totally crashed, and all our furniture was out on the street, had been thrown out. The kitchen cabinets had been torn out of the walls. My mother's beautiful Limoges china, which she really saved for just her tea parties, was totally wrecked, crashed on a heap, and from then on it was a matter of cleaning up.

We sat on the heap of broken china and crystal. My parents' paintings had been destroyed with knives. And the [Paul] Signac, which I'm now facing, had been torn into little tiny pieces. We crawled all over the floor to find scraps of paper, which we collected and eventually my mother took to a restorer. The painting has been restored, but, of course, it's not worth anything like if it were intact. However, it's really much more worth to me because of what happened to it.

In any case, my parents finally came back and we just sat together and cried. But that wasn't accomplishing anything, so we got busy and started cleaning up and prepare to sleep on the floor for that night.

Unbelievably, German neighbors came to express their sympathy, and one in particular was Frau Grüters, the mother of Gisela, who came from Oberkassel with cookies and a pot of hot tea – I still have the pot. It's Hutschenreuther china. It's in our lower bedroom. And she came to console us and that was under threat of life really. It was incredibly courageous.

So that was Friday night and by Sunday my dad had been taken – we had a little Dachshund. My parents had taken the dog with them on their walk on the street. And my dad took the dog out on Sunday and then was greeted on the street by a Gestapo agent in plain clothes asking him if he was Herr Adler. Yes. And the agent said, "Please bring your dog home, and then come with me." And that night that agent brought my dad's glasses, his gold watch, his ring back to the apartment – if you can call it an apartment because we still hadn't a door, an entrance door, no windows – and my mother was absolutely certain that they had killed him. She was so stoic.

Later we found out that he had been thrown into the police prison. They had straw in certain areas where they told Jews whom they had taken into "protective custody" to lay down. Later I learned that my dad had a court date for one of his clients in Duisburg Monday morning. He told them that he had that date, and they came back to our place, picked up his things – his watch, his glasses, his clothes – and then took him by train to Duisburg to appear in court. My dad did that and on the way back, it was the reverse. The Nazis, of course, took in his fee after they re-delivered his clothes and things back to us.

And so that was the first week after Kristallnacht. My mother immediately got busy to try and find relatives who could get us – get my dad out of Dachau and get us out of Germany, and I remember the daily, sometimes twice a day, calls from England. Her sister and husband and their four children had emigrated early during the Nazi period, '34, '35. The calls came sometimes two, three times a day to please ship the children, and that was my brother and myself, out of Germany with the Kindertransport. That was the transport that brought German – Jewish children to England. My mother absolutely refused. She said – and I so remember her voice – "We will either die together or we will live together but we will not split up," and that was really very lucky because we would have never seen our parents again.

But from that first Monday morning after Kristallnacht, she would take us to the Nazi agency because she wanted to know where my dad was and what happened to him. Of course, they stonewalled her. They wouldn't give out any information. And, in fact, I remember having to climb those high marble stairs, and they would stand at the top of the stair; they would not even let her



get into the offices. They would simply take their guns and push us down the stairs, and my mother would take us and walk us back upstairs. But she never got information from them, and she never gave up.

Then she got busy to repair the furniture, because it was not allowed that we would take broken pieces out of the country. And since my parents could not take money out, these were their only possession that my mother felt could be shipped and possibly turned into money. She had everything repaired. And then as we went on, the Nazis kept passing new laws. You had – in order to get your possessions out of the country, you had to have it appraised by a German appraiser. You had to pay the value of that appraisal to the government before they would give you permission to ship it out. [In other words, you had to buy back your own furniture.]

My mother put all this into action and was incredibly courageous doing it. She never lost sight of the fact that eventually we would get out of this, although during Kristallnacht a lot of our friends were killed. One of my girlfriend's parents were shot right there in the hallway of their home because they tried to resist the Gestapo. Luckily we weren't at the house or my parents would probably have resisted them, too. But Hannah Rath's parents were killed, and she eventually got herself on the Kindertransport to England. [I remember her sad letters telling me how she was being treated by the family that took her in. I was grateful for having a wise mother.]

But one day – I think it was two, three weeks after Kristallnacht – we had a call from a Gestapo agent telling my mother that they were shipping Papi to Dachau. If she wanted to see him for the last time she should come to the station at a certain hour and she would see him being put on the transport. At 3:00 in the morning one night she got us up, my brother and myself, and we went down to the train station to say goodbye to Papi.

I remember my parents embracing and I remember the Gestapo agent turning his back to them so that he – and this was extremely unusual because as history has proven they would ship people without saying goodbye, of course. He turned his back and my dad kissed my mother for the last time.

But my mother was undeterred. She worked on our immigration. In the meantime – she had found family in New York who would give us a visa to come to America – there was a quota in this country, of course. And then – she submitted that to the German government and I think with the help of the Dutch and the Belgian government; I was really not kept in the picture with that. I just knew in the background that things were happening. She submitted that to the government to ask for my dad's release from Dachau. It had, I don't think, ever occurred to her that they would kill him. That just never entered into the picture. But then, of course, records show that they killed but I think in those days they took them in to what they called "protective custody."

One day my dad appeared in his prison clothes. He was so weak we could hardly recognize him. He was all skin and bones. He sat on the threshold of our place and I just remember the joy to see him.

They had knocked out his teeth; he no longer had his teeth. They starved him. And they eventually just pushed him out of the concentration camp. It was winter, he walked along the railroad tracks to Munich, in his bare feet – Dachau is near Munich – where a soup kitchen had been established by Polish Jews to feed and to finance train rides back to people's places. They helped him get a coat over the striped pajamas – they were just pajamas. It was wintertime. He had no shoes. They gave him money to take the train to Düsseldorf.

And then, of course, we within days left Germany. I think my mother had already arranged for the lift

van to pick up the furniture and send it to America.

There are a number of things that I forgot. Jews were not allowed to own silver. My parents had a great collection of silver, both for eating utensils and hollowware and ornaments in silver but it had to all be given to the government and that was I think right after the Nuremberg Laws. What the government would do is melt it and eventually bought ammunition – built or bought ammunition for that.

My mother refused to do that. She herself gathered up the silver, and she took it to a place where it was melted. She designed Shabbas candleholders to be made out of that silver and I can to this day draw the design that she had. And those Shabbas candleholders were the only remnant of the silver collection that was put into the lift van to America. Of course, it never got to this country. The van was vandalized in Cologne. My parents' wines – and these were wines that they had saved for my wedding – they were Ernst Salomon wines. My grandfather, as I said before, was in the wine business and had his own label. None of this came over, but, of course, thank God we came with our lives, and we came with a few of the wonderful things to remind us of the old days.

{I think we should mention here that on the occasion of my parents' 50th wedding anniversary, which they spent in Jerusalem, the golden city, I wrote to their friends, to send us memos of their former life together. Pictures of the Munich and Bauhaus days came back, showing (what I thought to be my conservative) mother, wearing a sailors cap, her guitar with brightly colored ribbons, and smoking a cigar. There also came a letter telling us of the candle holders which had been found in a crate marked: "wine press." The crate was found after the war under basement steps. We were incredibly excited, thinking that after 30 years, we had found my mother's Shabbas candle holders. When they arrived in Detroit, they were pitch black and turned out to be the antique, ornate candle holders of the Adler (my Dad's) family – not my mother's modern design. It took weeks to bring back their silver glow. We used them at Susan and Dan's wedding, under the chuppah. They are now in their dining room in Colorado Springs.}

Then came the day of our emigration from Germany. That was a day of great joy. Anni came to say goodbye to us. Of course, she wasn't allowed to come but she came anyway. People had incredible courage to show their sympathy and remind us that we had friends whom we left.

Anni came. I don't remember very much about our leaving. All I remember is that in the excitement my dad packed the visas, which we needed to get on the ship. That was a great excitement. Once we got to La Havre, they had to unpack everything to find the visas, number one.

Number two, my dad had, having been in the book business, had a wonderful library of first editions, all of which had been burned by the Nazis with my dad paying the expense of transporting them to be burned. He retained certain volumes of authors that had not been allowed to be published in Germany. They were very dear to him. He had sent them earlier, much earlier, to Belgium into a safe deposit box. Someone, an officer from the bank I think, was instructed to meet us when we left Germany. I don't remember where he met us. I have a feeling he came to Düsseldorf to meet us at the train and deliver those first editions. But during the train ride to the border, there was a rumor going around on the train that the Gestapo was coming through to inspect everything. Some people, who were leaving with diamonds, were swallowing the diamonds. Everyone was trying to cover up what they were trying to smuggle out, in order to exist, because we could only take \$4 each, and that meant \$16 [between the four of us] out of Germany. My dad had these first editions and when he heard that they were coming through the train to inspect us he opened that train window and just threw them all out into the farmland that we were passing. [Knowing how much he loved books, this was done under incredible duress.]

The minute we crossed the border I started my diary. I marked it with the time we left Germany. I called it "Leaving Germany," begun the day of our leaving Germany, Thursday, February 23rd, 1939, and coming to America.

ANITA SCHNEE: Mom, let me interrupt. We're just about out of tape so let's take a pause here.

[Tape change.]

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Let's see.

ANITA SCHNEE: You were just about to read the diary. You were talking about crossing the border into France and you were opening the diary.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Okay. My diary is starting and it says, "French border, 18:20," which is 6:20. And it says – and I'm going to talk in German and try and translate it as best as I can.

"Ein Alpdruck ist von uns gefallen." A millstone has fallen from us. "Deutschland liegt hinter uns." Germany lies in back of us. "Kann es denn wirklich wahr sein?" Can it really be true? "Wird man wieder als Mensch behandelt?" Is one recognized again as a human being? "O, das ist zu schön um Wirklichkeit zu werden." Oh, it is too beautiful to be reality.

And then I describe the trip from Düsseldorf to New York. Of course, passing the Statue of Liberty I will never forget. We came on the Aquitania. It was a terribly rough trip. I was seasick all the time, all during that trip. We came with our little Dachshund, who had been put into steerage, and we were – my brother and I, were extremely unhappy about that but we were able to visit him every day. Then as we get into New York harbor, and we saw the Statue of Liberty – it was so moving. It just so happened that Bruno Walter, the great conductor, was on the ship also and I met him standing next to me looking at the Statue of Liberty. We cried.

{This now pertains to tape two where I talked about coming over on the Aquitania. Many years – many, many years later during a Thanksgiving holiday, Eddie and I were visiting our children in New York and our grandchildren, we decided to show them the restorations at Ellis Island. They were beautifully designed, and among the restored pieces was a large model of the Aquitania. And, of course, I told my grandchildren the story of our arrival in New York on the Aquitania and so they took a picture of me standing in front of the model because they said, "That's grandma's ship."

The other incident that I would like to correct is I am referring to Bruno Walther as having stood next to me on deck. We were passing the Statue of Liberty, and we were both incredibly moved by it. I'm not sure if it was his first trip; it certainly was mine. I'm referring to him as a composer, but he really was a conductor or known as a conductor.}

When we arrived in the port of New York, of course, we had never seen skyscrapers like that. We had never seen people munching gum. That was unheard of. But our family, the Weils, who had given us the visa, were at the quay and greeted us with open arms.

Now, I should mention that the Weil family was in the tobacco and liquor business and had apartments on Park Avenue and in the Essex House facing Central Park. It was a totally different atmosphere for me and a little bit foreign, certainly very foreign. I didn't know their language and I certainly wasn't accustomed to their way of life, but they were incredibly gracious to us and then saw to it that a day or two later we got on the train to Detroit.

My mother came with gifts to them and I remember her bringing French Gobelins pillows, which she thought they might enjoy. They were hand-done, petit point pillows, from the Musée Decluny. That's what she was into at that time.

{It is interesting to note that although she was a great admirer of the Bauhaus people and knew many of them, her own work was influenced by the Impressionists or earlier – by Gothic and Renaissance art. Her beautiful calligraphy portfolio from those school days is like missals rather than typography. The marbled frontispieces which she used to design could fit into the old leather bound books which I remember from my Dad's library. Now I very much love those small remembrances which my parents left. They bring me back to a culture which I dismissed during my younger days as being "too old fashioned." I realize now what a wonderful foundation it all was.}

In any case, my dad had been promised a position in Detroit and so we went off to Detroit.

ANITA SCHNEE: Mom, if I could slow you down just a bit and bring you back to Germany, I'm sorry, but two more things about Germany before you left: the art exhibition, the degenerate art exhibition, and the story of the ticket, the Wagner ticket.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh. Okay. I don't recall the year but Hitler was staging an exhibition, a traveling exhibition of what they called "Entartete Kunst [opened July 19, 1937 in Munich]," which is "degenerate art," showing the modernists and particularly the Jewish painters and sculptors. The idea was, and I think this was well publicized, that it would turn people off to that type of art and that they should rather appreciate the art that Hitler expounded, which was very Germanic and "Heldenleben," so to speak, was, of course, the big cry.

Well, I heard –

ANITA SCHNEE: What does that mean in English?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Heldenleben is the cult of celebrating heroes. Helden are heroes. Leben is life. And that was, of course, Wagner's philosophy, as we all know, with the Ring and all the rest of that.

Anyway, to come back to the exhibit, I don't remember how I heard about the exhibit but I was determined to find out what it was. Whenever there were things like that happening in Düsseldorf my parents would not attend because they were known for being – I don't like to say radicals – but certainly in the modernist style and sympathetic toward that type of art. But I wanted to find out more about it and my parents were totally against it.

ANITA SCHNEE: Totally against your going.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, my going [because it would further prove their "left" tendencies]. I had a brown wool coat, a winter coat, and my mother got me a brown large fur hat to go with that winter coat. As I got dressed to leave she got that – I hadn't worn that hat – she got that hat out and she pushed it down on my face over my head into my face and she said to me, "They will never recognize you in this, so go." Well, I went.

There was a long line to get into the – I don't remember whether it was a museum or a gallery. I stood, of course, in the back of the line, taking my place in the back of the line. What the Germans had done is with loudspeakers out on the street – I don't know how you call it – transport the songs of Kurt Weill, Bertolt Brecht and the other composers that were of that era and were Jewish, and [Gustav] Mahler. They hoped to incite people against that type of music. It was the first time that I

heard Lotte Lenya – Lotte Lenya, I was totally transported by it. I loved it. I loved it.

And then once I got to see the art I was beside myself. I had never seen colors so brilliant and so unusually put together as in the Kandinsky paintings. I remember those particularly, [Oskar] Kokoschka, [George] Grosz. I mean, it was as though I had been introduced to a new world. And I came home just totally transported by that.

What was the other thing you wanted me to mention?

ANITA SCHNEE: The Wagner ticket in 1936.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh yes. My parents had season tickets to the opera every year; that was sort of understood. I remember my mother going off in a brown satin dress with her long earrings – that she had inherited. We loved that brown satin dress. That was the only time she wore it because it had such a slick texture to it. We loved to feel that texture and her furs with it. And so off they went to the opera. They would never take us because it was considered that children could not understand, and might cause a disturbance.

Well, it was my incredible dream to hear Wagner because my parents were totally taken up by the Wagnerian operas. I decided one year – and I think I was only 13. Maybe I was 14, I'm not sure.

ANITA SCHNEE: You said it was '36 is the date I have.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, I would have been 13. I decided the spring of that year that I wanted to get myself a job. My parents had a friend who had a little button shop, and she needed some help getting the buttons organized and that was my job.

I worked all summer to earn the money. That money I had allotted to be able to see the *Ring*, Wagner's *Ring* [*Ring der Nibelungen*]. By the end of the summer, I think I had enough money to buy the opera tickets.

ANITA SCHNEE: The Ring is a really long thing, right?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, it's several performances.

ANITA SCHNEE: And so you had – you wanted to see it all?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Absolutely. But I was particularly enchanted with the idea that Siegfried was going to be – that was my hero – he was going to be transported in a little boat drawn by a Swan.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, you have a little drawing of it.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: And I drew that into my sketchbook. And when I got to the opera box office, I could not purchase a ticket because they would not sell tickets to Jews. I was totally crushed. But that was life in Germany. You just kept carrying on.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay, so now New York Harbor and on the train to Detroit. Your dad had been offered a job.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. We got to Detroit.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, that was – is this right, it's March 4th, 1939? No, no, that was your landing.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: We landed in New York March 4th, '39. I don't remember when we got to Detroit, but it was within that week, because we didn't have money to stay in New York and we didn't really have money to stay in Detroit in a hotel. I think the Weils, the New York Weils, gave us that.

ANITA SCHNEE: They were wealthy, weren't they, the Weils?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, yes, as I mentioned before Edwin Weil – was in the cigar business, and his brother – and I cannot remember the first name – was in the wine and liquor business, in fact, had his own label and, in fact, when I met Eddie, he had worked and – he knew of the Weils – and had worked one summer selling liquor, the Weil liquor. That was so curious. Anyway –

ANITA SCHNEE: That reminds me of Mutti's family. Were they through Mutti's family in the wine –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It was Mutti's family.

ANITA SCHNEE: I see.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: So anyway we got to Detroit and then, of course – that was in March. We all had to immediately start finding a job.

Oh, the thing I should mention in Detroit is when my parents took us on a visit, wherever we went, the first thing they took us to was the art museum so that we got a feeling – and the churches, the church interiors – so we would have a feeling of what the culture of that place was.

We came to Detroit without a job or money and before looking for a job my parents took us to the Detroit Art Institute [DIA]. And to my mother's great dismay, there wasn't a modern painting to be found in any of the galleries, and that was unfortunate.

Now, what I also forgot to say, during my young days in Germany, the trips that we took in Germany were always with – other than the family reunions – were always with an eye toward educating us. My dad, having fought in the World War I German army, wanted to show us where the war had been, and so he took my brother and myself to the battlefields of Belgium where the bunkers had been, where the guns had been placed, where the action had been. The Belgians had left those battlefields in total destruction so that you could see the mangled trees and the mangled houses, and it made an impressive picture for me. My dad wanted us to see that and hoped that we would never live through another war. Of course, that was long before World War II, and unfortunately he was wrong. It happened again.

Then also, since my parents had the business connection to Holland, we spent wonderful, wonderful days in Amsterdam, in Scheveningen, where my mother's Bauhaus roommate lived, in Katwijk where my parents rented a summer place and my brother and I would go out with the fishermen early in the morning, 4:00 AM, 5:00 AM to fish and eat the raw fish. And one of the trips was to Bruges.

[End of Tape One.]

The trip was to Bruges where my parents introduced us to [Hans] Memling, [Jan] van Eyck and the Flemish painters, and that was also an unforgettable experience because we had to take a little canoe. The Becinage, which was the museum where those paintings hung, was accessible only by canal, and I remember my dad rowing to the Becinage, telling us the story of Memling and Van Eyck and the miniature painters of that period.

The women sat in front of the entrance tatted the lace, and once you got into that museum, it was totally black except for those miniature paintings, and that was an unforgettable experience, too. They appeared like jewels.

I think those were the highlights of the travel in Germany. After '36 we were not allowed to travel at all within the German border but my parents were able to get out into Belgium and Holland. I think we also took a trip to Paris but I don't remember that too well. But I remember the beautiful museums in Belgium and Holland.

And so coming back to Detroit, our first visit to the DIA was very disappointing, and then later we found out that Mr. [Robert] Tannahill, who was a Ford family member, established the modern collection and gave money for the modern collection. Also, Hawkins Ferry, who became our great friend and benefactor. But they certainly had very little, and if they did, they weren't displaying it accessibly at that time.

{Just a note about Hawkins Ferry: "Hawky" whose money came from the Ferry Seed Co., whose family had donated the property on which the DIA was built, was having Bill Kessler, our good friend and architect from the Mies School, build a house on Lakeshore Drive.

Hawkins was gay, he was, I think afraid of women. He asked Eddie to help him with some interior problems by showing him what he wanted in an Italian architectural magazine. I think it was Ed's only architectural foray. He enjoyed the lunches at the Ferry Great Grosse Point mansion before it was torn down to make space for a steel and glass structure. Those lunches were hamburgers, served off Louis XIV armoires and among the world's greatest paintings. Perhaps this is also the place to mention that 64 years later, when my textiles were exhibited at the Cranbrook Museum exhibit "Staying Power," I was asked why I stayed in Detroit. This is the reply out of their catalogue:

"Coming from Germany in 1939, my family made their home in Detroit. We soon discovered that Detroit's strength is its people. Enormous encouragement by art teachers, a four-year scholarship to the Rhode Island School of Design and a fellowship to Cranbrook prompted me to open my studio here. Here I met the "love of my life." Edward Schnee had recently graduated from Yale University; we created a partnership, Adler-Schnee, which became a Detroit institution for avant-garde designs in architectural spaces, furnishings and textiles. It attracted kindred spirits. Philip Johnson pointed out to us that more architects worked here in contemporary design than in any other U.S. city. The list started with Eero Saarinen, Minoru Yamasaki and Alexander Girard – many of whom became our friends. Charlie Eames and George Nelson, working at Herman Miller in Zeeland, Michigan, told us that the public would accept whatever we were creating as long as it was well designed. They were correct, but it took 50 years! Ask me why I stayed in Detroit and I will tell you about a most misunderstood city. I have enjoyed Detroit's extraordinary location on a major waterway, close proximity to Canada, a multi-faceted musical life, the Detroit Institute of Arts and much more. I have enjoyed the people, the people that called on us and my work."}

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay, Mom, so you're in Detroit, and I have a note here that if you arrived in March, you must have been put immediately into an intermediate school. I have the school records from then and that you graduated in June '39.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes – actually I was in a school with Japanese kids to learn English. I don't think I learned anything else but it was mostly – I didn't know any English.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, your report card says you learned the whole gamut.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I did?

ANITA SCHNEE: So how in the world did you do that? Did they make accommodations for language?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think they probably did because – the other thing that's interesting – eventually when I got to high school and also still that fall I knew very, very little English. My German high school records served me to be able to skip chemistry and math and all those other –

ANITA SCHNEE: Appalling.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: – appalling subjects that I did not like. They determined that the German schooling was on a level of – in those subjects was on a level of the university schooling. So I was able to skip that in high school.

ANITA SCHNEE: Thank goodness.

Now, I also have a note that it must have been between intermediate school and Cass that you got the job at Fresh Air Camp.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. We arrived in March and in May, I applied for a job at a summer camp. And the director, with whom I'm still friends, gave me that job and there I met young people who are still my friends.

ANITA SCHNEE: So the director was Irwin Shaw?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Irwin Shaw was the director and the campers – not the campers but the counselors were mostly university kids. People who had just been admitted to Wayne University or Michigan. I became very close friends. In fact, Selma Fraiberg was my very first friend, who later became a well-known child psychiatrist and who wrote *The Magic Years* [*The Magic Years; understanding and handling the problems of early childhood*, New York: Scribner, 1959] and many other books. Gene Agins became my good friend and he later became our insurance agent. I met a young boy by the name of Ruben – that's his last name; can't right now recall his first name. [George Ruben. I also met Tiny Konikow who worked in the kitchen, Tiny eventually became president of the Detroit Chamber Music Society. I worked for 40 years on the board with him.]

In any case, the people I met there were so congenial and took me in as a green immigrant that I still feel very comfortable with their friendship.

ANITA SCHNEE: This was a Jewish –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, it was Fresh Air Camp, and it catered to Jewish kids. It was a wonderful summer really. And then I applied to Cass Technical High School.

ANITA SCHNEE: And tell the story about the application and your IQ.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: On my application I was asked to do story problems. I had never heard of story problems. I didn't know the language and couldn't figure them out, but I did the best I could. And when I was called in and told that I was not accepted because of my IQ being 42, I couldn't understand it. My parents obviously were very upset because Cass Technical High School was a wonderful art school – had a wonderful art department and was known for being an excellent school. My parents couldn't afford a private school and had to send me to public school. In fact, one



of the reasons they stayed in Detroit was so that my brother and I could attend Cass. Their friends were really in Cincinnati. When it was known that my dad didn't have that job, they were seriously considering moving to Cincinnati.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, he did not – the job that he was offered in Detroit never panned out?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No. It did not materialize. He had a very hard time finding any kind of work. My mother immediately found work sewing mattresses in a mattress factory. It was very hard work. I remember during the summers she would come home and complain that the tar from the roof was dripping on the mattress materials. [At night we all made lampshades, a trade we had learned in Germany, before emigrating.]

I don't remember what my brother did but I think he was probably selling papers. My parents bought him a little red cart so he could push the papers to his customers. We really had to find any kind of job.

When it was known that Cass would not accept me, my dad went down to talk to the principal – the school was in downtown Detroit; you had to take a streetcar – he had to tell them that he thought the reason I made such poor marks – was because we didn't know the language; would they please accept me for the first year. They said they would try.

Well, I simply blossomed when I got to Cass because it was my love. I was able to only do art in the art department: perspective, charcoal drawings, pen and ink drawings. I took a class in costume illustration. I took a class in pattern making. I just went wild.

Not only that, I held down two or three jobs, besides that. I sold bread in a market in the inner city. I took on the night shift because nobody else would take it. It had the advantage of not only paying a little money, but also I was allowed to take the day-old goods home. That fed our family.

ANITA SCHNEE: By little money, according to what I could see, you made between \$0.19 and \$0.45 an hour. Is this the right –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, I didn't know that.

ANITA SCHNEE: That doesn't –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That doesn't ring a bell, but I know it was extremely little.

ANITA SCHNEE: Did you get a raise? Do you remember that? Because I found \$0.19 and then \$0.45. It looks like you doubled your income.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Maybe I did, because I don't remember that. But I know that Awrey's Bakery – was known to never hire Jewish people, and it was really quite an exception when they took me on. I was extremely happy to have a job and to be able to contribute to my parents' household.

I also had a job babysitting. And, of course, my brother and I did all the housework at home because my parents were trying to earn money. My mother took on incredible hours at the mattress factory. My dad worked in a nursery that was open night and day. He always had a love for flowers, and so that's what he found.

Anyway, it was extremely difficult those first years, but I made friends at Cass. As I mentioned before, I went to school in Parisian couture clothes. That was all I had. The kids made fun of me. I

didn't have saddle shoes or the kind of clothes they wore, but that didn't seem to deter me. I made some wonderful friends, one of which I am still corresponding with, who was in the art department and whose sister's house I eventually planned once I was in the architectural business. {It was Anita Green now Cornblit. This year, now 58 years later she flew from Los Angeles to celebrate my 80th birthday with me. She is a wonderful painter.} The other one was Eva Hofmann, they had come over from Vienna. The father was an architect at Albert Kahn's, and we had much in common. Anita Green, the friend I've previously mentioned was really my only American friend. I could not relate to American teenagers, just couldn't. My interests were totally different. For Sundays I got a job as a Sunday school teacher. Those kids I could not really relate to except when I meet them once in a while at social functions. They remember me; I don't remember them.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, just to double check, I can't remember whether you mentioned the date, but my records show that you started Cass September of '39 just after the Fresh Air summer, and you graduated in January 1942.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay. Tell us a little bit about what life was like at Cass. You told us that you were taking art classes. Do you know that they actually called that the Home Economics Department?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. I was in both, the Art Department and the Home Economics Department.

ANITA SCHNEE: And the dress design curriculum, that was –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That was Home Economics.

ANITA SCHNEE: Only girls in that?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't remember. No, I think we had also boys who cooked, but the intense remembrance of Cass was that I had an English teacher, Ms. Eaton {Also, I think I made a mistake referring to Miss Eaton as having been a lecturer. She was my English teacher at Cass Technical High School. At the McDonald Foundation, I think the foundation was McDowell. Hopefully I'm correct in that.}, who had worked at the McDonald Foundation, which is I think in the East someplace, and it is a foundation for gifted students, and I had a wonderful relationship with her.

ANITA SCHNEE: Would that be the John D. and Kathryn T.? Is that the same?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't know. I really don't know. But I know that her summers were spent at that foundation teaching and attending lectures.

And the other wonderful friend I had at Cass was Ms. Sether, who was in costume illustration, and I think she came to Cass from Lord & Taylor's where she had been in the advertising department and did their costume sketches for the *New York Times*. Actually she was responsible, I think for my four-year scholarship to the Rhode Island School of Design [RISD]. She helped me get that portfolio together. She critiqued my work. She was really my guiding spirit.

Another spirit of another kind was Mr. Schuholtz, who was in charge of charcoal drawing, perspective drawing. It was a custom at Cass to sit in the hallway and draw the staircases, draw the hallways to get the perspective, go out and sketch the houses around Cass. I got my first and only – only D in his class. I was devastated because my marks had usually been A, B, maybe C.

ANITA SCHNEE: And if I could just interject, speaking as your daughter, I went to Cass myself and I had the very same Mr. Schuholtz, and I might have even gotten the same grade at first, but I eventually managed. I think you did, too.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: He was a good teacher.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: He was very good and I'm glad I got that D, although I was totally devastated at the time, because it made me realize that I had to work even harder and learn much more.

In any case, the other thing about Cass was it was a high school and in the life drawing classes, they would not allow a naked model. So I, in addition, took – and I don't really know how I had the time – took classes at Wayne University where a nude model was allowed. That was the university setting.

ANITA SCHNEE: That was August 1941.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, was it?

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes. I think you have your report card down there.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Anyway, my mother was absolutely convinced that every artist needed Beaux Arts training and the Beaux Arts training, of course, was drawing from the nude model, drawing from plaster casts, drawing and painting from or learning from the artists, the great artists in the art museum. I don't know if I still have it, but I had permission to do that. You had to get special permission because your marks had to be at a certain standard. But that's really my background. That was the foundation, and I'm awfully glad Mutti made me do that, although it was terribly dull. I wanted to design. I didn't want to draw from the nude model.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes, and also I want to just get in for the record, too, that when I was looking at various materials in preparation for this interview, I discovered that Harry Bertoia actually went to Cass also, which I never knew. So I thought that was interesting that he went to Cass.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Do we have to mention who Harry Bertoia was?

ANITA SCHNEE: Why not?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, of course, Harry Bertoia made his name in sculpture and then eventually developed a line of furniture for Knoll Associates. I met him at the judging of the Scholastic Competition.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay. Also, I have a little note here, two things: the IW job and also the dress with pannier. Is that a taffeta you were talking about?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, when I was in preparation for my scholarship portfolio, I did costume drawings and I made a dress. I had designed it, I had made the pattern and I sewed it. I was photographed in my dress, and I think that's how I got that scholarship to the Rhode Island School of Design. I had really applied to the costume design department, which was well known. Of course, being in the East, it almost assuredly landed you a job on 7th Avenue in New York.

In any case, that taffeta dress that I designed and made, instead of having the pleats that I loved, I designed it so that the pleats were on the outside and made little loops all around my hips or panniers. Is that what they call it?

ANITA SCHNEE: I'm not sure. I know they put them on motorcycles, like side pouches, they're called panniers.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: But are they like that, loops?

ANITA SCHNEE: They're kind of like that on either side.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, I don't know anything about motorcycles, but anyway, that got me the scholarship.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, also did you work for Winkleman during the Cass years?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Eventually I graduated from the bakery and – let's see – I don't know if it was the following summer. I have a feeling it was after I graduated from Cass that I applied at Winkleman's in the display department. Winkleman's, of course, was a chain of ladies' ready-to-wear stores here in Detroit. Eventually they branched into Ohio and across the country.

But I landed a job in the display department working with two Oriental display men. I was assistant to them, and met Manny Hartman, who was a CEO at Winkleman in charge of window display and incredibly strict in his critiques: how the display should be shown and he would come and check. The windows were changed every week. These two gentlemen would design the display and I would help put it into action. Mr. Hartman would come around and if there was anything just the slightest little bit out of order, he would reprimand me, I was scared to death of him.

Later, much later, after I was active in the interior design career, I designed their fixtures and interiors. Mr. Hartman again, was in charge. For 17 years, and we had a wonderful relationship until he died.

{During those years I met their merchandise manager, Jerry Chazen. I helped him with the interior planning of their home, here in Oak Park. He and his wife subsequently left for New York to establish Liz Claiborne. To our great joy, and quite unexpectedly, our granddaughter Sarah Schnee received a scholarship to Duke University from the Chazen foundation. Indeed, it is a small world.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay, before we leave Cass and go to RISD, I have a little note here about a teacher named Ms. Louise Green. Do you remember her?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, she was head of the art department. Absolutely I remember her. And while Ms. Sether was head of the costume illustration department, Ms. Green and Ms. Davis were in charge of the Art Department – but particularly Ms. Green. It was a fantastic department. I would say 90 percent of the students, once graduated, walked away with scholarships to Carnegie, to the New York costume schools or Los Angeles – the Los Angeles, I think it's called, Art Centre School.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yeah. I think that's spelled funny, too. I have to look that up.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It was a wonderful training, wonderful, so that's what happened.

Once I got to the School of Design – oh, I was thrilled. I remember the day I got that wire.

ANITA SCHNEE: I have that in either March or April of 1942.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, that's possible. I don't know the exact date. But I remember getting that wire and being absolutely beside myself because I had really hoped I would get a scholarship to one of the New York fashion schools: Traphagen I think was the name, or Pratt. My dream was to be accepted at Pratt [Pratt Institute School of Art and Design].

When that scholarship to the Rhode Island school came in, I didn't even know where Providence, Rhode Island, was, so my first inclination was to look it up in the atlas, and then I was really thrilled that it was in New England. That was important for me, because I knew very little about New England. I knew that there was a European culture of some sort that I could connect to. I was a little disappointed not being in New York, because New York, after all, was considered the Mecca, but that was pretty good too, to be in Rhode Island.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, just to be sure here, if this helps your memory at all, again the records seem to show that you graduated from Cass in January of '42, although there is some stuff about a June '42 commencement also, but you got the RISD scholarship in March or April of '42 so there's some time in there that –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, that's when I think, if I remember that correctly, I was at Winkleman's in the display.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, okay. Any more about Cass? Well, just to add, again for those people who are listening to this who don't know about Cass, when I went there some 20 years later, it was the same situation. Cass was still unbelievably fantastic, the background that it furnished the students, and again all my classmates got scholarships to New York and Los Angeles. And as far as I know, today it's still the same. That's still that same –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I haven't kept up with it, but our good friend Irving Berg replaced Mrs. Green.

ANITA SCHNEE: No, no, no, [Jules] Trattner.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, Trattner, of course. And then I think Irving Berg, didn't he?

ANITA SCHNEE: That's right.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Okay. Well, it was still way up there.

ANITA SCHNEE: A wonderful class.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I have not kept track and I have not been at any reunions.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, they're building a huge addition at the moment to Cass.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Are they? I didn't know that.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, it's a whole block.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Wonderful.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay. So are we ready to move onto RISD, Rhode Island School of Design? Entered in fall 1942 and graduated in 1945.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: {Also I should mention that the four-year scholarship to the Rhode Island School of Design was given to me by the director of the school, Royal B. Farnum. That was a very important name in my education. I had become friends of the Farnums and found that their academic background and their love for the arts was something that we shared, and I certainly owe that scholarship to him, without which I could not have attended college or art school. I feel it was the beginning of my career; it really was. So I want to be sure to mention Dr. Farnum.}

Okay. It was a problem to get the money together for, number one, the trip to Providence. The Wolverine Train was running and, of course, the cheapest ticket was the night ticket and I would sleep on those cold and hard wood benches to get to New York and then to Providence.

ANITA SCHNEE: And, by the way, too, again reviewing the records, you have a schedule – a train schedule – from those days. This is wartime and so there's this little notice at the bottom of the train schedule that says, "If trains are sometimes late ... passenger trains don't always have clear right of way ... must sometimes yield to troop trains or freight trains loaded with vital war materials."

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Absolutely.

ANITA SCHNEE: "Please be patient and bear with us," that kind of thing.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I did not remember it, but it's absolutely true. But then when did we enter World War II?

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, Pearl Harbor Day [December 7, 1941], December 8th, 19 – now, the year I'm not very clear about, so maybe that notice was from the later time that you were at RISD because you were there through 1945 and, of course –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It was probably later. I don't remember that the war was declared when I was at RISD, but I have no remembrance of that.

I do remember that my very best friend lived in Newport, Rhode Island, and going to the Newport Naval Yards to sketch and being reprimanded because I was not an American citizen at the time, and they thought I was doing subversive political stuff against the war effort. At RISD –

ANITA SCHNEE: You were not a naturalized citizen at that point. I should point that out, too.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No. No, I was not – as a matter of fact, I was not a German citizen either, because Hitler had taken citizenship away from us. I was a nobody.

But at RISD, I met people with whom I'm still friends. My best friendship was with Roxy Price. She was the daughter of Matlock Price, who was a very important art director in New York. They were Quakers, and I was very much taken in by the Quaker philosophies. I went to the Quaker meetings with Roxy. Her real name was really Nancy. We called her Roxy – I have a feeling we called her Roxy because she was into stone sculpture. I'm not sure about that.

But anyway, I went to the Quaker meetings with her and was totally enchanted by the harmony and the beautiful expression of those people and met a lot of the Price friends. Roxy had been brought up by her grandmother and old aunts. Her mother had died very early on. She lived, as I mentioned, in Newport in a William Morris style house – during many trips to Newport I met their circle of artists.

Of course, Newport was a special place. The oldest Jewish synagogue was in Newport, and the

early colonial houses were such a treasure to me. And the Price's and their friends – John Howard Benson's family lived in – one of those places, John Howard Benson, who was my calligraphy teacher, I have to say taught me everything I know about design.

ANITA SCHNEE: But I thought he was a sculpture professor.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: He was indeed sculpture. He designed the logo for the Rhode Island School. But I did not take classes in sculpture. He was my calligraphy teacher.

He sent us out into the fields to cut bamboo stalks and make them into pens and then do the calligraphy that way. He never used a metal pen point. He was a towering figure, not only physically but in voice, in philosophy. Everything about him was large and wonderful, as far as I was concerned.

He had bought the John Stevens workshop in Newport, which was an old stone cutting studio that did dedication plaques; they did the plaques for the Metropolitan Museum, for Yale University. They did cemetery headstones, chiseling, all by hand. Eventually at one point, I think Roxy took over that workshop when John Howard died.

In any case, when I later met my husband and we were married, it was our first trip. I wanted him to know the people that had been so close to me during my college days. We went – and here I'm skipping a little bit – we stayed at John Howard's place. They were Quakers. His wife, Fisher, their family had a place next door. They went way back in American history. Their house was filled with American primitives and English and early American furniture. In fact, when we tried to sit together in the parlor on a Chippendale sofa, John Howard would have to prop up the leg before we could sit down. He then announced that he had been offered – and this was 1940s – he had been offered \$30,000 by the Metropolitan Museum for that Chippendale sofa, but was not about to give it up.

In any case, they were thee-ing and thou-ing to each other. I met their children, who were totally the opposite with cutoffs, motorcycles, wild jazz music, while their parents were thee-ing and thou-ing.

In any case, that was the household of the Benson family, I think I should come back to that. On a trip to Washington to show our grandchildren the "monuments," we went with Danny and his family to the Roosevelt Memorial.

ANITA SCHNEE: Danny is your son and my brother, Daniel Joshua Schnee.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. We went to the Roosevelt Memorial, which was big blocks of rocks with Roosevelt's speeches inscribed in the rocks; his famous fireside chats. I looked at that calligraphy, and I said to Danny, "I know that calligraphy. Isn't it absolutely beautiful how it was chiseled into that rock?" And Danny was totally unmoved. He said, "What's so special about it?" And so I pointed out how the chisel marks had been left, how everything had been so carefully studied and spaced, and when I came back to Detroit and opened my – not the *National Geographic*, the magazine that the National Trust publishes – I opened it up. There, lo and behold, was the story of the Roosevelt Memorial in Washington and who had chiseled those wonderful statements of Roosevelt. It was a Benson – John Howard Benson, Jr.

I immediately sat down and wrote to him of my remembrances of his father, I was so thrilled that it had been his commission. He wrote back in absolutely beautiful calligraphy, just the way we had learned it, telling me the story of what had happened to his parents who died. He had taken over the workshop.

So here were these wild kids of my college days turning out this wonderful work.

Now, while I was at the School of Design, as I mentioned, I had to earn a living, not only to pay for my trips back home – I think my tuition had been paid but I'm not sure if the room and board at the college was paid, but certainly not the art material that I was using. In addition, I had to send money home to support the family back home, because my parents still had not found proper jobs, certainly not my dad. So that was hard.

I worked in the library. I worked at night at Newberry, which was the dime store downtown. I made signs. I had babysitting jobs. I mean, I had to work very hard in addition to keeping up my scholarship work. It wasn't easy, but I'm glad I did it because it's part of me now.

ANITA SCHNEE: Mom, I don't know whether you want to, but I would like you to tell the story about the Roxy prize.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh! Roxy was a very unusual girl, to say the least. As I said, she was raised by her grandmother and her aunts, her old aunts. Her father was in New York as art director. And she had very strange ideas about life but wonderful. First of all, she was raised in this William Morris house. Maybe it was not William Morris. Now that I think of it, it was probably arts and crafts movement, but it was dark and it was very much wood, and it had ships in bottles all over because some of her family were ship captains.

Anyway, that was her milieu. She was a wonderful calligrapher, and she designed woodcuts. One year, she decided to enter into a competition, and the competition was to design your own coffin. That was absolutely up her alley because she was intrigued by life after death.

Anyway, she won that competition and she won the prize of a cow. That was the prize. What were we going to do at school with a cow? Well, the Bensons had property in Vermont, and I think her family also had property in Vermont – I should mention that Benson, Vermont is very much on the map – Roxy, after she retired, moved to Benson, Vermont, I have visited her there in a little cottage which she occupies with millions of cats.

Anyway, the cow was shipped to Vermont, I don't know what happened to the cow after that, but it was certainly a relief.

[Laughter.]

ANITA SCHNEE: And now a few words about Bacia.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Bacia Stepner was my roommate and came from a Boston family. She was a potter, and we were very close in college at the Rhode Island school. I would take trips to Boston with Bacia and there, of course, was taken in by the fact that Walter Gropius had become head of the Architectural School at Harvard. In the meantime I had transferred, I should mention, from costume illustration to interior architecture, and so it was a natural just to fall into that group.

Bacia and I took trips. We didn't go to Maine but we would take sketching trips to Rockport together. After graduation and after being married, she came to our wedding and I have pictures of that. Then eventually she married Murray Edelman. I would send her the hand-me-downs of our children's clothes and in return, she would send me the pottery she was producing.

That's about all I can say about Bacia.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay. Also I uncovered an article that you wrote that was published in the *New York Times Magazine* section dated October 17th, 1943, in which you expressed your opinions



about Nietzsche, Mussolini and Hitler.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Good Lord!

ANITA SCHNEE: I know. I was totally amazed. Do you remember? It was excellent.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I have no memory.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, okay.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: What did I say?

ANITA SCHNEE: It was an excellent article. Oh, well, the war was on, and you were predicting that Hitler was going to come to grief.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, really?

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: How good for me.

ANITA SCHNEE: I'll show you the article later. Okay, you don't remember.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No. No recollection. But I was, of course, very much interested in what was going on in Europe. In the meantime we heard that our family was transported to Auschwitz and also my grandmother, whom I totally loved and adored. When I was a little girl, I would sit in front of her on a little stool, which I still have, watching her hair being combed. The lady would come every day at 11:00 AM. My grandmother had long, white hair, and she would put it up in a – what do they call those, puff –

ANITA SCHNEE: Chignon.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Chignon. And to me she looked like Queen Mary, who was also wearing that kind of hairstyle.

Anyway, that was even before I came to the School of Design. We had a letter from my aunt that my grandmother had passed away. I was totally destroyed because I had hoped that someday – she would come to America and I would see her again.

{I remember her as being the only member of my family who ever complimented me on my work. My parents expected me to do my best. Often the best was not good enough in my mother's vision. Oma was enthusiastic. She called me "Mucki." She would say: "Mucki wird 'mal ein grosser künstler." [Mucki one day will be a great artist.]}

I also didn't see my aunt anymore. Bertha was my dad's sister. She had been a friend of Clifton Fadiman's, who was on the radio I think, wasn't he?

ANITA SCHNEE: And then on TV too, I think. He was just a very – and also publishing, too. Didn't he – wasn't he Random House or some –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't remember Clifton Fadiman, but we had tried to get her to this country through Clifton Fadiman, whom she knew, but it was too late. She was transported off to Lodz and then gassed.

How did we get on that? Okay.

ANITA SCHNEE: That was just referencing your article. I wanted to ask you –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I should also mention – and I can see where I would write such an article because I was very, very much taken up by Roosevelt. I hung on every speech that he delivered. And believe me, I was the only one I think – at the Rhode Island School of Design who had any appreciation for Roosevelt. They were all against him – every one of my friends, but I looked at him as a savior. He saved our lives. And I loved the diction and the way he delivered his speeches. I was totally taken up with that.

ANITA SCHNEE: How did Roosevelt save your life, according to your perspective?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, I thought he had given us the quota. As it turned out, Roosevelt was really against the immigration but I thought he was responsible for our –

ANITA SCHNEE: Personal dispensation.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: – our quota. And I also forgot to mention that when we got our entry number – we had to go to Stuttgart to the American consulate to be examined and to pass tests, and you were given a number. And when we got to Stuttgart – now this is before, of course, our immigration – I did not pass the math test, and I was beside myself because I thought I had ruined the possibilities for our family to come to America. I was totally hysterical. But as it turned out it didn't count; we made the trip.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay, now a little bit please about the transition from the – let's see, the costume design to the interior architecture. What was that like? What happened there?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think what happened was that I became to realize that fashion design was too restricting. First of all, I remember reading Goethe saying that architecture was frozen music and I remember saying to – my mother that architecture really encompassed all the arts, and I felt that that's where I wanted to be. Fashions were just too limiting. It was too changing. I mean, I'd be designing "style." That was kind of phony I thought. But I didn't think architecture had that same stigma. So that's how I decided that interior architecture – was for me, and not fashion design.

When I got into that department, it turned out that it was mostly learning about the different styles of architecture, which was pretty good. I mean, you have to know that but it was not getting into the more contemporary mode, which is really where my heart was.

ANITA SCHNEE: There's an awful lot of interest in the effect of your being a woman and your being Jewish on your prospects in architecture. I keep getting curators asking me questions about that. I wonder if you could say anything about your experience in that area – gender discrimination or religious discrimination.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, architectural offices did not hire Jewish applicants, nor did they –

ANITA SCHNEE: Male or female.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, I don't know about that – I can't address the male issue because my friends in Detroit were in architectural offices and Albert Kahn was hiring Jewish immigrants – particularly from Vienna, who were architects. Of course, Albert Kahn was Jewish but not really seriously practicing Judaism. That was the deal there, but they certainly weren't hiring women.

And I somehow knew that and I don't know how I knew it. I had often thought – the fact that I had gotten the scholarship by competition made me aware that in order to get ahead, it was best to submit your work to competitions. I submitted my work at the Rhode Island School of Design to Condé Nast, and they recognized it and it was for the Prix de Rome or Prix de Paris. I don't recall that.

Anyway, they were not sending people to Europe because it was right after the war and – no, the war was still going on, in '45 at that time when I submitted it – but they were getting people into important jobs.

And so since I was graduating from interior architecture and it was a very traditional department at the School of Design at that time, they got me a position as a designer at Lord & Taylor's. Lord & Taylor's was a lovely store, a beautiful store at that time and the antiques they sold – rare antiques were beautiful – I lasted about two days in that job because it was not really my métier.

So I went back to Condé Nast and I said, I'm really unhappy doing what I'm doing there and so they got me an interview with Raymond Loewy.

ANITA SCHNEE: But now, let me slow you down just a little bit to say that this was – you graduated in summer of '45 with a bachelor's in fine arts and interior design, so the Conde Nast competition came towards the end of your stay at RISD?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: In my senior year. I worked on that all through the senior year.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay. So then you won that and you went with Bacia, right? You were saying –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Bacia and I went to New York, yes. I don't remember what kind of a job she was looking for, but I know what I was looking for.

ANITA SCHNEE: And it wasn't Lord & Taylor.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Right.

ANITA SCHNEE: So then you went to Raymond Loewy in the summer of '45, right?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It was really spring of '45. I should mention that my parents came for the graduation. It was the first time they had put together enough money to be able to take a trip.

And I should also mention that I graduated with a bunch of prestigious people with fancy names, and I was only Ruth Adler. And so I had the idea if I have a fancy middle name, it makes me more important. I decided that Ruth Wellington Adler was a wonderfully sounding name, and that was the name they called out when I was called to the stage to get my diploma, and my mother did a flip.

ANITA SCHNEE: And it was not for joy.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No. She was very unhappy.

There was something else that I think I should mention. It's now slipped by me.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yeah, I had all that in my notes and I don't have anything else, just to say that you were at Times Square when the war ended.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, I was already employed at Raymond Loewy's at that point. It was that

summer I think when the war ended, but I'm not really clear on exactly.

ANITA SCHNEE: What was that like to be there?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I was dating a newspaper correspondent at the time. It was pretty exciting and I was really happy.

But life in New York was interesting. My interview at Raymond Loewy's I will not forget, because I really didn't know how important he was in the industrial design area. I just knew that they had an architectural office that they were doing graphics and industrial design, and they needed a designer, and that was the important part at the time. When I got there, they made me do a drawing of anything, and I said to them, "What's that got to do with this position?" And he said, "Well, if we approve it, you will have a job with Raymond Loewy." Well, that was the first time I really looked into how important Raymond Loewy was.

It was so important to me that I worked with a man by the name of Robert de Verac, who was the head of the architecture design department, but my drawing board was in back of his and next to Minoru Yamasaki's, whom I befriended, you can't help it. On the other side was Warren Platner.

They both became my friends. Yami, as we called him, and I were working on the Meyer Emporium in Sydney, Australia. Yami was doing a presentation drawing out of crayon.

ANITA SCHNEE: Mom, let me stop you there because we're close to the end of the tape, and let's just –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Again?

ANITA SCHNEE: Again. And we've got to just reel it back for one second because when I was looking at the materials from RISD I noticed a mention of a guy named – I don't know how to say it quite in German – Ramisch from Waldemar School in Berlin. Did you know him at all?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I knew Waldemar Ramish, but he was in a different – I think he was in the sculpture department. How did I get to him?

ANITA SCHNEE: I don't know. And also John Frazier.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: John Frazier was the head of the painting department. I didn't take any painting lessons, but I did make friends with Mr. Christ-Janer, who was the head of the museum. The reason for that was because, off and on, I babysat for his kids and then met his brother again last year or the year before in Sarasota.

ANITA SCHNEE: Wow.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think Christ-Janer got to be head of the Ringling School of Design in Sarasota. It was he or his brother. I don't –

ANITA SCHNEE: And is he the one who's giving you a teaching position?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, I did get –

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, you did before.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: – teaching – no, just this year I got – it's still on my desk, the teaching

contract.

ANITA SCHNEE: With Ringling?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: With Ringling, but Christ-Janer is no longer the head of the school.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay. Well, that's it for the tape pretty much. It looks like we've got a minute. Anything else quick about RISD? One minute, go!

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Can you stop it so I can think about it?

ANITA SCHNEE: Sure. Okay. I think we're recording, Mom, so you can go right ahead and start with the Raymond Loewy year, few months. You got there in a few months after you graduated from RISD, summer of '45, and you worked – my dates are a little unclear, Mom. Was it May '45? What is it, I've got May and fall of '45.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I worked from I think May to fall of '45.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, that's what I meant, just those few months.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: But I think they were important months, because, number one, I made all these connections, people that I value, whose designs I value, and also New York is a fabulous place to be and especially when you're young and you're open to new ideas. I got myself a room in an apartment on Riverside Drive. It was in close proximity to Columbia University. I enjoyed the international teas every Sunday. I was involved in some of their lectures. It was just a very inspiring time.

As far as my work was concerned, Mr. Loewy was of considerable stature. He had a certain style that I thought was incredible, wonderful, with foulard neck pieces and so forth and so on, and spats to the office, but also my work with Yamasaki was interesting. As I mentioned before, he was designing the Meyer Emporium. We were both. He was doing the architectural work, and I was doing the finishing materials. One day, Mr. Loewy came around with the client, Mr. Meyer, and Meyer was a fairly stout man. He leaned over, and Yami was a very slim Oriental type. Meyer sort of overpowered him and leaned over his drawing table and asked him to take the drawing off. It had not been sprayed with fixative; it was in conte crayon. So Meyer took that drawing, which was on onion skin, and folded it, much like you would fold a handkerchief into maybe a size five by seven square and subsequently put it into his vest pocket.

Well, Yami's eyes turned from slitty to round – because he had been working two weeks on that drawing. It had not been fixed with fixative. It was just a sketch. It certainly would have been destroyed in Mr. Meyer's coat pocket.

And the interesting thing here is that years later, many years later when our son Jeremy gave a conference in Dallas – one of the participants was a Meyer from Sydney, Australia. I approached him and I thought it was possibly the son of the person that I had met at Raymond Loewy's office. It turned to be the grandson. I said to him, "Did you ever build that building?" He said, "Absolutely we built that building, and many more." So that sort of brought it around full circle for me.

When I was in New York, really starving, I was making \$27 a week and existing on crackers and cheese and not much else, except the dates that I had with young men who would treat me to dinner, and also the teas at the International House at Columbia. Then came that wire from the Cranbrook Academy of Art [Bloomfield Hills, Michigan]. I had submitted my portfolio, after my

graduation from RISD, to Wally Mitchell at Cranbrook, the entrance registrar.

ANITA SCHNEE: Mom, before you get to Cranbrook, just say a few words about who Yami was and Warren Platner. I think you said Warren was the Knoll designer but say a little bit about Yami.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yami was later hired by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls here in Detroit – to be the head of their architectural department. His great chagrin was, and they had not told him that when he was hired, at least to my knowledge, he was not allowed to see the client. He was to design, but he could not make the presentation of his designs. Of course, it was right after our war with Japan, and since he was Japanese, they were leery, I'm supposing. That was one thing.

The other thing, of course, is that he could not find a place to live. So he bought a farm way outside of Detroit, brought his parents over from Japan. His father worked in the shoe department in one of the department stores here. But years later, years later when Detroit finally expanded, that property came to be very valuable and was valuable enough for Yami to build the kind of contemporary house that he liked to build.

Of course, after leaving Loewy, and I dreaded to leave because –

ANITA SCHNEE: But Yami also built the World Trade Center and –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, he did – but that was years later when he was on his own. He designed the World Trade Center and I had some input into that. The desk on the other side of me was Warren Platner, who subsequently designed wonderful furniture for Hans Knoll and designed the restaurant “Windows on the World” in the World Trade Center.

But the important thing here is that this entire group of Raymond Loewy's, my friends in that architectural department, eventually that fall came to Detroit with Yami being employed by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, and Warren Platner, Morris Jackson and a whole group of others then moved into Eero Saarinen's office in Birmingham, Michigan, outside of Detroit.

When that wire came from Cranbrook, I did not want to leave New York at that time. I felt that Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, where the Cranbrook Academy was, was the country, and once you've seen Paris, you do not want to leave it. It was the country and suburban, and it just was not my taste.

ANITA SCHNEE: What is this wire you refer to?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The wire that gave me a one-year fellowship to Cranbrook for my master's degree.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay, and then I can interject that you graduated – you started in fall of 1945, you graduated in May 1946 with a master's of fine art.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes – my parents convinced me that I could always find that job at Raymond Loewy's and go back to New York. Mr. Loewy assured me that he would give me a higher salary once I had a master's degree. But that wasn't enough for my dad. He sent me a one-way ticket and he said, “You come.” And so I came.

But I should mention that prior to that, in the spring, when I handed in my portfolio, we did not have a car. Everything had to be done by public transportation. And my mother, God bless her, went with me for that interview to Cranbrook. It's a long way from Woodward where the buses would stop,

down Lone Pine Road and finally to the Cranbrook campus. It takes about an hour each way to walk it, and we took turns carrying my portfolio.

I think the dedication that my mother had for my career I should absolutely mention, because I owe my parents a lot. They were not happy with that art career at first, since my grandfather had been offered an ambassadorship to Belgium, to Brussels by King – I think it was Leopold at that time – and refused it because he felt that no Jew should meddle in politics; it would only increase anti-Semitism.

ANITA SCHNEE: This was on which side of the family, Mom?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: My grandfather on my mother's side. I mentioned it once before.

My parents felt very strongly that I should be in the diplomatic service, and they really trained us from early years to study languages. My mother herself had learned Italian before she learned German. Of course, we spoke German at home, but my parents spoke very often French and especially when they didn't want us to hear it, they would always say "regarde les enfants."

And so foreign languages were important, and I remember my parents at one point trying to debate whether or not to send us to Dutch schools rather than German schools because the Dutch schools were particularly good. If you went to a Dutch school you had to learn five languages, no less, five.

In any case, then when I insisted on the art education that I later pursued, my parents very much supported it, except never, never, never in complimentary terms. It was totally understood, this is the career that I had chosen for myself and I'd better do good. I tried, and that's the route that I followed. I didn't need their compliments. It was enough that they said, "Okay, you can do this, but you'd better be the best," and that's what I've been trying to do all my life.

So at Cranbrook it was a totally different picture from what I had been accustomed to. I referred to the Rhode Island School of Design as my Beaux Arts background because it was geared in that direction. At Cranbrook there was no structure of any kind. There was no study plan. You were simply given a studio, space and you were told, "This is the place where you come up with ideas, and at the end of the year, you are expected to mount an exhibit of your work at the museum. If we consider the work good, then you'll get your degree."

First of all, I should mention that Cranbrook was beautifully landscaped and so well thought out in every architectural detail. Mr. Saarinen – Eliel Saarinen – planned the campus. Mr. [Karl] Milles planned the sculptures in specific places. Everything was total perfection.

Mr. Booth, who originally gave the property and also started the educational community – every day walked the campus, and if there was one leaf on the ground that was not in the right place, he would call one of his 30-some gardeners to take care of that.

I wasn't used to that kind of perfection, and it was incredibly difficult to live up to it. I was used to making drawings and sketches and just shredding the paper all around me in total disorder until I came up with the right idea. That was impossible to follow at Cranbrook, because every time you threw down a piece of paper, it was as though you were disturbing the landscape.

In any case, it took me about six, eight weeks before I could get adjusted to that. And before I could come up with some kind of a plan to work and produce something creative. It was incredibly hard to do that on your own – I think the instructors would come around once a month or maybe once a

week – I have no recollection of that – to critique, but it was not really a critique. It was more to talk to you. You had to come up almost with your own critique.

Well, anyway, I had a horrible time until I understood what they were trying to do, and they were trying to lead me into a totally creative mode of thinking for myself.

Because at that time since I didn't think I could get a job in an architectural office, I would turn to industrial design. I think what I really should have done is studied landscape architecture because I love plants, and it would have been a lot easier as a woman to do that.

In any case, I thought I would have to go into an industrial design office eventually; I took a class in ceramics with Maija Grotell, the Finnish ceramicist who was absolutely for perfection of form. We threw pots, I learned about glazes and I learned about forms. That was very good. Maija was an incredibly astute critique. She would work all night on her own pots, and in the morning we would hear her smashing them because she wasn't happy with the way they turned out. That's how she really was with her students. It was total perfection.

I don't remember very much more about Cranbrook except that I worked hard – I had a very good friend, Kit Fiebelman, who came from New Orleans and who was a painter. I think we were probably the only two Jewish students, although she wasn't very Jewish. She worked in the kitchen with me. And at the end of the year, I found out that she was really engaged to Johnny Rice, who all year had sent her orchids periodically, beautiful Japanese kimonos, and beautiful Japanese embroidery work. He was the son of the Rice-Stix Corporation in St. Louis and also Stix Baer and Fuller, the department store. So there was a great deal of money, which she cagily hid by working in the kitchen with me.

In any case, I was invited to her wedding. It was an absolutely fabulous affair at their summer place in Charlevoix. I was her bridesmaid. I did not have a proper dress to wear. I arrived in Charlevoix on the bus with a little overnight weekend suitcase. I was met by a chauffeur and a limousine. He looked at me and he said, "Where is your luggage?" And I said, "That's it." So we drove to this beautiful house where they had brought their entire staff up from New Orleans. It was actually her grandparents' house, the Godchaux, who I later learned; own all the rice in Louisiana.

In any case, I just had a little cotton dress with me for the wedding, but it was an unforgettable affair because the food was flown in from Chicago, the chocolates came from Rosemarie de Paris in New York, the flowers came from another place, and it was like paradise really, a wonderful weekend. The Loeb's from Kuhn-Loeb, the stock brokerage, entertained in their summer place. It was just an incredible weekend, and I met some very important people there, who were actually flying their own flags under the American flag. The people from Sears Roebuck in Chicago, the Loeb's from New York, from Kuhn-Loeb and the Lowenstein's who were flying a Lowenstein cotton flag under the American flag – they came I think from Cincinnati. Also May Department Store people.

Anyway, it was very impressive but kind of turned me off because it was not my world. My parents were disappointed. They felt that I had finally arrived in the right circles, but they were really not my circles.

ANITA SCHNEE: Talk about Norman Thomas instead.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, I forgot that Norman Thomas had come to Cranbrook. That was wonderful about Cranbrook; they had invited important people in the political and creative world,



and that's how I met Norman Thomas. He spoke to us in the lounge.

ANITA SCHNEE: He was a communist, right?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Everybody knows he was head of the Communist Party. But anyway, so that was Cranbrook. {I'm now referring to notes pertaining to tape three, where I am speaking of the family of Johnnie Rice. The department store that I'm referring to is Stix, Baer & Fuller. Also in that connection, and this was my Cranbrook connection, I'm referring to speakers that came to Cranbrook, and I think I've referred to Norman Thomas as the head of the Communist Party. He was not. He ran for president on the Communist Party ticket, but I don't think he ever was the head of the Party.}

ANITA SCHNEE: But you told that story about Eliel and Loja.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, yes. I struck up a friendship with Eliel Saarinen, although he insisted all the time that I was not Jewish, I was German. So I was invited to the Saarinen house and that was a wonderful experience because Loja, who was his wife and a weaver – she wove all the tapestries and curtains at Cranbrook – would sit on a very hard bench with her tapestry draped from the ceiling along the wall, across the bench and to the floor, and Mr. Saarinen would sit on a very hard chair. To my great pleasure, those chairs were reissued eventually by International Contract Furnishings with my upholstery designs on them.

In any case, we lounged at their feet, and I think this is where I learned how difficult life can become as a designer, to have the discipline and the energy and stamina to do things over and over again until they are absolutely perfect. And this is how the Saarinens worked. They took a problem and dissected it and studied every small part of that problem until they got it so that it was the best solution. Then they put the whole thing together, and it really turned out to be then the perfect answer for that problem. That's what I learned there.

I also learned that, in order to get ahead, one had to submit to competitions. Mr. Saarinen did this all the time and, of course, he was known for having won so many of his competitions in Finland and also here. He said always, "Before you enter that competition, study the jury because that will determine the outcome of that competition, whether or not they will award your work."

Well, it stood me in very good stead, because while I was at Cranbrook, I submitted a design for a contemporary house to the *Chicago Tribune*. They sponsored the competition because it was after the war. The new gadgets, kitchen appliances and so forth had come on the market, and the problem was to design a contemporary house accommodating those features.

I designed that house in steel glass, the Mies van der Rohe style. It had very large, glass windows. I had no way of covering those windows because I couldn't find appropriate drapery fabrics and vertical blinds hadn't been invented. So I set out to design my own abstract patterns on drapery fabrics.

I won that competition, and when they exhibited my work – in the office of the *Chicago Tribune*, they had a very large reception. The architectural community of Chicago attended and the firm of Shaw, Ness & Murphy was there. They were designing automotive showrooms with very large window areas for the new models which had come out after the war. They had no way to cover them, to shield the the bright lacquer of the cars against the sun, they wanted those designs. One of the architects came up to me and said, "We can't use cabbage roses with those new car designs; this is exactly what we need." My answer was: those designs are just a figment of my

imagination; they're not on the market.

The short story is that they eventually gave me a deposit and said, "Here, buy the fabric, buy the screens and we set you up in the silk screen printing business, because we want those designs." And that's how I fell into the textile design business. {When I came back from Chicago and realized that I did not have enough money for all the background fabric, a philanthropic attorney, Fred Butzel, wrote out a fifteen hundred dollar check.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay, before we leave your education, there are a few questions about that. What do you think the strengths and the weaknesses of your educational background were?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, I think I've talked about the strengths: learning from the genius of others.

The weakness is that I really did not have a liberal arts education. I hardly learned the history of Germany or the geography. I hardly learned the history or geography of America. I attended civic classes at Cass, but I didn't know the language, and so I memorized everything and I never retained it. Except for my stay in New England, I really had very little knowledge of what went on in this country. This is one of the things that my dear husband always criticized – he had a Yale education and a liberal arts background. I was totally void of that.

I should have had that, because I think it makes for a more rounded person to know the Greek plays, to know Shakespeare, which he did, backwards and forwards, to know the great – not only the great writers but the great musical talent that is in this country, and I think that's a very weak spot in my education.

{It was Eddie's genius. That's how we supported each other. He could spell difficult words, which were not in my everyday vocabulary. He used them with great pleasure. When my knowledge of history, geography or drama was out of focus, he jumped into the conversation, knowing exactly what I was missing or had confused. It was one of the many attributes that I admired and loved him for.}

ANITA SCHNEE: So now –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think there is something we forgot that I wanted to say, and I can't think of it.

ANITA SCHNEE: I interrupted you on the *Chicago Tribune* story but I wanted you to treat your entry into silk screen printing separately, and I thought we could do that in the context now back into the chronology of meeting Eddie after Cranbrook and talking about how that developed.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I didn't meet Eddie after Cranbrook.

ANITA SCHNEE: Eddie being Edward Charles Schnee, Ruth's husband and my father.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: After Cranbrook I got a job at Michigan State teaching design. Michigan State at that time was what I call a farm college. It attracted students from the Upper Peninsula who – I don't like to say, had come from the farm but they did come from the farm – and were not really interested in the fine points of design or modernism. In my foundation design class, I had them design to music at first, which was not really what the college had in mind.

In any case, I didn't last very long there, but I did continue to design fabrics, because I really liked it.

So when I came back to Detroit from Lansing, in December of – let's see, I graduated in '46.

ANITA SCHNEE: The MSU date of your appointment was October 1946.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yeah, and I came back in December. That's how long I lasted.

ANITA SCHNEE: One semester.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Not even a semester, I think two months.

{I should mention here in connection with my teaching stints that about two or three years ago I was asked to become artist-in-residence at Western University in Kalamazoo.

ANITA SCHNEE: Western Michigan.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Western Michigan. The lectures that I gave there seemed to have instigated a new teaching plan for the faculty. They were very excited how I was able to connect my work with the different periods in the history of art. They had never looked at – and the lectures were on Modernism actually, not on art history, but they had never looked at it that way and were extremely grateful that I had pointed that out to the students.

The students I think were – I had the feeling were totally uninterested except for the European students. They kept me late. They absolutely punctured me with questions. They were so enthusiastic, and I really regretted that the American students didn't share that enthusiasm.}

I looked for a silkscreen printing studio where I could design fabrics and I found it on 12th Street off an alley. And there I had a 30-yard table – I think it was 30-yards – or was it 30 feet? I'm not sure. No, it must have been 30 feet, 10 yards. It was a long table.

I read about silkscreen printing. I had no idea about it.

ANITA SCHNEE: You never took it in art school?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Never.

ANITA SCHNEE: Never had any training?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Never.

ANITA SCHNEE: Nothing.

[End of Tape Two.]

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: So I had a carpenter build me a 30-foot table. I padded it and stretched it with a canvas. I had a carpenter build me screens for the designs. They were actually frames that I stretched with organdy because silk wasn't available after the war. I learned to cut film and adhere it to those frames, and then I tried to buy background fabric. It was difficult because fabrics had been rationed during the war. What year did you say it was, '46?

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, you got back from MSU in December '46, so 1947.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It was shortly after the war and everything was rationed still. The big textile houses were gobbling up the fabrics which were available, so I was really kind of stuck. Since I'm a

sewer, it occurred to me, why can't we print on tailor's canvas? I liked the texture of it. The mohair and cotton combination was very attractive. It was a nice texture coming through the ink dyes I was using, and it was cheap. It was very cheap. It was cheaper than cotton. Later I learned that it had incredible – I mean, there was absolutely no maintenance to that fabric. It seemed to shed the dirt. It stood up against the sun. In fact, about 50 years later it's still hanging in some of the commercial establishments that we serviced at that time. So that's how the silkscreen printing business got started, and that was '47.

Toward the end of '47 I met Eddie Schnee. He was the friend of a young man who had contracted polio and had been bound – in those days they were putting people into an iron lung. Poor Richard was stuck in this iron lung. He hardly could see. He had, what do you call, that sickness in the eyes.

ANITA SCHNEE: Glaucoma?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't know if that's what it was but he was half blind. And I would come occasionally and read to him.

ANITA SCHNEE: Is that Richard Savage?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Richard Savage.

ANITA SCHNEE: He was a family friend.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: But he was not a family friend exactly, I'm not sure I remember how I met Richard except – oh, yes, I now remember. I had a friend who was an attorney in one of the major law firms here, Butzel Levin, a big law firm.

ANITA SCHNEE: Butzel Long?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It was Levin; it was Butzel Levin in those days. He helped a lot of immigrants get their citizenship papers and set them up into businesses, get them jobs and so forth.

ANITA SCHNEE: Did he help you with yours, which I guess you got in '46?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, he did.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: And he became interested in my work and dated me, and came out to Cranbrook to visit me on a regular basis. His dates were always business dates. We never just went to a movie or out to dinner. He had to see a client about a contract; he had to go squash fires here and there, as lawyers are doing.

ANITA SCHNEE: What was his name? I've forgotten.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Nathan Millstein was his name. One day he called me and said, "I have to make a Shiva call," which is what you do in the Jewish religion after a person dies. He asked me to come with him. Well, it was the call to Richard Savage's house. His mother had died of cancer and Mr. Savage was associated with the Levin law office, and so that was the connection. And that's how I met my longtime friends, Barbara Savage [Cherish], Joan Savage [Weisman/Parris], Richard and Jimmy Savage.

When we were there for sitting Shiva, that's where I met Richard, who was in the iron lung. I don't remember Eddie having been there; I don't think so. But one day I got a call from Richard saying that he had just come back from Warm Springs, he had a friend who had picked him up there and brought him back to Detroit. He hadn't seen me for so long and would I please come to a party that following weekend?

I thanked him very much but – (in those days I had dates lined up three weeks ahead of time) – that was just too short notice. But I said, would you please come to our house for Sunday dinner? I can't come to your party. So he said, "I can only come if I bring my schlepper" – schlepper being his assistant who would push the wheelchair and who had picked him up in Warm Springs and brought him back to Detroit. I wasn't very happy with that situation because I had had another engagement planned for that evening and it would be very difficult to get rid of two of them. So I said, okay, but you've got to leave by no later than 5:00 PM. [The "Schlepper" was Edward Schnee]

Well, they came to dinner. My parents ate dinner Sunday afternoons, according to the European style, not in the evening. My mother served her plum cake. We sat out in the garden under the tree. She brought out what she called her Zwetschenkuchen, German for plum cake and she served it. And both Richard and Eddie said: "Oh my God, this is better than Rumpelmeyer in New York," was it in the Plaza, Rumpelmeyer?

ANITA SCHNEE: No, it was on Central Park South.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, at least when I was there.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: What's the name of that hotel?

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, the Hotel Pierre?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Is it the Pierre or the Plaza?

ANITA SCHNEE: No, it's not the Plaza.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Anyway, it was the Pierre, I think. It was a very fine – not a delicatessen, it was a European bakery shop, a tearoom really, beautifully designed interior. I remember it was art deco. And they were serving plum cake. And both Eddie and Richard said, this is better than Rumpelmeyer. Eddie never forgot that plum cake.

Then after we had dessert they coaxed me – coaxed me to bring out my designs. I brought out *Pits and Pods*. It was printed in red and charcoal on haircloth, Eddie absolutely flipped. He said, "That's what I want for my room." Of course, later, after I saw the room and saw how small the windows were. The design was totally inappropriate for those windows – [laughs] – but anyway, I was happy that he offered to buy it and to buy it at a retail price, because I needed the money, and even to offer to print it.

ANITA SCHNEE: I never knew that.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: He came the very next day on Monday to print his fabric.

ANITA SCHNEE: Which he paid retail for?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: He paid retail for. [Laughs.] So he always said: "That made me see what a good businessperson she is."

Anyway, he printed that fabric. And, let's see, it was the end of the summer – it was the fall. Then I never saw him again, but I had letters from him telling me how he loved the fabric. In return I sent him an old tie – [laughs] – He always held that against me because when that package came, he said, he expected a beautiful hand-printed silk tie, and I had gotten that tie from a dime store. It said, "pal" on it, P-A-L. [Laughs.] He wasn't very happy with that because he was accustomed to handmade suits and hand-blocked wool ties.

Anyway, he came back I think around Christmastime – yes, it was Christmastime. In the meantime, I had the print shop, I ran it and I found salesmen who would go out to the architectural trade and show the fabrics. We got some orders. I had hired two young boys who would silkscreen print the yardage. Things were difficult because the fabrics didn't sell very well. People were not accustomed to that sort of thing. But I managed to keep my head above water.

So when Eddie came back around Christmastime, I saw him and – let's see, how did that happen? Richard in the meantime had moved into his parents' house. I was still reading to him because he couldn't see the script. He had gotten a professorship at Wayne University, teaching in the math department. They had a helper who would take him to Wayne University, but he couldn't see his students. He would stand against the blackboard, and he could only recognize them by voice.

At Christmastime, there was a party planned, and I met Eddie again at that time, I think. I'm not sure about it, but I know that we both took Richard to a math professor's party in deep snow and dropped him off at that professor's party and we then drove around Detroit, talking all the time, and ended up at the Toddle House, which was a little coffee shop on Grand Boulevard in the New Center area district of Detroit, there Eddie slipped his ring on my hand and said, "I want you to have this because we're going to get married." I was totally floored. It came out of the clear blue sky. I hardly knew him, but I thought he was wonderful.

He had a certain wit that I loved. He was extremely verbal. He was really the first young man that I had met – and I had a number of boyfriends at that point – who understood my European background. I found it very difficult to relate to American young people, except those that really could sympathize with what we had gone through in Germany. [Eddie's family had taken in a refugee housekeeper during the war.]

We went back to Richard's party, picked him up, brought him home, and Richard said, "I'm going to need someone to help me get undressed" – he was totally paralyzed. And Eddie dropped him into the house and said, "Not tonight, Josephine" – [laughs] – and then came back and we – oh, yes, he said to me, "You know, I can't get married until I check with my shrink in New York, but I want you to have this ring, and when I get back to New York I will buy you one at Tiffany's." I said, "I don't want a ring from Tiffany's. This ring was your dad's Masonic ring and that's the ring that is close to me." Anyway, Eddie left the very next day to check with his shrink, and then called me up from New York and said the shrink says it's okay. [Laughs.]

Meanwhile, back home, Richard's sister, the next morning, immediately called my mother and congratulated her. My mother had absolutely no inkling of what had happened – I hadn't had a chance to tell her – and she came into my room absolutely furious, that she should have been consulted before I accepted that ring.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, now, was this in the tradition that the man is supposed to go ask the father

first?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, absolutely, and that's another thing she was very upset about. My dad was in Cincinnati on a business trip. He was not home. We should have waited until Eddie had a chance to talk to my dad. It was all wrong, according to her. And not only that, she had never met Eddie, except that one afternoon with the Zwetschenkuchen story.

My dad immediately came back from Cincinnati, and I think Eddie and Papi sat at the Statler for lunch one entire afternoon so that Papi could get an idea of his family background and get to know him. He immediately drew a credit report on him and the family. To my horror – I really didn't think he would do anything like that – showed it to me and said, "Is this what you want to marry?" And my reply – I didn't even look at the report, I said to him, "Well, okay, if it wasn't as good as you expected, at least he hasn't been in jail." Well, it turns out that the reason there was no credit report was because the Schnees never paid on credit; they always paid cash. And Eddie's father owned a bank, which went bankrupt – I think that's what you call it – during the Depression, and later, after I discussed it with Eddie, he said, "Well, you should have called the bank president. He knows our family." In any case, it was –

ANITA SCHNEE: Did you say that the Depression had caused that crash?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, the bank to crash.

So we had one date. We went out to dinner to try and patch up things, and then he went to Chicago and that was that.

ANITA SCHNEE: Eddie just took off?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: He took off. [Laughter.] So I was a little bit upset. I felt I should get to know him a little bit better, but I think – I think it was probably the beginning of my leaving the big decisions to him. I was perfectly happy to do that, I totally trusted him. He made all the large decisions in our lives. He would always say, "Ruth, don't speak in itsy voices," meaning, don't bother with all that detail work. But somebody had to take up the detail work and that was me. Anyway, that's how I met and married Edward Schnee, and to this day – it was a wonderful 52 years.

{From the day we confessed our love for each other, we started to send each other books and letters. I have beautiful love letters from him, which I cherish. When I die, I have asked my children to put them in my coffin with me. In turn, I sent him Joseph Wechsberg's "The Best Things in Life" and Lin Yutang's "The Importance of Living" with the inscription, "Living, loving and learning together, each as an individual, yet as a strong unified whole. May we grow together, knowing the enjoyment of living a happy and full life." It is dated March 30, '48 – before our wedding, May 23, '48. Unbeknown to me, he sent me the same Lin Yutang book a day earlier from New York. We now have two copies in our library. Now, 55 years later, I think we fulfilled our dreams.}

The thing I forgot to mention about my friendship with the Savage family was that I not only was on wonderful friendship terms with Richard, but also with his sisters, Joan and Barbara. I took a trip to Chicago during those days, and I don't remember the sequence. Barbara was living in Chicago, and her brother Jimmy was living in Chicago. Jimmy was an incredibly brilliant mathematician, and I remember my first encounter with Jimmy was that he was eating pemmican, which is a food – he was eating it for months. It's a food that the Eskimos, I think, eat, and he was experimenting how that would affect his body.

{His brother Jimmy, also who I am referring to as having met when he was chewing pemmican, also took on a chair at Yale and unfortunately died very young. They made me sit down and play the game, Go. As mathematicians they certainly always had the upper hand of me. I could never understand that game, and it all came back to me when I saw the movie *A Beautiful Mind*. The mathematician, what was his name?

ANITA SCHNEE: John Nash.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: John Nash, whom the Savages knew very well playing Go at – I think it was Princeton. Eddie was a whiz at it.}

Okay, well anyway –

ANITA SCHNEE: And Richard, just say what Richard became.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Richard then became – he's a statistician. He was called to Palo Alto on government work. He went to Tallahassee, where he was the head of the math department [University of Florida], and eventually became head of the Yale math – or statistics department. And, of course, we're still wonderful friends. Every time I go east I visit him in New Haven, him and his wife. {Every time during those visits, I totally admire his stamina and zest for life with a very dry wit. He is my shining example of how one can live a full life, while being so terribly handicapped.}

Now, let's see. After –

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, it seems like Eddie took off to Chicago and then you talked a little bit about the Savages, so where would you like to pick up from there?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, we had a very nice wedding and then we went out West.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, I mean, before you talk about the honeymoon, because there's a little separate travel section we'll do, why don't you describe the 12th Street Shop go back up and describe how that was, and then when Eddie came in and how that started to evolve.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It was a little storefront studio that I had as my first print shop, or workshop I called it. So the front was open to the public. 12th Street was not exactly a desirable shopping area because eventually, in '67, the riots broke out near there on 12th Street and Claremont. But word got around that I had this little shop, and people came by. I felt I should have something in the front window, so I purchased an Eames chair, a little Knoll table, and I had a friend who was a potter in Vermont – Nancy Wickham, who supplied the most beautiful pots.

And then when Eddie came into the picture we continued the printing business on 12th Street but we also rented the garage in back. People had to go through the alley, which was strewn with garbage and beer cans, to get to that garage, which Eddie painted green. He did it after shop hours. He would come home totally covered in green paint, his shoes, everything. He sprayed the walls green. We displayed fine crystal there. I don't know to this day how people got back through that alley because they really had to work hard to get through the garbage, but we had fine crystal and – we did attract an interesting trade. It was the first time I met Al Taubman, who came back there with his mother-in-law, wanting me to design her new house. And we had people like the salesmen from Rosenthal, Germany, come back there.

ANITA SCHNEE: Rosenthal, the German –



RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: China.

ANITA SCHNEE: – china. And Al Taubman, of course, is –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The mall magnate.

ANITA SCHNEE: Mall, Christie's and federal prison magnate.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: So when Mr. Lauffer came by –

ANITA SCHNEE: Sotheby's.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: – from Rosenthal china, I insisted to Eddie that he was a Nazi. His head was shaven, he had a crew cut, and he acted exactly like an SS officer. He came with his little suitcase filled with china which he was importing from Germany. It turned out that he was a Jew who had emigrated, but we didn't know this until years, years – five, 10 years later.

Anyway, he was selling white china. I think I mentioned before that my parents were not able to take any money out of Germany. In foresight they bought my trousseau in Germany – they took me with them. I was about 13-years old, and I remember the beautiful china and glass – crystal store that my mother took me to. She said, "Pick out your trousseau, and that will be the china that you will have when you get married." I picked white Rosenthal, the Helena pattern, which was then shipped in the van to America and which I still have and love. When Mr. Lauffer came around with white Rosenthal china, we put all our pennies together to give him an import order – we had very little capital to start a retail shop but we felt we wanted that china because many people had admired it in our home. The other thing we bought for that little place, that garage in back of the alley, was the Jena teapot, which did not sell. We had that on the shelf for three years until we finally decided we loved it so much we would take it home. We could ill afford to take it home but we did. I still have it.

Years later, when one of the editors of the *Free Press* ran what they call "a blind ad" in the Detroit paper showing that Jena teapot, which incidentally had been designed by Wagenfeld, at the Bauhaus – from then on until we sold our store in 1976, we sold 700 of those glass teapots, and creamers and sugars, also teacups that went with it. We really felt that we had made a contribution here. Eddie was always insisting that that pot, that little glass teapot, should be displayed on a pure white marble cube, six-by-six inches. It looked like a piece of sculpture. It was absolutely elegant, and I think that's probably what sold it finally. {Many years later, we found it stuck in a corner at Bonwit teller, with papers stuffed into it. Obviously that buyer did not love it like we did.}

[Break.]

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I forgot to mention, in connection with my work at Cranbrook, that I met my lifelong friend, Louis Redstone, a well-known architect in the Detroit area. He was building banks and large corporation buildings. But in 1946 he worked at Cranbrook. He studied. He was in my classes but he studied city planning, we became really lifelong friends until his death at age 96 last year.

{During my early career days, Louis designed many schools: Julian Krolik, Alexander Bell, B. Benedict Glazer, among many. I specified brilliant primary colors for those projects. When I designed the interior of the Phi Lambda Fraternity house in Ann Arbor, the fraternity brothers liked it so well that they moved out all the furniture one night. Simply stole it. Louis insisted on art in all his buildings – built a 10 percent budget for art into his proposals. No other architect had that foresight at the time.

He was instrumental in securing some very large projects for me, such as the Bill Markley house. Mr. Markley owned 19 antique cars which he housed in air conditioned quarters with attendant. I lost the commission to design his office when he decided to buy a Duesenberry automobile instead. I totally agreed with him in viewing it as a piece of sculpture.}

I also met Bill Bostick, who was curator at the DIA, and another friend, Earl Pellerin. Earl Pellerin designed the buildings for Wayne University in Detroit, I became very friendly with his wife, who I think was also an architect and who introduced me to the Plochure color system. I can't really explain the system well. However, it was a matter of putting brilliant colors together in a harmonious way scientifically. I remember Eddie asking me one year: "What would you prefer, to have a watch or a box of the Plochure color cards?" I chose the Plochure color cards, although I didn't have a watch until years later. Those color cards helped me in planning brilliant interiors later for the Winkleman fashion store chain.

I also forgot to mention my friendship with Morris Jackson, who was one of the architects whom I had met at Raymond Loewy's. He also became to be a lifelong friend. And Morris – that whole group, as I mentioned before, moved from New York, from the Raymond Loewy office, into Eero Saarinen's office in Birmingham, or Bloomfield Hills, and we saw each other very often. That office was designing State Department buildings.

Morris so often told the story of the presentation which Eero made for furnishings in the State Department dining room. At that time he had already designed the tulip bases for his famous furniture. For the presentation, which he chose to do on the building site, very unusual – one usually presents a scheme in conference rooms – Eero felt that the feeling of the building material should be part of his presentation. So he chose a cement slab, a tall cement slab. Jackson tried to illustrate it. It was about eight-nine feet high. He got a beautiful yardage of red velvet, which he draped across that cement slab to the floor, and covered the sandy ground with it and set up his tulip-based round table with a fiberglass chair with the tulip base. This was in Washington; perhaps I didn't mention that. He had bought very fine china, which he would recommend for that scheme, fine crystal, fine sterling, and everything was really exquisite.

Mrs. Eisenhower was asked to come and inspect and give her approval. She came with her entourage, carrying an issue of *House & Garden* magazine under her arm. She opened it up and she said to Eero, this is what we want. Well, that was, of course, killing his unique scheme. It was a very traditional approach, and he was really quite shattered.

That's my story on Morris Jackson and the State Department presentation. Now, going back – where do we go now?

ANITA SCHNEE: Let's go to the move to Puritan. That was in – what year was that? Do you remember?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: We opened our shop in – I started printing the fabrics in '47. We were married in '48. Just about that time, '49 or '50, I can't recall but one could look it up, the Art Institute sponsored an exhibit called "For Modern Living." I could look it up in the catalogue – I have the catalogue still. They turned the major hall of the Art Institute into an exhibition space for contemporary interiors and furnishings. They asked various designers like Jens Risom, Alexander Girard and Florence Knoll – she was no longer Schust at that time, she had married Hans Knoll – and designers of that ilk to present contemporary interiors.

{The exhibit surveyed the current state of progressive design. It made very clear the distinction

between intrinsic design and the superficial styling. In those days people felt that, especially in Detroit, that styling was “design.” In fact, many of our friends had been hired by General Motors from the Los Angeles school until –

ANITA SCHNEE: Do you mean Art Center?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Art Center School into the styling departments of General Motors and Chrysler; unfortunate – an unfortunate move because they were delegated to designing hubcaps and steering wheels and that sort of thing, and General Motors at the time tried to kind of soften that approach by giving them an annual exhibit of their real work in the halls of the General Motors Center.

But coming back to the “For Modern Living Exhibit”, and speaking about architecture, it very much pointed out that the design of buildings and design of their furnishings are really inextricably interrelated. That was the basis of Eddie and my work together. Eddie was in charge of the retail end. I did the designing, whether it was fabrics or drawings for the ads and promotions, or the architectural work.}

Hudson’s, the large department store here, sponsored and financed that project. And unfortunately for them but fortunately for us, they neglected to educate their sales personnel in contemporary furniture. There was no one else in Detroit who was familiar with that furniture, so people came to us and asked us – when they couldn’t get the proper answers from Hudson’s on how to work with this new style. We spent many hours explaining that the rough linen upholstery shown on those chairs was not burlap but was linen, we then looked at each other and decided, hell, if Hudson’s doesn’t educate these people and these people want that furniture, why don’t we supply it? And so, with that in mind, we moved into a larger retail establishment on Puritan. It had – instead of two I think it had four or six show windows – it was a corner store – and tile floors, and we showed and sold that wonderful furniture. We couldn’t afford it for our own house except when we were stuck with certain pieces. We would take them home. And that was really the beginning of the retail store.

{In the process we made many friends: Edgar Kaufman Jr. from MoMA, Joseph Frank, Saul Steinberg who designed the murals, Bartolucci and Waldheim who designed the Barwa chair, van Keppel and Green whose metal furniture I then specified, Jade Snow Wong for whom my parents gave a party. My dad represented her in this area. We filled our shop with the work of many of the exhibiting designers, even if their work did not sell.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Then there’s that story about Everett Winter coming with –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, Everett Winter, a Raymor salesman, would come into the store and present his line, and would brag – was quite proud to explain to Eddie that he had sold a thousand pieces of this to Marshall Field and another thousand pieces of that to Hudson’s or Nieman-Marcus, and Eddie was totally unmoved. He always said, “This is my own money that I’m investing here and I jolly well better do it the way I think it should be done. I am not at all impressed with Hudson’s or Marshall Fields’ sales. I feel a sale is only good when a customer is happy.”

{Eddie had fallen in love with the Eames wood laminated screen. It was designed of Birch molded panes, mounted with natural linen inserts to make them flexible. This screen was to retail for \$275. It stood in our show window for two years. No one ever looked at it. We finally donated it to the public radio station. I recently saw that it was auctioned for \$4500. We also tried to sell Charlie’s masonite storage units. They were designed and constructed of industrial material with angle iron frame. People sneered at them. WE relegated them to the washroom for storage of toilet paper.

Later they were moved into our house, where they sat in the basement and stored paint. Today the storage units are one of the Eames' most sought after designs and sell for \$2000 to \$3000. I recently had a call from Florida. A client asked me if she should buy the George Nelson Ball Clock for \$1500 for her kitchen wall. I absolutely encouraged her but couldn't refrain from mentioning that if she had bought it at Adler-Schnee, it would have cost her only \$45.}

And so – but yet still, on Puritan we carried a lot of wrought iron pieces, accessories – that was the mode in those days – with the contemporary furniture. And then when they –

ANITA SCHNEE: If I could just – I think you said that Ben and Edna came in there before the move, before the fire; somehow that Winkleman's contact developed around that time. Do you remember that?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Additionally, we were printing our fabrics on Puritan. Edna Goldstein was planning the Winkleman stores, and Winkleman had a theory – and this is Mr. Isadore Winkleman's idea – no, it was Leon Winkleman's idea – this being a fairly low-grade dress shop – it later became to be many, many stores all over the Midwest – that the customer who would come into their store should be treated as though she was buying a couture design. So she was led into a dressing room and three dresses, which had been chosen by the Winkleman merchandising department, would be submitted to her for her choice. All the accessories for those dresses had been chosen. This was then her time to make a decision for the purchase.

The fitting rooms became to be a very important part of the Winkleman store philosophy. They wanted them to be unusual. The draperies were to be unusual, and they chose my designs for their draperies in the fitting rooms.

Edna Goldstein was designing the interiors and came in to make the selections. We became, again, lifelong friends. When her husband, Ben, took over as CEO of Kern's, that store was the competitor of Hudson's, Edna felt that it was a – how do you call that? –

ANITA SCHNEE: Conflict – conflict of interest.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: – a conflict of interest, and she asked me to take over the design of the Winkleman stores, and I worked for Winkleman's for 17 years from then on, at the same time designing the interiors for Kern's department store.

{The Goldstein's at that time decided to have Yamasaki build a house for them. The first plans were based on property in Huntington Woods, which the bank rejected being too radical and having no resale value. Eventually, Yami designed a beautiful place in Birmingham for them. I designed the interiors. They were "cutting edge," now classic.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, around that time too you had commissioned Yamasaki to do the shop and residence, right?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, I think that was – yes, after –

ANITA SCHNEE: Sorry. It's – '53 in the note that I have.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: You see, we had stored chemicals in the basement of the Puritan location. When the furnace blew up, they ignited, causing a terrible fire.

ANITA SCHNEE: But, see, that happened in '55, and the records show that the Yami contact was in

'53, so it must have been before then.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I didn't even remember that. Yes, our close friendship with Yamasaki, we felt our family had grown and we wanted to have a place that was a little larger than what we had occupied until then. We didn't want to travel back and forth from our home to the shop and so the idea was to have a workshop and residence combined.

We went out Northwestern Highway where there was still vacant land and fell in love with an apple orchard. It was Tillot's Apple Orchard. We had about 30 apple trees on it.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: We fell in love with Tillot's Apple Orchard. We used to take the kids out in the fall on Sundays – they were selling apple cider – and we then bought the property, thinking that we would have a wonderful house, modern house there. We first contacted Mr. Brigham from Ann Arbor [University of Michigan, Ann Arbor], who was a Frank Lloyd Wright devotee and head of the architectural school in Ann Arbor, to design a house for us and workshop – no, I think it was just a house at that time – in the Frank Lloyd Wright Prairie Style.

For some reason, and I think it was probably because we graduated from the Frank Lloyd Wright style and got into the Mies van der Rohe steel and glass style, that we abandoned that project – I'm sure Eddie would remember why we abandoned it; I don't remember it – and then we contacted Yamasaki to design a print workshop and house.

Yami's designs were wonderful and very exciting. Eddie would take those plans to the head of our bank to prepare him that someday maybe we wanted to get a mortgage for this. The bank president looked at it, he nodded and he said, very nice, very nice, but when it came time to get the actual mortgage, he refused. He said it was too far out, Railway Express would not deliver out there, which was the truth, but certainly it was too far out from a design standpoint, for the bank to invest any money in this project.

ANITA SCHNEE: But by far out you mean geographically far out.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, also from a design standpoint.

ANITA SCHNEE: It was out Northwestern Highway.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Northwestern.

ANITA SCHNEE: In the not even suburbs, it was –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No. Detroit ended at Eight Mile Road, and this property was two miles, I think, further north.

In any case, that was refused, and so we abandoned those plans. A year later, Hudson's owned property on Ten Mile and Northwestern, and Lawrence Institute of Technology owned property on Eight Mile and Northwestern, and we were sort of in between. For whatever reason, I don't recall, Hudson's and Lawrence Tech switched properties. In other words, Hudson's came to own the property on Eight Mile road and Northwestern subsequently built Northland with Victor Gruen as the architect. Lawrence Institute of Technology took over the property on Ten Mile and Northwestern and Earl Pellerin worked on that project.

ANITA SCHNEE: I think Northland was actually the very first mall in the United States.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Exactly. Victor Gruen, of course, was Viennese. H was the designer. It was an open mall. It was not an enclosed mall.

Anyway, when those plans were announced we immediately had a call from the bank president asking Eddie, did we still own that property? Of course we still owned it. We had no intention of selling those apple trees. H said, "Well, we're interested in buying it." And Eddie's immediately reply was, "It moved a little closer, didn't it?" –because he had first said it was too far out.

{Both Earl Pellerin, who was head of L.I.T. Architectural department and Victor Gruen became clients and friends.}

Well, anyway, we did eventually sell the property, did you say what year it was, 1955?

ANITA SCHNEE: No. I don't actually know the date of the sale; '55 was when the fire happened.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, that was subsequently to this I think. I'm not really sure about my dates, but we could look it up. We probably should have looked it up because we have Yami's plans.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, yes. Well, the date I got off that was '53. The plans were '53.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: And the fire was '55.

ANITA SCHNEE: That's right.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, that's interesting. I didn't realize that we planned that before the fire. The fire was devastating. We had stored all the chemicals for the silkscreen printing of the draperies in the basement. We were printing a job for Louis Redstone, a restaurant which he had designed. It was a large yardage. Eddie was at the bank on Puritan and Livernois when he heard the fire engines going by. He poked his head out the door and, by golly, they stopped at our place of business. He ran from the bank all the way to the store. Of course there was nothing to be saved.

The saving grace was that we had changed insurance agents. Eddie did not like the insurance agent we had. He wasn't very cooperative. And so he asked my friend Gene Agins, and when Gene came, he said, "You're way under-insured" – and this was quite a long time before the fire – and Eddie said, if we're under-insured, please bring it up to snuff, and what about business interruption insurance, which he remembered his Uncle Nat had when he was in the steel drum business. Gene quoted an enormous – what do you call those –

ANITA SCHNEE: Premium.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: – premium, and Eddie said, "Just a minute, I have to ask my wife." I was home and I said, "That's more than we make in a year; we can't afford that." But Eddie went right ahead; he was convinced it was the right thing to do. Of course he was right because when the fire broke out we were covered with plenty of insurance for the goods as well as for the time that we were out of business.

We decided at that point to – well, first I should say that the insurance agent advised us not to have a fire sale, although people came around. It was December 8th that the fire broke out. It was Christmas business in the retail business and people wanted to buy the merchandise at fire sale prices. And our agent, God bless him, said, "Under no circumstances will you have a fire sale. It will reflect on your reputation and it's not a good idea." So he packed up everything, the agent, and shipped it off to Chicago, including my burnt fabrics. All of my fabrics were burned, the screens were

burned, everything was in total disarray. However, it was shipped off to a salvage company and we were paid money for that mess.

Anyway, we decided this was the time when we wanted to go to California to see what California was about. Everyone spoke about the modern in California. We knew modern architects like Schindler and Neutra. We had been in touch with John Entenza from *Arts and Architecture* magazine. In fact, he publicized a lot of my designs. And we knew that Charles and Ray Eames had built a house out of factory parts. And so, with a recommendation from Yamasaki and Eero Saarinen, we visited John Entenza and the Eames.

The first time we met John Entenza, he was quite a man, of course, his magazine was fabulous. He instigated what he called the case-study house, which was a new look at contemporary architecture. It was really a very creative – he was looking for creative architects – he promoted my fabric designs in many issues. When we came into his office he was very temperamental. He was raging around about something that either Eames or Alexander Girard – I can't quite keep it straight – had asked him to do. They wanted him to clean up his house. He said, "I just can't be that neat; you've got to be goddamn neat in a modern house and you've got to always make sure you have one flower on the table for aesthetic look." [Laughs.]

Well, that's my remembrance of John Entenza. He was instrumental in introducing us to the Eames. It was an unforgettable experience. They lived in this house that was built with – it looked like angle irons with panels slid in between. When we arrived at the house the entire – it was wide open – the entire floor was covered with toys. They had just come back from Bavaria. They had been commissioned to write a piece on baroque architecture in Bavaria. At any rate, Ray had bought all these wonderful Bavarian costumes and headdresses, and Charlie had indulged himself in incredible wooden toys. I mean, they were just marvelous. They were hand-chiseled, whittled in incredible colors. He was playing on the floor with them. I said to him, "This is a wonderful pastime for your children." And he looked up and he said to me, "What do you mean? My children have children." He himself was crawling on the floor playing with them and having a great time.

So anyway, we had some days with the Eames' before we went back to build a new shop. We had enough from the insurance company to have Al Taubman build us a stainless steel front for that store, and illuminated ceiling; it was really very handsome, and we moved in.

ANITA SCHNEE: And Kess had a role in there, too, right – Bill Kessler?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Bill Kessler? Bill Kessler worked on our house in Yami's office. I don't think he worked on the shop, no, no.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, he worked on the house.

ANITA SCHNEE: Which house?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The house that we wanted to build in the apple orchard.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, that one.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Bill Kessler was in Yami's office, and also Ann Crane, who also became a wonderful friend later, we helped her when she designed the Glancy house. We seem to have made friends as we went along. We retained that friendship for many years, and still have actually.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, and you didn't mention W's contribution after the fire.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: When our shop burned it was, as I mentioned, December 8th, just before Christmas business. We were in the midst of Christmas business. It starts Thanksgiving. We had a call from Isadore Winkleman, who was CEO of Winkleman Brothers, and as I mentioned I had done interior design work for them. No, at that point I think they were just buying the fabrics for the fitting rooms.

W was very strict, very stern. Everyone in the organization was scared to death of him because he had high standards. He was on the phone to Eddie and he offered 3,000 square feet of his warehouse for us to sell Christmas merchandise out of that space. We were totally floored at his generosity. That was very exciting. Of course, we became very good friends of the Winkleman's from that point on. {I still cherish my friendship with Peggy Winkleman, whom I first met in 1940, before she married Stanley Winkleman. We share many memories now that we both have lost our partners.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay, so it looks to me from the records like you moved into Livernois also in 1955, the same year as the fire, right?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That's correct.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, I have a note here about Wil [Wilmer] Weiss.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Let me put it to you this way. We admired the windows at Jacobson's. We felt that we should – Livernois was actually a busy street with automobile traffic. There was no walking traffic. However, our store was across the street from the University of Detroit architectural department, and Leonard Leone, the head of the architectural school, was a very good customer and so were his students. We felt obligated to have the two show windows to be very striking. We looked for a window designer who could do that.

We loved the windows at the Jacobson fashion store and so we contacted Wil Weiss, who was designing them, would he moonlight and do our windows? We were a small peanut compared to Jacobson's, but Wil took a liking to us, and we liked him, and so for many years Wil designed our windows, and eventually, when Ben Goldstein became CEO of Kern's, the first thing he did was to get Wil to come and do the Kern's windows downtown.

Meanwhile, I should mention that Wil had moved on to New York. He was designing the window display and the general styling for Federated Stores, which included Sloan's and some very important stores. He came back to Detroit to work at Kern's, and since Ben Goldstein at that time also asked me to do the interiors for Kern's department store, we worked really well together. He had wonderful ideas, wonderful colors, a great deal of style, and our kids loved him.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes, we did.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: And he sent candy every Christmas to them.

ANITA SCHNEE: Really? I don't remember that. I just remember that he was so fun to be with.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: He was terrific. [We also worked on the Franklin Simon store interior in Buffalo. Wil hated Buffalo, he felt that if the world needed an enema, he would plug it into Buffalo.]

[End of Tape Three.]



ANITA SCHNEE: So the Livernois store, really quite a transformation from the Puritan one.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, because Eddie decided that we no longer wanted to deal with wrought iron. He felt very strongly that we should really deal in quality merchandise, and so that meant that we had fine crystal, fine china and stainless steel, and George Jensen Silver.

{The Livernois location was the first time that I actually had an office. I furnished it with Jens Risom furniture. It is furniture I still have in our house and very much love. Risom turned out to be one of my admirers. He wanted us to print fabrics for his furniture. We were concerned that our dyes would “crock.” We never came to terms. It was in the Livernois office that I designed some important projects: One particular one was for James Conn, the architect, who was designing – not detailing, because Jim never detailed, for Eli and Edye Broad. During one of the late night meetings – Eli was a work-a-holic – never met during the day – he asked Eddie to invest in his company. My husband refused, only to regret it years later, when it became known that Broad’s wealth was only exceeded by Bill Gates, the computer genius. We experience a similar investment dilemma, when we refused stock in Syntex, just before they became the makers of “the pill.” Another Conn project was the home of Bill and Harriett Sherr. I have since planned homes for the Sherr’s both here and California, including the second generation of Sherr children.}

ANITA SCHNEE: I also have a note during that era, which was 10 years, ‘55 to ‘65 – in May 1957 you were asked to judge the Carnegie Scholastic prizes, and I believe there were a number of fellow jury members that you have mentioned. I have here a list of them. Maybe you could just scan the list and say if you remember them.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The invitation – it was the 30th anniversary of the Scholastic Art Awards, and of course they had awarded to me that fellowship – or scholarship to the Rhode Island School. So they asked me to come back to – I think it was in Pittsburgh at Carnegie to help with the judging of – it was Carnegie in Pittsburgh – to help with the judging of the new awards. That was a wonderful experience because it put me together with a lot of people whose work I knew, but I did not know them themselves.

{These notes pertain to tape four, and particularly where I am referring to the Carnegie judging in Pittsburgh through the *Scholastic Magazine*.

This note pertains to tape four where I am talking about the Pittsburgh Carnegie *Scholastic Magazine* judging. I neglected to mention that Eero Saarinen had been at Carnegie just prior to my arrival. I had been told that Eero had received a grant to study “creativity.” Of course, that’s what we were concerned about during the judging of that competition. I was curious to know at that time what he came up with as far as what was producing “creativity” and who was susceptible to “creativity.” I found out at the end of my stay at Carnegie that after studying that for three years, Eero didn’t come up with a thing; there was no “creativity.” It was all just solid work. I felt pretty good that he also struggled with that.}

One of the other judges was, for instance, Marco de Marco, the painter and illustrator. I met Harry Bertoia there. I met Marguerite Wildenhain. Elsa Regensteiner, the textile designer I met. Actually, I got the wire from Carnegie to come to Pittsburgh while I was giving birth to our son, Danny.

ANITA SCHNEE: 1954.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: And Sarkis Sarkisian is a painter who was also on the jury.

ANITA SCHNEE: Wait a minute, there's a discrepancy because I have '57 for this and Danny was born in '54. If Danny was the right date –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, I know that it was during – while Danny was –

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, no, '57.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Danny was born in '54?

ANITA SCHNEE: Fifty-four. You didn't have anymore children after that.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, but I thought it was – I got the notice when Danny was born.

ANITA SCHNEE: Could you have, two or three years earlier?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, I'm not sure I know why there is this discrepancy because I remember distinctly that I had to think very hard to leave that little baby to –

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, you were telling me that.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: – to do this judging, and Eddie assured me that it was all right. He was going to take care of him, like he did very often.

ANITA SCHNEE: With all of us?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That's the advantage of having a supportive husband, he took over very often.

{I think it would be appropriate here to mention the dilemma of having children and a career. I don't think I ever solved that problem. Many is the time when I phoned a client, leaning over my drawing board, nursing a child. I remember my clothes were totally drenched with milk during the Scholastic judging. Danny wasn't there to slurp it up. As the children grew older, I brought them with me to the carpenter shops, construction sites, to mix paint and to check metalsmiths. They seemed to be intrigued and enjoyed it. I wanted them to know about craftspeople. Now I am told by my children, who have their own children, that they would have preferred participating in sports. We never participated in sports. Eddie had given up golf, because he did not want to stay away from us for so long a time. Willie, our black delivery man and helper took them to baseball games. The only sport we practiced was tennis. We stopped playing tennis when Nita at four years old cried: "Take Eddie out of the cage!"}

Where are we going now?

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay, that's – I can hardly believe it, but that seems to be all I have for Livernois. Oh, we have those festivals. Do you remember them? I remember selling ice cream.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, Eddie had promotions. It wasn't a festival exactly. One year he had the idea of selling ice cream – I think it was mugs that would hold ice cream on plates, and we had a Greek friend who had ice cream trucks which he would drive around the city selling his ice cream. And so Eddie had the idea of parking a truck in front of the shop and having our kids dish out the ice cream. [Laughter.]

ANITA SCHNEE: I don't know how much we dished out.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think you did dish out a lot because Danny and Jeremy said they were afraid to eat the ice cream because they were afraid they would be charged back for it. They didn't eat any, and when we told them that the ice cream had been donated for this event, they were very distraught.

ANITA SCHNEE: So that was sort of a forward look at Harmonie Park, 10 years at Livernois and then – tell the story of how you started looking at moving downtown with the store.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I'm trying to think. I think it all started when the Renaissance Center was built. I think that was where we decided we would love to be downtown rather than in the suburbs.

I should probably mention that with the fire on Puritan we discontinued doing our own printing. Eddie drove the screens in his Volkswagen – strapped to the roof of the Volkswagen – to New York to Murad Printworks, and then from then on, because we thought it was just too dangerous for us to be doing this, risking another fire, Murad printed the drapery fabrics.

One thing I forgot was that when we were printing our own, we participated in about 18 major museum exhibitions, both in this country and abroad. We participated in a great many tradeshow. I remember a tradeshow in Grand Rapids, where I first met Edward Wormley, the designer of the Dunbar Furniture. Ed Wormley was one of the first people who ordered my fabrics. They were very difficult to sell, nobody wanted abstract designs in the window, but Ed Wormley ordered them for the Lightolier Showroom which he was designing. The year that we had a booth at the AID, American Institute of Decorators Fair, Wormley was displaying his furniture designs for Dunbar and – I will never forget it – was cleaning and sweeping and doing all the odd chores that really should not have been done by a famous designer. I thought he was very humble and wonderful to do that, he was also very approachable.

The next time I met Wormley was when we took a trip with the children to Sandwich – Sandwich Mass. or Connecticut? Sandwich, Mass., I think. We had gone through the glass museum in Sandwich and found, on our way back to the hotel, a wonderful church which had a for-sale sign – the church and rectory were for sale. We thought, oh, wouldn't this be a wonderful place to have a shop in a church and live in the rectory? And then when we investigated it further, we found that Christopher Wren had designed the steeple of that church. It was for sale with rectory for \$10,000, which we didn't have.

We spent a lot of time crawling around that empty church. One of the times, who should come out of the antique shop that was across the way? It was Ed Wormley. The shop was just filled with Tiffany glass, and Wormley had bought pieces of Tiffany glass for the next Dunbar line. He was planning to use those glass pieces and embed them into wooden tabletops. Absolutely beautifully. Eddie actually had predicted that. When Wormley came out of that shop and had Tiffany glass he said, "You watch out, I bet that glass is going to be in the next Dunbar line," and it surely was. He called the collection: Janus.

Also, the interesting thing about that Christopher Wren church was that years later our son Daniel was married and his wife's family has a place on Anchor Lake in upper Michigan. People from Sandwich visited them. The first thing I said to them is, "We fell in love with a Christopher Wren steeple in Sandwich." And she said, "That's our church." [Laughs.] It was really a thrill to find these people. They were friends of the Maldegans. [I am not sure that I mentioned the summer during which we studied Christopher Wren architecture at Oxford University in England. It had been sponsored by the Yale alumni group. It was wonderful.]

{I have forgotten to mention that many Chicago gift show trips that I accompanied Eddie on his quest for the best. During those trips, we have been flooded on expressways, stuck in hotels during blizzards and suffered from indigestion. We always stayed at the Drake and ate the superb seafood at the Cape Cod room. The maitre d knew us and always reserved the same table. Except once: I had been in agony all night with a piercing headache and was to take a 7AM flight to Chicago to meet Eddie. Undaunted, I dragged myself to the plane, but when the plane arrived in Chicago, I could not walk. He took me into his arms to carry me back on the same plane. I insisted on doing the gift show. My wonderful, dutiful husband rented a wheelchair and ran me around the show. But we had to forgo dinner and opera at the Kungsholm. That would have been stretching it. When I arrived back in Detroit, an ambulance was waiting to carry me to emergency. I was determined that I had contracted Polio, although I had all the required shots. It took weeks of crawling along the floor and much therapy to get my legs back under me. But it is amazing how one can design on the floor.

It was the same year, fall of 1961, when we were in a terrible automobile accident while driving in a funeral procession. We were almost killed. Eddie suffered broken ribs, a punctured lung and a displaced heart. My pelvis was broken on both sides, and so were my clavicles. I could not hold even a pencil. But it is amazing how many designs you can hold in your head.}

Anyway, so –

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, I have us just about ready to go to downtown and –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: We wanted to move downtown because we felt that the suburban shopping scene was very plastic. I think Henry Ford II had invested money so that the Renaissance Center at the riverfront could be built, and we were approached for a year's free rental and the fixtures if we were to rent a space in the Renaissance Center. We tried to put the money together for that venture but were totally unsuccessful doing that.

When I was a student at Cass, I remember going past Harmonie Park and passing a building that I really liked a lot. It was the Hemmeter Building. Hudson's had their appliance shops in that building, on the first floor, and I would peek in there once in a while and saw the beautiful oak paneling. I had no idea what that building was, except that it was a tiled building, white tile exterior, and seemed most attractive.

When we were looking to find a place for my office and his shop, we both fell in love with the Harmonie Park area. It was sort of a little pocket park in the center of the city. It had a little fountain. It was just a very, very nice place to stop, and for people to have lunch. Hudson's was a block away and the employees would come and eat lunch in the park and pass that building. I said to Eddie, "Why don't we look at renting space in that building?" He said to me, "You're absolutely crazy; it's got so many square feet, it's downtown property, we can't possibly afford it." So I said, "Why don't you get a hold of the real estate man" – because it was for rent – "and check it out?"

Well, the rental wasn't too bad except it was certainly not conducive to a retail business. It did not have an entrance from Grand River, which was the major thoroughfare, still is. The show windows – I mean, there were no show windows; it was just windows all around, which we would have had to make into show windows. And it was just not a store. [Laughs.] So I said to Eddie, "Why don't I make a list of what needs to be done architecturally, like a front door from the street. See if Hudson's will accept that." I made a list as though I was designing a Winkleman store. When Eddie saw that list he said, "I'm not going to take that to Hudson's; they'll never approve it." So we decided we'll both go to Hudson's with that list.

We went to the executive floor, and Foster Winter greeted us. We had an appointment with the real estate people in Foster Winter's office. We had with us our annual – what do you call that? – accounting – well, how much money we took in. What do you call that?

ANITA SCHNEE: A balance sheet?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: {I also neglected, in connection with Hudson's and our negotiations with them on the Hemmeter Building, that Foster Winter was very much the head of their real estate department and enormously important because Hudson's was branching out at that time into various mall situations and Mr. Winter was in charge of all of that.} Our annual balance sheet I guess you would call it. Winters took one look at it and he said to us, "This alteration does not warrant this kind of an investment – I mean, your balance sheet does not warrant this kind of an alteration. It is absolutely out of the question." So Eddie came up with – well, Eddie was incredible. He first said to Mr. Winters – before he even gave him the list he said, "We would like to come downtown and be competitive with you." That was a big honor because Hudson's was a 14-floor store and we were peanuts. [Laughs.] And he said, "I have an idea of starting an advertising campaign between David and Goliath;" we're David. With his charm and incredible ideas that he came up with – I had never heard my husband have these incredible merchandise ideas, which evidently he had thought about on the way down to the Hudson office.

ANITA SCHNEE: After careful study –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I was absolutely amazed this should come out of his mouth, but it seemed to impress Mr. Winters. And then came the business with the balance sheet, and Winters looked at that balance sheet and he shook his head and he said, "This is not wanted, this kind of expense by Hudson's," because we wanted Hudson's to do the alterations. [Laughs.] He said, "That's not warranted." So Eddie said, "Mr. Winters, We are not without funds. We can participate if you will give us the opportunity to pay it along with the rental."

And they went for it. They absolutely went for it. They used the whole transaction as a tax deduction. Eddie said, "Obviously you're not familiar with our merchandise." So the next day Foster Winter was in our store on Livernois. I was working in the stockroom and certainly was not presentable. When Eddie saw him walk through the door he came running into the stockroom and said, "Ruth, go home and get dressed." So by the time I went home and came back, Mr. Winters had left. But anyway, we negotiated a very favorable lease. They added the downstairs basement space to it without rent. In other words, we could keep merchandise down there and the upstairs was I don't remember how many square feet, but it was a huge space. It had been a cigar factory.

I totally neglected that from the time that we moved into Livernois, until now we had three children. I wanted to be home with the kids more so I took on architectural work, which I could do at home. I stayed home all morning to make sure everything was running well. I had lunch with them, and I only made appointments from 2:00 on until 5:00 so that I could eat lunch with them and be there. I had wonderful household help: a cleaning woman who would also do dinner, a laundress – I had a staff – and a husband who jumped in when the kids were sick and I had to see clients. It was a really wonderful arrangement. We worked together well.

{Eddie fully supported me. He knew that I could never be a stay-at-home-mom. My dislike for cooking and the glue I produced for our first meal, early on convince him. He often said: "I didn't marry you for that." He had infinite patience when the children misbehaved. Now, I think the long talks on the brown couch seem to have had little influence on them. It disturbs me deeply, when they criticize his sharp wit. That's what I fell in love with.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, you also mentioned, in the context of the move, some advice from Manny Hartman of Winkleman.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, when we decided we wanted to move downtown, people were up in arms because that –

ANITA SCHNEE: I remember that. They were!

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That was certainly not the way to go.

ANITA SCHNEE: What? Us go downtown?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: They felt downtown was dead. And we tried to explain to them that Detroit had a great harbor. We had sea-going boats down there, which they never knew of. It was really an alive place, and that we wanted to be part of that action.

Well, our attorney got word of it. He said, “I don’t want to lose a client” – and so did our accountant. And Manny Hartman, with whom I had worked in the early days at Winkleman’s and who had become CEO at that point, said, “It will take 30 more years for that area to come back.” That’s absolutely what happened. It took about 35 years and the building of Comerica Stadium, and casinos. It seems to be back and running at this point – but not exactly in the direction we envisioned.

ANITA SCHNEE: But of course you moved there in ‘65 and the riots were in ‘67.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Right.

ANITA SCHNEE: So that was –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It was after the riots that downtown collapsed. The riots didn’t actually touch us except we saw – we came back from Stratford and we saw the black clouds coming down the freeway –

ANITA SCHNEE: Do you remember all the people lined up along the freeway too? I remember that – looking up as we were in the car and there were just lines of people along the freeway just standing and looking at those fires.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think that was the next day.

ANITA SCHNEE: On the way back from Stratford.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Were you in Stratford with us?

ANITA SCHNEE: Yeah.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don’t remember that. I just remember – the black smoke over the city. We went to the shop and nothing had happened, and so we went home. On the way back we passed the parking garage of the Ford Hospital, and there were snipers shooting at people – at cars.

ANITA SCHNEE: They killed the woman in Harlan House.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, I didn’t know that.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: And so from '67 on it was very difficult to operate a retail business in the downtown area. People would not come downtown anymore – it had been a tradition to come downtown and have lunch at Hudson's – we were a block away from Hudson's – and then shop at Adler Schnee. That was the tradition, but from '67 on it was extremely difficult to get people downtown.

ANITA SCHNEE: Nevertheless, you had the art fairs and all that wonderful activity that you instigated.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, we had table-setting promotions. We had hibachi cookouts in Harmonie Park. We got together with the hotel and created gourmet cooking lessons with Copco iron pots. The last two or three years we instigated the Harmonie Park Art Fair, which was extremely successful, and we brought the Detroit Symphony to Harmonie Park.

There was something else that I wanted to mention in connection with that.

ANITA SCHNEE: Greektown maybe?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Greektown.

When the Detroit Edison Company, with Mr. Walker Cisler as head, decided to put ornamental lights on one block of the downtown area, which was Monroe Street [between Beaubien and St. Antoine], the merchants were so excited about the idea. They thought their buildings were going to be torn down and were losing faith in the downtown area. This gave them a new presence.

Anyway, they came and asked me to spruce up their buildings with color, which I did. To their great joy, I would come into Greektown with my little red Volkswagen, and the merchants would come out and wave at me and bring me bags of grape leaves, wonderful bread, baklava, cheeses, and just throw them into my car because they were so delighted that I was working with them on the colors.

The climax of that was – and I worked with the Downtown Business District Organization, and the climax was the Greek festival, Eddie and I sat on the podium with the mayor, and speeches were given. We received the key to the city at that time. The Greek festivals are still, to this day, a very exciting and joyful occasion. In fact, they've expanded to include the lower Woodward area, Hart Plaza [where we have the Noguchi fountain], and are now called International Ethnic Festivals because Windsor [Canada], which is across the way – across the Detroit River – is also participating in that. So I feel very gratified to have helped that effort, and have had so many influences on people.

ANITA SCHNEE: Tell us a little bit about Eddie's relationship with Diane Edgecomb.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Diane was the head of the Downtown Business District, and a lady so full of ideas. She was half blind, but she had enormous ideas, enormous energies, and instigated the Downtown Detroit Days. The merchants got together and had certain promotions. She loved our shop and its merchandise, and her Christmas parties were outstanding. She was Greek, and so she helped in the promotion of Greektown. And of course I'm still friendly with Diane. She's a wonderful person.

And after that I think Eddie joined the Convention Bureau [and the Board of Commerce]. He was active in the Renaissance Center construction and in the People-Mover. In fact, when it was

decided to have a People-Mover, we were the only ones who gave money to that effort. There wasn't another merchant who had confidence in that project. Of course, by that time the city was pretty deserted; there were not many people to move.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes, I remember asking Eddie about that, because it was initially started as a little loop –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It still is a little loop.

ANITA SCHNEE: – around downtown, and I said, well, I just didn't see how that would be really worth all that. And Eddie said, oh, no, they've got light rail planned, going upward into the suburbs. This is the first step in a great new public project. That never happened. Really too bad.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It never materialized, but Eddie never gave up hope. The only idea which materialized was the planting of 157 trees on Madison Avenue.

ANITA SCHNEE: So the character of the store in general, in the climate of the day, was a big contrast, wasn't it? Very few people were doing what you were doing. If I recall, you were the only such store in Detroit.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, we were. We were very friendly with the people from Crate & Barrel, the Siegel's. Their vision for a store – although they felt it was absolutely imperative to have well-designed merchandise, but their vision was to stock certain designs in depth. This was not Eddie's vision – it turns out they were right, that this was the only way you could really make money and have many branches of your store; but Eddie felt that good design needed a personal touch and needed educating. That could not be done on a large scope. It was not a very democratic way of looking at it in hindsight. But he felt very strongly about that, and so we never got together with the Siegel's although they were interested.

ANITA SCHNEE: But Eddie – I mean, the store had absolutely the wackiest combination of things, didn't it? It had this very, very elegant china and stainless and crystal, incredibly beautiful things, and it also had all the gadgets, remember those?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The cooking gadgets.

ANITA SCHNEE: Which nobody was interested in.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, Eddie fell into that because George Roeper, a well-known analyst who studied under Freud, came into the store one day and said, "Do you have a nutmeg mill?" Eddie knew about nutmeg mills through my mother, who brought one from Germany – we had one and Mutti used it constantly. He had never seen one in this country except one day at the Boston – I think it was the Boston Gift Show. This was a Boston distributor who brought European gadgets into this country. He found a nutmeg mill, and that was the beginning of the gadget and cookery department.

ANITA SCHNEE: Things like egg decapitators. Goodness, I can't even remember – honey dippers, long before anybody had ever heard of such things.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Absolutely. He loved gadgets.

ANITA SCHNEE: That and, in fact, he would talk to people and he would just be like a traveling show.



RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, he was not interested really in people buying these things. He just wanted them to know the design and the function of them.

Have I talked about the white china? I think I have.

ANITA SCHNEE: The Rosenthal, yes.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That was part of it.

ANITA SCHNEE: But also coffee, special coffee when Starbucks hadn't even been dreamt of, and some of the fashions – you had some clothing in there, too.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Finnish

ANITA SCHNEE: Finnish fashion.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think I should also mention while we had that store on Harmonie Park – I don't want to forget that I had an architectural design office.

ANITA SCHNEE: We'll get to that.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: During those Harmonie Park days we would travel to Finland and Sweden and Norway. Those buying trips were particularly enjoyable because the crystal people – the glass people in Denmark and in Sweden were hosting us in their guesthouses, which were part of the owners' estates or sometimes in the owner's mansion. At that time there were no tourist facilities in the glass areas. Just woods and lakes. It was the first time I had seen Scandinavian antiques, almost like a Bergman movie interior. It was quite a revelation. We did take our kids on one trip to the Orrefors Glass factory, which they really enjoyed.

But the interesting thing about those trips was that we bought from the glassworks, whether it was Kosta-Boda or Orrefors or Pukkeberg. We bought merchandise out of what they called their "unique rooms." They had at that time a system whereby they would ask designers to come into the factory and set them up in studios. They would give them that studio space for a year and ask them just to produce, and at the end of the year they would judge those pieces and whatever they felt was merchandisable they would put into the line. It is not the way it is done in this country. There were plenty of pieces that were not selected for production in the line, and those are the pieces that we then were able to buy not only at a lower price but also these were the unique – what they called the unique pieces and one-of-a-kind pieces. That was, of course, a real plum.

ANITA SCHNEE: I remember Bertil Vallien; you had a show built around him. Was he a glass designer or a ceramicist with those painted –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Vallien was a glass designer. What you're thinking of –

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, what was his name?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I see him in front of me.

ANITA SCHNEE: Winblad.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Winblad.

ANITA SCHNEE: Björn – Björn.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Björn Winblad designed ceramic pieces, wonderfully whimsical girls with headdresses that would hold flowers, baskets that would hold flowers. We commissioned him to design a plate for us to open that exhibit. I recently found the first draft for it; I have it. We became, of course, very great friends with these designers. They came to this country to visit us, and when they came to Detroit all they wanted to see is, where did the riots start? They didn't want to go –

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, no, I thought you were going to say the car factories at least.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, they didn't want to go to the Art Institute; they just wanted to know where the riots started. That was very distressing.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay, so just in general if you could talk about Eddie's aesthetic point of view and how that tallied with yours, the way you worked together. You sort of shared the same aesthetic.

This is a script of a commercial that my dad wrote and I noticed a great deal of similarity between what he was saying in that and what you believed. And also you might tell us the Mrs. Cohen story.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I'm not sure but I think this was one of the ads we used to advertise on the radio, they were very snappy ads. I think what you're referring to is one that goes like this. It says, "The Eyes Have It: Anybody look at a tree lately, beauty may be only in the eye of the beholder but first the eye must see. The Art Institute is a storehouse of beauty but not the only one. We can all be surrounded by beauty in the kitchen. Can't a cooking spoon have a beautiful shape? The sweeping broom can be a bright, cheerful color and feel good to the hand. Most of us eat eggs in some form but have any of us looked at the form and texture of an egg or considered what a fine packaging job it really is? Notice the subtle modeling and beautiful simplicity of a shell, a continuous smooth shape, a true sculptural form. Can only painters compose still-life: color, texture and shading of apple, peach, grape? Why can't we? We let familiarity blind us to beauty and we are the losers. Put a few nuts in a little bowl and notice the wonderful texture and colors, all harmonious, no genius needed, only the eyes to delight in beauty. Use them to see beauty in the little things all around us."

And I have a story about that. I was designing an interior for a lady who was a schoolteacher, and to my amazement she organized her library by the color of the books. As a schoolteacher I found that very unusual. When it came time to put the accessories around we had a very beautiful alabaster bowl, which I picked for her cocktail table and she asked me, "What am I going to do with that bowl?" I said, "Well, it's for flower arrangements or you can keep fruit in it." She said, "But that's perishable and I have to replenish it all the time." So I said, "Well, grab a handful of nuts and just pile them up on that dish." And she said to me, "Mrs. Schnee, please show me your hand." End of story.

ANITA SCHNEE: That was Mrs. Cohen.

Okay, and just to wrap this section up on Harmonie Park and Eddie's participation in the store, which he pretty much took on, can you just sort of give an overview of his importance in your life? You were saying something like he was your partner in making people realize the value of modernism and what you were trying to do. You had said that the partnership carried you through all kinds of difficult times.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: With children. [Laughter.]

ANITA SCHNEE: I think actually at the time you were talking about disappointments and rejection of the modernist view.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, that was all the way through my life.

ANITA SCHNEE: But Eddie was –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, we supported each other that way, but rejection of modernism I was pretty much used to, but it certainly didn't deter us. We felt it was more important that we had all these beautiful things around us and we were educating people to them.

My fabric designs never sold. The purist architects shunned them because they were ornamentation and they felt that the only true ornament in an interior was the seam of leather, the texture of grass paper on the wall, the texture of raw silk on the window.

Incidentally, I have to add, my mother's draperies in Germany were always, always raw silk. She would not have any other material because I think this is the material that Mies van der Rohe used on his windows.

So anyway, the purist architects wanted no part of ornament, and I have always felt it was because of the book that Adolf Loos wrote, *Ins Leere Gesprochen*, or talking into the void [*Spoken into the Void: collected essays, 1897-1900/Adolf Loos*], where he said ornament is unnecessary. Of course, Mies van der Rohe said less is more and Le Corbusier fell right in with that.

So it was very difficult to sell ornamental abstract designs to the architects of the day. The interior decorators wanted traditional cabbage roses or purist French provincial designs. It was just incredibly difficult to place those early drapery designs.

ANITA SCHNEE: But let's talk a little bit about that adventure you had in teaching yourself silkscreen. And you mentioned how few other people were doing that work at the time, in '47 and '48.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't know what to say.

ANITA SCHNEE: You were talking about the very few people who were doing it, Ben Rose, Angelo Testa, the Lavernes, June Goff, and that you had watched each other's work, paid close attention to the fabrics that they were developing, and learned from going into Ben Rose's studio.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Nobody taught us how to do it; we just had to pick up and learn it. What you're referring to is that I snuck into Ben Rose's studio and just simply took in how he printed his drapery fabrics, but that didn't make them sell.

ANITA SCHNEE: No, no.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No way. It was the museums and the magazines who finally promoted abstract drapery designs and then eventually, of course, took them into their collections. The Chicago Art Institute, Christa Thurman, opened her textile gallery with my work and took 32 of my designs into the Art Institute. And so eventually, the Los Angeles County Fair, every year I would get a blue ribbon with a steer. [Laughs.]

ANITA SCHNEE: We still have them.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: They promoted the fabrics but that didn't mean that we were making a living with that. No way.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, let's talk about – you won the Chicago *Tribune* prize and that's when you started the silkscreen fabric printing.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: And then you won the Celanese prize.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: And I won a few prizes in between.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes, a few.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: For the American Institute of Decorators and such.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes. I have such a long list I stopped. So it was the exposure in the prize, the competition settings you were talking about before and also the help of curators that you said had been very important?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. Bill Woolfenden [at the DIA], who eventually established the Archives for American Art, had established at the Art Institute a craft show and he would call us every year to “get our stuff down there,” as he called it. We couldn’t keep track of what the Art Institute was doing. So it was people like that who really were very supportive and wonderful.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes, and he would also write you on an annual basis telling you you had won a prize every year.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, did he? Did you find that?

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, yes, I did – I did, a whole series of them. The Henry Hopkins Prize some Grosse Pointe couple had –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh yes, I forgot about that. That’s interesting.

ANITA SCHNEE: So, curators and Edgar Kaufman.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, Edgar Kaufman became a great fan eventually. He had to be convinced that ornamentation was necessary in the home, and that took a long time to convince him. He was curator at the Museum of Modern Art and became a wonderful supporter later. He established what he called the “Good Design” Competition. By that I mean merchandise that had been shown at the Chicago Furniture Market and had been accepted by the public would get the museum’s stamp of approval. We would be able to attach a little tag to the yardage and it said, “Good Design” on it, and that was supposed to promote the fabrics. I cannot remember that it ever sold one yard of fabric, but it was a prestigious gesture. Many years later, in fact two or three years ago when the Chicago Athenaeum opened their new building they reestablished that Good Design show and I won a number of Good Design prizes for ANZEA [Textile Company] fabrics.

ANITA SCHNEE: And Jack Lenor Larson I have on my list of curators that seems –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: He’s not a curator.

ANITA SCHNEE: No.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: He was just a wonderful friend and weaver and a companion. I don’t know how well Jack’s weaving sold but we knew each other for many, many years and supported each other.

{When I mentioned Jack Lenor Larsen, who has become such a wonderful friend to me, I would like

to refer to a situation where I was first hired by International Contract Furnishings to reissue the original '40s and early '50s designs. As I mentioned before, I did not get along with the head of the textile department because I wanted to reissue those fabrics in the colors that I designed them for. Very true, we're now dealing with woven fabrics, but I felt those colors were still very vital and needed to be used. They refused because they felt it would not sell on the contract market and it was a very great investment for them and, of course, the merchandise had to be turned over.

In my despair I went to Jack Larsen and told him that I couldn't get along with the head of the textile department [at C.I.F.]. Jack totally understood and said, "I've met her; I can't get along with her either. I know exactly what you're talking about." Then I said, "Well, Jack, why can't the two of us work together?" And Jack's famous remarks were, "Ruth, I am currently working on the fabric designs of the 1920s" – and he was referring to Anni Albers – "I haven't gotten to the 1950s yet. But when I get there I will call on you." Well, unfortunately, of course, Jack sold his business or it was taken over and we never did have a professional relationship.

ANITA SCHNEE: But, Mom, I want to ask you, you took the same philosophy with you to ANZEA, and your experience there has been what?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Totally different.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I still have been kept from using the primary colors that I love. The American public is just not ready for that kind of color palette and, after all, the investment is huge and the fabrics have to sell. So Mitzi [Mills], the president, and I have arrived at a happy medium. We use clear colors but they are fairly well subdued. Of course, since ANZEA is in the contract business and sells large yardages for auditoriums and lobbies and the hospitality trade, they do have to sell what the public will accept. I hope someday the American public will come around to my way of thinking; happy, bright colors can be uplifting.}

ANITA SCHNEE: And David Hanks. Now, this was all the way up to 1991 when he organized the Montreal Museum.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: David Hanks actually got me together with Christa Thurman from the Chicago Art Institute, and that happened long before then. I always felt that he was responsible in bringing the '50s back into focus by promoting those designs. And particularly Frank Lloyd Wright – he is a great connoisseur of Frank Lloyd Wright's and wrote several books on him, he organized the Wright Museum for Mr. Monahan in Ann Arbor. Actually I had the privilege to visit David Hanks in his wonderful penthouse apartment overlooking the plaza, with wonderful art deco furniture that he had collected and a butler who would go around with white gloves.

ANITA SCHNEE: And then up to Judy Endelman and Nancy Bryk as in the curator category of important people.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I met Judy through her husband, Todd Endelman, when we were looking for a depository to place my dad's Holocaust and Judaica collection. On that occasion I met Todd, her husband, who was head of the Judaic Studies Department at the University of Michigan. Eventually the Harlan Hatcher Special Collection Library got my dad's collection. And I think through that, as well as through my gift of a Biedermeier Secretary [Desk] to the Henry Ford Museum, I met Judy Endelman, who became very interested in my work.

{When Papi died, I inherited Biedermeier furniture. Much of it I loved, because it had warm and wonderful memories. I was able to incorporate it into the classic modern furniture with which I designed the interior of our home. The secretary was tall and had a veneered crucifix imbedded into the top hinged cabinet. It was difficult to place. We decided to donate it to the Henry Ford Museum at Greenfield Village. After they joyfully accepted the piece, I had great misgivings. I envisioned my parents turning in their graves at the thought of Henry Ford – the anti-Semite – having their furniture treasure. Judy, as chief curator, assured me that a new spirit was blowing through the museum halls.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, Judy's title or basically her job is chief curator at the Henry Ford Museum, something like that?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: And Nancy Bryk is domestic materials of – that's her –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Domestic what?

ANITA SCHNEE: Her designation, curator of domestic items.

There were magazines that were responding to Ruth's work, and I'm just going to read a list into the tape of these articles that were published and their dates.

There were articles in the *New York Times* and the *New York Times Magazine* section in 1948, one in October 3rd '48 and one in February 15th.

There were articles in *Arts & Architecture* 1952 and 1956, one in *Progressive Architecture* – sorry, there were two there, May 1949 and March 1954.

More recent coverage has been in *Contract Design and Interiors*. This is after the *Unika Vaev* reissues were released.

*Metropolis Magazine* in June 1994.

Let's see, where else – and *Design Quarterly* 1957.

Really it gets to be – oh, *Contract Design*, October 1995, and a picture of one of the designs in the *Smithsonian Magazine* of February 2002.

Could you talk a little bit about ways in which industry ever approached you to get your fabrics out into the marketplace?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: {Next I'd like to refer to the question about whether or not I have worked for industry. I think I've mentioned the airline industry as having commissioned us for a screen, but we were also in touch with the designers or stylists, as they were called, of General Motors. They called me in on many occasions to learn about the use of color. On one occasion they asked me to design a line of scarves, which they would then distribute to the ladies at the coming auto show in New York.

I had some working arrangement with Chrysler. Chrysler was bringing out a pilot car for the auto show. They have a special name for these cars that they show at the auto show – but don't produce.

ANITA SCHNEE: Do you mean prototype?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Prototype, thank you. They wanted to use one of my designs for upholstery in one of those prototype cars and we were concerned that we didn't have the facility to print large yardages. They came back and said, "Oh, no, we don't want large yardages. We want just enough for one car and we want a special design for that." Well, every time we made a special design of course it meant cutting new screens. We were totally baffled that for one car, which required something like five yards only, they were investing money for new screens. But that was typical of working with the automotive industry in those days.

In fact, I remember Jam Handy. They were producing educational films for the automotive people. We would come to Jam Handy in our Volkswagen; park it in front of the building. On one occasion there was great excitement; they couldn't find the owner of the Volkswagen, which was our Volkswagen. When we looked out the window, we saw that four men were lifting our car out of their parking lot. We ran downstairs and said, "What the devil is going on? Why are you doing that?" And they said, "Well, you have a Volkswagen and we're expecting General Motors people. We can't have anything but General Motors cars in the parking lot." That was the thinking of the automotive industry in those days.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, Mom, when you referred to the prototype and wanting the five yards, did you eventually supply the new screen and the five yards?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Absolutely. Absolutely, we did.

ANITA SCHNEE: And what was the design?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't remember the design, but every once in a while we would get a commission like, for instance, the Ford Rotunda where I developed a special design and then was not to use it for any other project. And then I think we destroyed the screens. Unfortunately we destroyed the screen so that it would not be used for any other project. But the automotive industry was very fussy about that sort of thing and didn't mind spending gobs of money. Of course, we were happy oblige.

ANITA SCHNEE: And that was exactly my next question. Do you remember how much?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, I don't remember how much. Eddie handled the financial end of it and I was glad to be out of that.}

But industry very rarely approached us because the fabric designs just were not selling. There are only a few times that I remember. I think it was probably 1946, 1947. I had been designing a fabric on sheer cotton batiste and it was the design *Fancy Free*. Hans Knoll called on me and asked could he include that fabric in his line. I was totally unprepared, didn't know what to do.

ANITA SCHNEE: I'm sorry. What line would Knoll have wanted to use the fabric in?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: They were selling, I think, if I remember this correctly, the Total Picture. In other words not only their furniture but it included drapery fabrics; in other words, sort of a packaged interior because they were also I think having a problem getting designers to know just how to use the material. So they designed for these designers and told them, this will go with that.

Well, Hans Knoll came to our house on Appoline.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, that was before you married, right?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. I think I said '47.

ANITA SCHNEE: '47.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: '46, '47.

ANITA SCHNEE: And what had you done up to that point that got the attention of Knoll? Do you remember the connection there? How did he ever find out?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think probably through the media. It would be the only way I can think of, because the magazines were promoting designers with the forward look and I think he probably saw a reproduction of *Fancy Free*.

In any case, he came to Appoline. I did not know how to handle a commercial transaction, and he was pretty sharp. He already had gotten himself established. So I had my dad, who certainly was very much familiar with commercial transactions and our attorney from Germany, Mr. [Ruben] Manko. I had them there to meet Mr. Knoll and possibly negotiate a contract. Knoll's demands did not exactly meet my dad's and the attorney's. They just couldn't see eye to eye and they felt – that is, my group felt that Knoll was taking advantage of me, and so he walked out without getting a contract or without ever using my fabrics again.

ANITA SCHNEE: Who did he use?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't recall who he used but it wasn't me. Then after we married and were a little bit more established in the fabric printing business – and, of course, Eddie had a very keen sense of negotiating commercial contracts, in fact, running a business and doing the accounting and that type of thing –

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, his Yale background in economics I guess really did come in handy. I hadn't realized.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. Of course, he came from a very sharp Jewish background, let's put it that way.

In any case, we then at that point decided that the Swiss batiste was really the most beautiful. It was – it felt like silk. It was beautifully woven. It was Egyptian cotton that the Swiss used at the time, and so we started importing that background fabric for the designs, and *Fancy Free* looked incredibly lovely on that sheer and had great depth.

The airline industry approached us because at the time first class and tourist class was simply divided by a screen. They bought yardage. They did not buy the design. They bought the yardage and subsequently embedded it between two sheets of Plexiglas and used it, I don't think, the fleet. There wasn't that much yardage sold, but I think it probably was sold for a few private planes.

[End of Tape Four.]

Actually, now that I'm designing for ANZEA I have found that many of those fabrics have been used for private planes. I wish they were used for the entire fleet but they are not, I think that was for Alexander Girard to catch: the Braniff Airlines.



Anyway, that is I think the only time when we were approached by industry to submit our designs.

ANITA SCHNEE: But now you also had noticed that Knoll had taken on the laminated design in their own line, just took them –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: More than 50 years and that is my story. Fifty years later people come around.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, better late than never.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That was actually what Charlie Eames said – he didn't ever say it that way. However, when we would complain that it just didn't sell, what we were doing, he made that famous statement, he said, "Don't worry about it. If it's well designed it will sell." However, he never added that it would sell 50 years later, which is what's happened now.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes. Okay. In what ways do political and social commentary come into your work?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: They really don't. I find that politics is a mean game and I try to stay away from it, except that we have had many, many friends who were totally involved in it. One of our good friends was Walter Reuther, the head of the – is it UAW [United Auto Workers] – I helped the Reuthers a little bit with the interior of their house when they were living on Longfellow and before he was shot.

ANITA SCHNEE: Boy, talk about a mean game, to be shot.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Our friends – well, that was – well, no, in those days –

ANITA SCHNEE: That was a labor – one of his or –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It turned out – the papers thought it was the GM [General Motors] people that instigated it, but it later turned out that I think it was one of his people. I'm not sure. I always thought that he and May were killed in that airline crash, that it was sabotage. I think history has proven that it indeed was not. I don't want to go into that because my knowledge of it is very sketchy. It was just that we were totally distraught when it happened. Reuther had been at our house with his bodyguards. In fact, I remember one evening when – and this has nothing to do with my fabric designs – I was helping them with the interior of their place. The doorbell rang and Jeremy answered the doorbell, opened the door and there was, as big as life, Walter Reuther and two bodyguards behind him. Jeremy, who had been active in the political arena at that point, I think it was the '60s, came running back to us and said, "Walter Reuther is out there. He is a humble man." I think it was probably because Reuther took special pains to greet Jeremy and Jeremy just didn't expect it.

In any case, to come back to the political scene, our friends were certainly into politics. They were into union business, they were attorneys, they were into I think it's called – ADA, Americans for Democratic Action – I'm not sure.

ANITA SCHNEE: Anti-defamation?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The Anti-Defamation League, absolutely, ADL.

ANITA SCHNEE: Who were these lawyers? Do you remember their names?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No. I know Mort Eden was one of them but he was a labor lawyer. He was in Sugar's office and Sugar I think was the attorney for Reuther, if I'm not mistaken. Certainly he was legal counsel. Steve Schlossberg was legal counsel for Reuther for many years. The Schlossberg's lived in Lafayette Park in a Mies van der Rohe high-rise.

ANITA SCHNEE: That was here in Detroit, wasn't it?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Absolutely, yes. So that was really the background, but it really did not affect my designs in any way because I was more concerned with a peaceful space inside a home and not the tumult of politics. So I hope that answers the question.

ANITA SCHNEE: And organizations, I noticed you were a member of the American Institute of Decorators [AID]. I think that's what they call themselves, right?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Absolutely. And I detest the word "decorator" because it means applying things to things.

Yes, I joined the American Institute of Decorators because they were giving me prizes. I was getting first awards and I felt I should honor them with a membership. However, I was sadly disappointed because at that time in those days, and this was the late '40s, the group consisted of – they were really kind of phony. They concentrated on cocktail parties and that kind of social scene, which was certainly not my bag. I felt they should be supporting students and upcoming young designers. They didn't follow that route, probably and mostly I thought because they were afraid of the competition, but I had very strong feelings.

ANITA SCHNEE: The competition, who from?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: From them, from the young designers who were coming up into the trade.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, right.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I was certainly not afraid of that. I thought, if you're good you're good and you deserve to get ahead. So that was my only experience with the professional groups.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, just let me interject. First of all, what function did you see them serving professionally that could help young people? What could they have done?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I thought they should give out scholarships, they should give out student loans, they should exhibit their work wherever possible, whenever possible. I mean, there are many ways you can help young people to get along, publicize their work. None of this was done.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, they did – I noticed that there were two prizes that seemed connected to you in some way. One was in February of '47 and one was in February of '49 and it seemed that the February '47 prize you got an honorable mention in that one and you were talking about having been notified that you had won that.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: In '47.

ANITA SCHNEE: '47, the earlier one.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: And what was the second one?

ANITA SCHNEE: '49.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Okay, '47 we were not married yet. I got a wire that I had won. The first thing I did was joyously tell my intended husband that I had won. He was just as delighted because he shared every moment, sadness or happiness, with me.

So he said, "Well, I'll drive you to New York. We'll both attend the dinner together." That was a wonderful opportunity to talk to each other, because we hardly knew each other when we decided to get married. We went to New York and at the dinner party that they gave we found out that someone else had been given the first prize and I was given honorable mention. The first prize was a copy of my design *Pits and Pods*. It had been copied and got the prize.

ANITA SCHNEE: They said something about the ink still being wet.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, it was wet. One had to have that design on the market for a little while but when the new winner gave his acceptance speech he mentioned that he rushed the design to the office of the AID with the ink still wet. Eddie was furious. He felt that I had been cheated. It didn't matter to me. I mean, that kind of thing. I felt I just wanted to work and keep producing things. Whether or not they got prizes, that was just by the wayside. That was okay if it happened; if it didn't happen it was okay, too.

ANITA SCHNEE: A good thing because it took 50 years.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That's right.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, local organizations, I believe AID, of course, is national, did any local organizations figure in?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. When we first married I had always loved chamber music and perhaps did I mention that I went to Gisela's house and we had chamber music concerts all weekend with Rudolph Serkin at the piano. My great love was chamber music, besides my work, I wanted Eddie to be part of that. He was not familiar with chamber music because his family attended the symphony always. Symphony and opera, he hated opera because he always felt, "I wish they would stop screaming so I can hear the music." That was his take on opera. But chamber music he was unfamiliar with.

{When I refer to opera, I am thinking of traditional style by Verdi, Strauss, Wagner, etc... A-tonal opera is permitted. We both loved Menotti and now that I have been introduced to Jake Heggie, "Dead Man Walking," I am convinced that opera must be more than music. It must tell the story of our time and must be timeless.}

My family had an old friend by the name of Karl Haas. They knew him from Germany. Karl came to this country to Detroit. He was a pianist and in order to be heard he arranged for not only piano recitals but for a group of artists, musicians to play together. He would rent the lecture hall at the Art Institute and his wife, Trudy, would serve Danish rolls during intermission and after the concert. It was just a very lovely way of spending an evening. [Karl has since become a radio personality with his lectures "Adventures in Music."]

We went to every concert. Eddie was totally taken by the intimate milieu of that setting.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, intimate.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: And then became to love it as much as I did, of course, I was excited because it was just another thing that we shared.

I had joined the Chamber Music Society of Detroit. Of course, we both became to be active members and Eddie spent sometimes an entire weekend calling people trying to make them join us. There were mighty few of them. In fact, I remember the Budapest coming to Detroit –

ANITA SCHNEE: Budapest String Quartet?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The Budapest String quartet with Schneider. The other thing that was so wonderful, we hosted many of the musicians. We picked them up at the airport, drove them to their hotel, made sure that they were not alone after the concert as so many musicians are. Once they give a performance they're just left stranded. We always tried to create a warm atmosphere for them.

In any case, the Budapest came, and this is really a classic example, they came to Detroit and I think we didn't have more than 50 people attending that concert. Eddie was totally crushed and said, "I don't know why the hell we do this; nobody wants chamber music."

I should mention that these days, 50 years later we sell out almost every concert. We fill the hall.

ANITA SCHNEE: That's the very same chamber music society.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Exactly. We have people sitting on the stage listening. It's a very popular event. I have also been asked to serve on the board of the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, of which James Tocco is the artistic director. We bring contemporary composers, whether male or female, into this scene. These are two-week concerts in the spring in various religious facilities such as St. Hugo's in the Hills, which is a Catholic facility, Kirk is Episcopal and Temple Beth El, a synagogue. The festival has been extremely successful. Every year I have two or three artists staying with me. It is my great joy to support these dedicated young people. Our living room then becomes a concert hall when they practice before going on stage.

ANITA SCHNEE: That's the one that Henry Meyer is connected to, right?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Indeed. I met Henry Meyer because we have many things in common. He too went through the Holocaust. He was saved out of Bergen-Belson. {In Bergen-Belson he played music of Kurtwell, Gershwin, Mahler – all Jewish composers to Nazi officials. When he became ill and slated for the gas chambers, he was saved by a Nazi prison guard, who recognized him as the child prodigy he heard in a performance in Dresden. The Nazi officer then took Henry's emaciated form and exchanged it for a dead man. He thus spirited him out of the camp.} For 40 years he was part of the La Salle Quartet. Now he is educational director for the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival. We have spent many beautiful occasions celebrating his birthday and other wonderful events. {His 75th birthday party was held on a trip cruising the Ohio River. We were companions of Peter Oinjan, the first violinist of the Tokyo Quartet, now conductor of several great orchestras.} But those are the two organizations that I think I'm most active in.

I am not certain that music affects my designs, except for ANZEA's design *Cadenza*. {Again, a note pertaining to tape five, and now I have a track number one where I'm discussing chamber music and the effect or the feeling it gives to my designs. I forgot to mention that the design *Cadenza* was developed from notes and after I had learned exactly what a cadenza is in music. And so that was developed for ANZEA.

ANITA SCHNEE: And what is a cadenza? Oh, well, okay, let me rephrase the question. How do you feel about the music being reflected in that design? Can you explain a little bit more about how that works? You said something about chords, do you remember?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. I'm not sure if I mentioned previously when I was teaching at Michigan State I had the kids design to Sibelius because I felt that his music had that flow that I was looking for in designs. *Cadenza* is really the notes taken right from the sheet music and reflected in the design. A cadenza is an extended section of free improvisation. It often makes use of virtuoso passage work.

ANITA SCHNEE: And where the lines are closer together? It's hard to describe the design but you said something about those being chords.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I can't say much more about it. I think the design stands for itself.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh yes.}

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I do know that it affects my psyche because it makes me totally happy. It is a wonderful outlet for me and I really think that in order to create one must have a happy soul. You can't create wonderful things if you're unhappy or laden down with problems. Since Eddie died it has lifted my spirit. {Every happy and sad occasion has been marked with Chamber music in our home, surrounded by a group of our friends. At Eddie's funeral, with one of my favorite textile designs draped over his coffin to keep him warm, we had a quartet playing his favorite pieces.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Speaking of spirit, let's turn to what it is that engages your spirit and inspires you. What is your working environment like?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I have a wonderful studio. I mean, the physical environment is such. I have the entire lower level of our condo. The condo itself is about 2,700 square feet large and I have that entire lower level, which we built into a studio. We took out a wall and replaced it with glass. I overlook what they call a meadow, which eventually at the bottom finishes off into the Rouge River which runs along the property.

ANITA SCHNEE: And this is, I should interject, too, that this is not in the suburbs. Hardly. It's barely a quarter of a mile from one of the busiest junctions in Southfield, so it's just a little pocket, isn't it?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: We never wanted to live in the suburbs and we never wanted to work in the suburbs. That's why we eventually moved our shop and my architectural studio downtown. We always felt that the suburbs with malls and the lack of walking space from place to place, the distances are so long and large. We found this place, which is really just a little outside of the center of the city

I have deer coming up to my studio window because there is an apple tree right next to it and they like those apples in the fall. They walk along the river and come up the hill. I have all kinds of little animals that come in and look.

ANITA SCHNEE: The studio has big glass right down to the floor.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I mentioned we took out a wall and replaced it with glass.

ANITA SCHNEE: And you've got all your plants and all these little birds.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Hanging. Well, the birds were actually whittled by clients of mine, who knew that I created a two-foot deep little garden area here. The floor is vinyl but I put my plants on that in the winter, when I spill in watering them it doesn't ruin the carpet. My clients who have come to my studio send back at Christmastime or my birthday or happy occasions they send me little birds that they either whittle or paint and I hang them on strings into this little garden area. It's just lovely. In the summer all the plants move to the deck, the interior court off the den, or little garden spots which I create.

ANITA SCHNEE: And the little trees.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Which trees?

ANITA SCHNEE: The little trees from, gosh, the Six Mile house, or the Outwood house that you uprooted?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, that's outside.

ANITA SCHNEE: But you look at them.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, absolutely. I planted four or five, I think five little pine trees that I started from a branch. On Arbor Day I got a branch from a drugstore and I put it in the ground. It's now a little pine tree that's about three, four feet high. We took little trees from places where we had lived in the past, to help us remember, whether it was on Parkside or Outwood. We rented a very nice house in the woods, and I planted those trees from Outwood outside my studio window. So there are a lot of things around me that I totally enjoy and have wonderful memories of.

Now, you wanted to know about my –

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, let's talk –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't know if I answered the question.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh yes, oh yes.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think I answered the question in a physical sense.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes, that's true. What about spirituality, the non-physical, the metaphysical?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, it's nonexistent I think. Or maybe it only exists in my imagination probably you would call it. I'm not really a religious person. That is, organized religion really turns me off. I think the Jewish religion has great depth and I wouldn't want to be anything else but a Jew. It has brought incredible heartache. My entire family was destroyed because of being Jewish in Germany. However – I was lucky enough with my parents and my brother to escape it.

I feel great – is the word sympathy, allegiance? I don't know what word to use, I feel I am part of a very large, wonderful group of people who have brought into this world a certain philosophy, music, poetry, certainly laws and who try to live by those laws, they have been written down thousands of years ago. That tradition to me is extremely important. I really don't care about praying every day and putting on tefillin and all the rest of that. I think it needs to be in your soul and you need to really feel to be part of it. That to me is spirituality. Religion is really morality.

ANITA SCHNEE: So your source of inspiration clearly comes a bit from that but what other more

physical or more concrete ways do you work to get inspiration?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: In the past, I think in the early days I was greatly influenced by the artistic climate of the time. When I worked at Raymond Loewy's, who designed the Studebaker car, among many other things, I was totally fascinated by streamlining; horizontality was speed. And I designed with those ideas in the back of my mind.

Then when I came to Cranbrook it was a totally different picture. The Saarinens, who were also friends of Alvar Aalto and that entire Finnish group of architects, were more into organic forms or plant forms, shapes, maybe that's the way to use it. The artists who come to mind are Arp and Henry Moore. In fact, Eero designed his buildings that way, such as the TWA terminal at Kennedy, which I think is sort of a biomorphic shape, the Yale Arena and, of course, with Eddie having graduated from Yale, we have gone back a number of times to look at that architecture. And then, of course, there is the St. Louis arch, all I think biomorphic forms.

Through Bacia I was introduced to Alexander Calder and his shapes and mobiles. I was intrigued by his fireplace tools and his electric circus – oh, I loved Henry Moore – and I met [Isamu] Noguchi, who I think was a friend of [Constantin] Brancusi.

Anyway, these were artists who I admired and whose work I was really – I did not copy it, but I was certainly influenced by those shapes and my designs *Cuneiform*, *Pits and Pods*, and *Germination* and *Driftwood*, just to mention a few, were greatly inspired by them.

Then later I was influenced by the things around us. On our honeymoon, which took us out to Arizona, I had never been out west, we had gotten a little red Volkswagen convertible from Eddie's mother as a wedding gift and –

ANITA SCHNEE: A Volkswagen?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, it was a Plymouth. I'm sorry. We bought a Volkswagen afterwards. It was a Plymouth convertible. And since Eddie loved to drive, he had been at Oak Creek Canyon with his mother before. He was determined to show me the west. I had never been any further than Chicago.

In any case, I was totally enchanted by the landscape, the Painted Desert, the wonderful rock formations. I did a lot of sketching on our honeymoon and the design *Germination*, when we got back was finally developed. I was never very happy with it. I felt I really hadn't done the landscape justice.

So it was Eddie who looked at the design – sometimes one can't see what's right in front of one. I looked at the design many times and I thought how can I change that so it really feels right. Eddie took one look at it. He was wonderfully perceptive that way, because when I painted with watercolor or whatever I was doing and I was stuck with a certain problem, I didn't – you know, it just didn't come out right, he would come around and say, "Why don't you do this or why don't you try that?" I would follow his advice. Bingo, the whole thing blossomed.

And so it was the same with *Germination*. He said, "Leave out those little seed pots and just concentrate on the horizontal lines that you've created," I did, and here was *Strata*. We both loved it.

I submitted it to a competition that the Celanese Corporation had mounted in 1948. It was the year we got married. I got the Celanese Corporation prize on that design, and with lots of publicity – it

was advertised extensively – and really set us up in the printing business, in the silkscreen printing business.

But that's not the only place where I get my inspiration. I'm a sewer. My sewing table, I have a very beautiful Danish sewing table with a little wicker basket underneath it, which Eddie gave me. It gives me much inspiration.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, he gave that to you full of colored thread, didn't he?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Absolutely. He bought every color – because he knew that I loved color. He bought every color thread that he could get his hands on.

ANITA SCHNEE: It's a lot like the Plochure system, isn't it.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Exactly. I remember saying to my mother, "What the hell am I going to do with all those spools of thread?" And Mutti said, "Never mind; he gave it to you because he loved you and he loved your sense of color." That was actually absolutely true. To this day, 55 years later, I have not used those spools of color. I want to remember him, surrounded by color.

*Pins and Needles*, the design *Pins and Needles* was born right there at my sewing table, *Busy Byways* with the threads that I just mentioned. I have also been inspired by the environment, stones, and logs inspired the design *Cordwood*. Pine trees, pebbles, drifting snow, teed wheeds and nosegay.

ANITA SCHNEE: That's a reissue too, isn't it? That's one of the old ones, *Cordwood*?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: *Cordwood*, maybe I should mention the recent designs that I did for ANZEA. The design *River Stones* was also inspired by stones, because I love stones and their shapes. *River Stones* is actually a little different story because –

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, as far as the ANZEA fabrics we'll get into the process a little bit later but be sure and mention the new designs.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, *Pebbles* was inspired –

ANITA SCHNEE: *Pebbles*?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: *Pebbles* is an old design. That was inspired obviously by pebbles. I mentioned earth formations, trees. *Spiny Pines* was inspired by trees. Microscopic enlargements of snowflakes, such as *Nosegay* was inspired. The design *Seedy Weeds*, of course, comes from our garden. The nightscape of Manhattan created *Central Park South*, the lit windows in the skyscrapers around Central Park with the stars above. Railroad yards, I used to love railroad yards; *Narrow Gauge* was inspired by railroad yards. Later, for ANZEA, it was *Banners*. Construction sites, and that was really my milieu, working with architects and construction teams and so the design *Construction* came about.

ANITA SCHNEE: So let's talk a little bit about whether you use trade periodicals to get any ideas from.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No. I really don't. I don't have time to read trade periodicals and, in fact, the only time I have time to read them is when I'm on vacation. I do it for pleasure. I'm not inspired by what I read or what other people have done in the magazines.



The only thing now that I think about it, is it does help in finding new materials for background fabrics and for the woven designs. So maybe that answers that question.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes, good.

And how about not so much getting ideas from but getting feedback from any writers, have you admired any writers?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I wish I had more time to read, to be inspired by them. The New York architectural critic, Brendan, whatever his name is – Brendan Gill, I loved his critique of architecture and also Louise –

ANITA SCHNEE: Ada Louise Huxtable.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: – Ada Louise Huxley –

ANITA SCHNEE: Huxtable.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Huxtable, right. I read her comments assiduously and I think they're right on. Whether or not my designs are inspired by them I really can't say that. I just enjoy.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, you have told me many times that you object to explanation of designs; you feel that they should speak for themselves.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Exactly.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes. Do you need to say more?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Because if I have to explain I haven't done the right job.

ANITA SCHNEE: It's not verbal. We're talking not verbal.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, I think a design must stand on its own and speak on its own. And whether it's color or shape or space I don't think explanations are necessary. It must not only speak, it must S-I-N-G.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, I'd like you to comment, if you would, please, on an observation in a 1994 *Metropolis Magazine* article that I appreciated for shedding some more feeling behind your work. The writer was talking about the *Unika Vaev* reissues, so it's the old designs, and I'm thinking particularly of *Strata* and this person noted that when the design is hung there is a sculptural quality. That kind of comment I liked because it kind of opened my eyes as an observer to notice something that was actually true that I hadn't noticed before. Any writers who do that for you or do you just not want to get into that part of the work at all?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't really know how to reply to that? I thought when we were picking background fabrics I had made it clear – maybe I wasn't clear enough – that we picked those backgrounds because they enhance the design and that's actually what happened with the airline job, although they'd never used them that way. The sheerness of the fabric, combined with the print, gave it a dimension when it is draped. I didn't have to wait for writers to interpret that. The same with *Strata*, the same with *Wireworks*; I wanted the depth of it.

In many cases when I have come to an exhibit of my work and they just stretch out the design.

They did at the exhibition this in the museum of the Fashion Institute of Technology [FIT]. They took my sheer designs and just stretched them to show people the graphics and they were really designed and printed with a purpose on that background fabric. I was extremely upset when I saw that. It happens more often than not, because people are looking just at the graphics and not at the sculptural quality that a draped fabric can create. [Whenever that happened, Eddie tried to pacify me, “Ruth, don’t worry about it. As long as they spell the name right.” He would say.]

ANITA SCHNEE: Aha. So the writer having spotted that doesn’t give you a feeling one way or the other. I mean, it –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, I’m happy that she finally realized it, but I don’t think I should have had to point it out to her. I think anyone who looks with a discerning eye should know that. When we printed on heavier fabric we chose the designs that were just graphic, although in designing I have to say that designing drapery fabrics I did consider the fact that the graphics would create an undulating presence and were never used just flat. Now, that is the difference between designing the old fabrics for draperies and designing for ANZEA, which is upholstery. That is always a flat surface. So it’s very important to know the final application. The designed textile must be suited to not only the function but also the application in the space.

ANITA SCHNEE: So let’s talk a little bit about the newer designs that have been specifically created with upholstery fabric in mind. What is that like?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, I think we need to finish the old designs.

I haven’t said enough about the dies. I haven’t said enough about how I designed those fabrics, because they were really designed with the t-square and the triangle because they had to be cut out of film to be adhered to the – we didn’t use silk in the screens; we used organdy. There were other textile designers who used a more painterly approach with tushe. I’m not a painter; I’m an architectural designer. Those were my tools and that’s how the designs came about. The crispness of the shape is what I looked for in those days.

Now, I was inspired by the Expressionists, with Jackson Pollock’s work, and some of those people, I regarded the process more important than the end product. Then like “Batik” we developed what we called the “chenini” process. That was created – those backgrounds and those designs were created with tushe.

{In the beginning the patterns were very stiff, and so by the time we had turned over the printing of the fabrics to the Murad Print Works in New York, I asked them to try and work in a toushe process. Exactly how they did it I am not sure, but we called it the “chenini” process. It was a washed background of color that we then printed our designs over, such as *Wireworks* and *Central Park South*. The design Batik was very much developed with that in mind.}

The other thing I think that’s important, I quickly touched on it when I spoke about the sheerness of the batiste, is that in those early days, right after World War II, we were unable to get background fabric. Everything was rationed and whether it was cotton or linen, it was going to the large printing manufacturers like Cohn Hall & Marx. It was certainly not going to be shipped to little guys like us. We only ordered, if we were lucky, a bolt of 50 yards. If we were lucky, could afford it, and had an order for it.

In order to have an attractive background, again, I looked at my sewing table and found that there was tailor’s canvas. This was a combination of mohair and cotton. I thought that was a beautiful

texture to print on. It was cheap, very cheap, much cheaper than cotton and linen. It turned out that it had an incredibly long life. After 50 years, we still have installations that have haircloth hanging. *Swizzles* [printed on haircloth] is hanging in the Livernois Library, 50 years old. I don't know how many times they've cleaned it. That, of course, enters into the life of the fabric, but it's there.

ANITA SCHNEE: Does the fact that – I read in the earlier press that evidently Eddie took ten passes with a squeegee for each color break.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, I didn't know that. I didn't remember that.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: But anyway it turned out to be a wonderful fabric to print on. Eddie was always concerned that the fabric would not stand up. That's been proven wrong. But he always said, "What are we going to do when we get all this yardage that we've printed back into our laps? We can't afford to refund people?" So that was a great concern to us.

The other concern was that people not use the fabric for upholstery, although some of the designers did. We were worried that there would be crocking of the dyes, this means that if you sit on it, the dye will rub off on your clothes. That, of course, would be a tragedy.

We ended up printing with transparent dyes. Transparent dyes had two advantages. One was the clarity of the color, which we loved. The other was that the background fabric showed through. The little mohair threads from the tailor's canvas showed and created a lovely little texture. And thirdly, it helped us create a third color in overprinting the dyes.

That was a very happy combination. It was just that we couldn't sell the fabric. It was very difficult to sell those printed fabrics. We had several salesmen. I think in the end we had about 10, 11 salesmen who had wholesale showrooms and presented the work to the various architects and designers. It really was not an important contribution to our subsistence.

We did print in custom colors. We had created a small line of stock colors, which we could print ahead of time and then just cut the yardage when the order came in. The custom colors is what we were really into. That created some very unusual situations. We felt very strongly that the fabric color and background must blend into the space that they occupy. In order to match colors, people would send us all kinds of stuff. Sometimes it was a sock. Sometimes it was a wet washcloth. It didn't come to us wet, but it came with a slip attached to it saying, "If you hold this under water you will see the color I want."

ANITA SCHNEE: Just add water.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: So it was tricky in some cases but we managed.

{In the 70's, when we gave up trying to sell the abstract printed draperies which I had designed, we recalled all the outstanding samples which had been lent to salesmen and had been shown in wholesale showrooms throughout the U.S. for 20-30 years. This resulted in boxes and boxes of dirty, torn, fringed, 1 yard pieces of drapery fabrics in our home. One year, Cranbrook called on me, as they often did, to make a contribution to their scholarship fund. I was distressed, we needed the money for our own kids' education. I came up with the idea of dumping those boxes of dirty cloths on Cranbrook for their auction. Eddie was aghast, "You cannot bring those "schmatte" [Yiddish for rags] and dump them onto the Cranbrook museum." – "Under any circumstance!" I nevertheless delivered four full containers to the service entrance of the museum. Four months later, while on a

visit to the DIA exhibit. I ran into the Cranbrook museum director. Gingerly, I asked him if he was able to use anything. He was ecstatic, “Didn’t they call you? We could have used more! We raised \$4500 with your fabrics.” Recently, a lady approached me after she heard my name to tell me that she had bought my designs at a Cranbrook auction to make placemats many years back. She never made them, I offered to buy the fabric back at today’s prices, she refused. I never heard from her again.}

What was the next question?

ANITA SCHNEE: So the next question is the recent designs from which the archival ones were adapted for upholstery fabric or the new ones that you’ve produced with upholstery fabric specifically in mind, how that process works, how the design ideas get executed, the whole process from concept to being realized in fabric.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, when ANZEA first approached me in 19 – was it ‘92 or ‘95, I can’t remember. I think it was ‘92.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, let’s see. I think the process was the ICF [International Contract Furnishings] first started the reissue process.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: Then ANZEA saw that, whether it was in the *Metropolis Magazine* article or actually saw the fabrics hanging, in any case that’s what led to the ANZEA interest.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: ICF, International Contract Furnishings, had the idea of reissuing the old designs. They had an archive collection, which consisted of designs by William Morris, I think Klimt, Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, Josef Hofmann, artists of the Wiener Werkstätte and also Mr. Saarinen.

They approached me and wanted the old designs to be reissued into upholstery fabrics and be part of that archive collection. I was absolutely ecstatic. These were my role models. My first reaction was, “Oh, they picked me because I’m the only one of those guys still living.” Well, that wasn’t true. They assured me they really wanted the work and then I was incredibly excited. In fact, I couldn’t sleep for nights because I thought this was a great honor.

I thought they would reissue those designs in the very colors that I had planned them for – I love clear, clean colors. I find it uplifting. It gives people a feeling of well-being. I envisioned woven fabrics to do the same thing.

Unfortunately, ICF saw it differently. They were trying to sell the stuff and so they insisted that I adhere to the colors that were currently popular in the market. Their clientele is what we call contract work, which is commercial installations. My old fabrics had been used in commercial installations. I remember an installation at the Bendix showroom, in intense blue. Bendix makes washing machines, don’t they, or they did; I don’t know if they’re still in business. At that time, brilliant colors were used in commercial installations and showrooms. ICF insisted that I tone down the colors. They turned out to be approving very muddy colors, which I was not happy with. So that was not really a happy association.

Then in ‘95 I believe IBM had an exhibit in New York –

ANITA SCHNEE: Where was this?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: IBM –

ANITA SCHNEE: IBM.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The exhibit was in New York at the IBM building. They had a gallery on the first floor, a wonderful gallery, beautifully designed, and they displayed my old designs [now considered “archival”]. In fact, I was extremely excited when I saw them hanging between Dali and Picasso.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, were they hanging the actual archival?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, they were hanging those fabrics.

ANITA SCHNEE: Where did they get them?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Probably from our New York salesman, and I really should talk about Creative Looms, who represented us in New York. I think Mitzi Mills, who’s one of the principles at ANZEA, saw them there. Now that I think back, they had a showroom in Detroit. That is Hampton Products and she was at that time importing fabrics for her upholstery line. It was increasingly difficult. She was looking for an American designer who she could work with.

I remember a call from Hampton Products, Dave Roberts, who was servicing us with Stendig Furniture, which I used in the Winkleman interiors and in other interiors, and Dave knew of my designs and called me at 7:00 at night and said, “I’ve got someone here who is looking for contemporary fabric designs. Would you be interested in coming in and showing her your work?”

Eddie and I just grabbed any old what we called schmatte – it was really samples that were fringed and had been with salesmen, kind of dirty. We rushed them to Hampton Products’ showroom and we met with Mitzi that night. She took each one of them apart and said, “Oh, this is exactly what I’m looking for.” I said to her, “You can’t have that.” She was really quite taken back, and I said, “Those designs never sold and if I’m going to work for you I would like to create new designs which will sell.” With a quick letter and a handshake I was hired by ANZEA to design their upholstery fabric line.

Now, I should say that ANZEA is a contract resource. That means the fabrics they weave, and they’re mostly jacquard woven fabrics, are geared to a commercial installation such as auditorium seating, stadium seating, hotel lobbies, hospitality and that type of thing. They are sold in large yardages and must withstand a number of what they call “double rubs.” It means it’s a machine that rubs over the fabric 50,000 times back and forth and the fabric has to withstand that kind of treatment or it won’t stand up under commercial use, people sitting on it. And it also has to be lightfast; i.e. it has to have certain qualifications.

ANZEA accepted – oh, I submitted about – they wanted three designs and I submitted about six or ten of them. They bought them all. That really started my association with ANZEA.

I think it was ‘97 or ‘98 when the whole ‘50s retro wave came about Mitzi said to me, “See, we would have made money three years or four years earlier and we would have been ahead of the time if you hadn’t stopped me from reproducing the old designs. Now we’re going to reissue them.”

Well, that’s exactly what happened. I’m very pleased with the reissues, I have to say. It was difficult to adapt the old shapes to woven textures. It was a whole new process. They took those old designs – once they’re approved – we work on textures. Mitzi knows exactly which one of the mills will produce the correct texture for that pattern. This is her contribution and it’s a damn important

one. I then approve or disapprove what is passed by me. I approve or disapprove of the texture, because I have certain ideas in mind and the way I want this cloth to look when it's all done.

Sometimes it's a frisée, sometimes it's like perhaps *River Stones*. We had a really difficult time to come up with the right texture for *River Stones*. They didn't understand or the mill didn't understand that I had envisioned a Japanese garden with polished stones in a reflecting pool with water over them. This, of course, changes the color of the stone. It creates a little sparkle as the water is driven by the winds that flow across it. And that was incredibly difficult to reproduce, but I insisted that it be done.

[End of Tape Five.]

So the upshot was that we had the little stone shapes slightly padded from the background so they have a little dimension.

ANITA SCHNEE: But not like quilts?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, they first came up with quilts and these pockets of ugly shapes were everywhere, I did not approve that. Then we just slightly raised them, very, very slightly, and we outlined them with a metallic yarn so that there is a certain amount of sparkle, and we set them in a field of a very slight texture that sort of – that is reminiscent of the waves of the water. I'm really very pleased with the way that came out, but it takes sometimes a year or two for that to be developed.

ANITA SCHNEE: So what happens when ANZEA deals with the mill? The mill sends you back – executes the design into a little blanket, sends you back a blanket, then you have to put more input in, discuss with Mitzi. It's a very involved and long process.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Actually they don't send blankets; they send cuttings. The blanket comes in when we're working with color, and that's the next thing.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, what's the difference between a cutting and a blanket? You're going to go on to talk now about the color?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The cutting is a small piece. A blanket is a bolt of fabric, off which we need to make color decisions. When you're making texture decisions you don't need – in fact, it's better if you just have a small area to look at and make decisions on, but when you have colors there are so many different possibilities and you need a broader vision.

ANITA SCHNEE: Why is it better to have a small piece for texture?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: You can study fiber construction better. Actually, when the blanket comes, I cut it up into small pieces.

ANITA SCHNEE: But what is that about? How come?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Because you zero in on each individual color without being distracted by an adjoining color. The mill threads their looms in their standard colors. Their standard colors are not always my colors. They are guided by what the market will bear, because they have to buy the dyes in large quantities.

ANITA SCHNEE: So they dye the thread and then –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: They dye the thread and thread the loom with those colors. But then when it comes to the filler yarn –

ANITA SCHNEE: The standard color is the weft, the warp? I can never think of –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The warp.

ANITA SCHNEE: The warp is the long thread.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. Once the loom is threaded, they use it for many different applications.

ANITA SCHNEE: I see.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: But when they put a filler yarn in –

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, filler yarn would be the weft?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes it is the horizontal. They can change that a million times. When I say a million times, I don't mean a million, but there is an infinite number of variations that they can fill the warp with. They do it for eight inches. Every eight inches they put a different color warp into it.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, that's why they're huge bolts because they have all this variety that they can inject into the standard.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: They use the standard warp because it takes time to thread it, but they can change the filler yarn every eight inches.

ANITA SCHNEE: I see.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: So when it comes to my studio, it's a huge bolt, about two feet in diameter and about 54 inches long. It will have about 300 to 400 variations of one design, only one design.

ANITA SCHNEE: That's unbelievable. Do you ever look at that and say, "Oh no"?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Absolutely not. I greet it with open arms and then "Oh, wow."

ANITA SCHNEE: A feast.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I have a feast of color here. I take each bolt. In the past when I designed new designs, ANZEA came out with about six different designs every other season, because this is really a fashion industry. When it came to the reissues, we issued I think 12 to 15 of the designs, though you can imagine I had 12 and 15 bolts of fabric here that I had to go through to pick. The industry suggests that every design have about 12 to 15 color ways, so out of – well, you figure the math.

ANITA SCHNEE: No, no, I don't do math.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It's an enormous job. Sometimes I cut up the bolts. Sometimes I cover up the colors that are totally unacceptable, because it's amazing how a design will change with each color. I don't go by any color system or by any statistic. There are statistics of what will sell. I think people like Steelcase and some of the big manufacturers follow what they call color trends. I never go by that. I just feel that here's a problem that I have to solve, I break it down into its smallest component, I look at each component and try to come up with a best solution of how I can use that.

Then I put them all together and I find that by the end of – it takes me days. My eyes are way out of my head, and they have fringes. It's just a very, very tedious job, but I love it. After a number of days, and if I've done a good job, I will have come up with 15 color ways for each design. Then I usually let it wait for a week, and then I go back and look at it once more to see if I still like it.

The other thing I think I should mention is that the season and the way the sun and light comes through my window has also something to do with it. The colors look totally different on gray and rainy days. But they do need to speak on those days too; they have to sing. And so maybe that's the creative process. I have no idea but I love it. There it is.

ANITA SCHNEE: Can you talk a little bit about the salespeople, the fabric salespeople who help you get your wonderful designs out?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: In the long ago days, we had a very difficult time finding people who were sympathisch [sympathetic] to our philosophy. They, of course, early on realized that there wasn't much money to be made trying to sell our designs. Not many reps called on architects. This picture has totally changed over the years. ANZEA now has salespeople who call on architects and designers. In those days, people just called on decorators, or they set up a booth in a tradeshow and hoped that they could attract people.

We had a salesman in Seattle. We were very friendly with him. Every Christmas he sent us salmon, Alaskan salmon, and that was good. Also when we participated in one of the tradeshows – and I don't recall which one in New York – a firm by the name of Creative Looms contacted us. That firm had been established by two immigrant weavers who had a weaving mill in Germany. The owner's name was Hesslein. The other was [Lili] Blumenau. Mr. Hesslein in particular was very familiar with what we were trying to do, in fact, had lived in a Mies van der Rohe house in Germany and had been subjected to Mies' strict control of color from two shades of gray to three shades of black. When he came to this country and we visited him, he lived in a wonderful farmhouse in Westchester. It was filled with wonderful Gothic and Romanesque art, just wonderful art. I remember asking him what made the change, and actually he gave me the same answer that many years before John Entenza had given us: that it was incredible discipline to live in a modern setting such as Mies' where all had to be precise and organized.

[Audio Break]

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Over the years we have made many friends among people who try to promote our designs and our vision. I cannot recall a lot of them at this point because it's been ever so many years since we actually tried to sell those fabrics of the '40s and '50s by lugging them from buyer to buyer, who would not buy. But there were editors such as Olga Gueft who did see the larger picture of creativity. In a more recent era, with ANZEA, I have helped them promote their textiles at NeoCon® in Chicago on a number of occasions. I was very fortunate to meet their star salesman, Susanne Dotson, who herself is a painter and works out of Columbus, Ohio.

Susanne is a whirlwind. In helping her present the ANZEA textiles, my designs in particular, she's invited me to her place. We pack up the car with the fabrics. We start out at 6:00 in the morning to pick up pizza, which she will – first we pick up Danish rolls for the people who she serves breakfast to in the architectural office. Then we continue on, pick up pizza for the lunch crowd in other offices. We make about 10, 15 calls a day with her carrying an armful of fabrics and my carrying a heavy portfolio up and down stairs. She is incredibly enthusiastic. She tells the story of my life. She explains the designs. I'm really only the background material. The designers are most appreciative to have me come and always ask me for my signature, which I'm very hesitant to give out because I



just don't believe in this kind of a thing. I think my work should stand for itself.

ANITA SCHNEE: You mean they're asking for your autograph?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: They are. And if they have a chair around that happens to be upholstered in my design – for ANZEA, they ask me to autograph the chair. The ANZEA people encouraged that sort of thing and have been very unhappy that I have not followed suit, but I don't believe in that kind of stuff. I think my work should stand for itself. If it doesn't, then I haven't solved all the problems. My signature is enough on the original sketch.

ANITA SCHNEE: So where in all of this did you – going back to the retail store, Adler Schnee – do you remember what year you sold that and the stories around that, the sale and what happened to the shop?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think we sold the shop in 1976 or '77. I can't recall; we should really look it up. We sold it because Eddie developed heart problems. It was very difficult for him to operate.

The shop and my partnership – and our partnership, I should say – really had become an institution in Detroit. It was an institution because we carried the work of designers in whose work we believed in. Nobody else did, but we did. I remember items that Eddie bought that never sold or after many, many years, and that's not really the idea of having a retail facility. You're supposed to be turning over the merchandise. I don't think we ever really turned it over. When we didn't sell something for three, four, five years we just simply took it home and enjoyed it at home.

{Deleted repeated conversation of the Jena Teapot.}

We were always very particular to have the beautiful lines of contemporary accessories displayed in a very pure and beautiful setting. We tried to promote the cookware, the crystal, glass and the exquisite Jensen silver that way. We worked on that with the Dansk people. We were their only outlet at one time in this country. The people from Orrefors and Kosta-Boda and Pukkeberg, in other words the glass houses in Sweden and Denmark, came over, we were their only account in those days in this country.

We tried to find pieces that – could be sold at popular prices, but it was almost impossible. The production was so small that prices had to be raised. Now I find that Bertil Vallien's glass, which we used to sell for \$100 or \$200 is being sold in some of the glass galleries for up to \$5,000. I'm delighted these artists are finally being recognized.

{Deleted repeated conversation about the Eames wooden screen.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Tell us about the advertising and promotion program that you had.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The promotion program I think I should credit to our daughter Anita.

ANITA SCHNEE: That's me, by the way.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: We had wonderful little – how do you call those little things?

ANITA SCHNEE: Leaflets, those things?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Leaflets. Selling contemporary accessories and tableware was really an educational process. We spent a great deal of time educating people, and Eddie was on the sales

floor constantly talking about why the design created the shape that it turned out to create, and why we were interested in promoting it. Anita came up with a number of little leaflets that supposedly would save him explanations. It worked to a certain extent.

Let me just give you some of the catchy words that Anita concocted. We had one that talked about flatware, *Flatware Facts*. We had one that talked about the cookery. It was called *Pick Your Pots Pensively, A Guide to Gadgetry, American Industry, where are you?* We carried unusual lighting fixtures and here's one that says, *No more glaring mistakes*. We were very concerned that people use lighting in the right way. For instance, ambient lighting was to create a space. There's lighting for reading, there's lighting to light great art. People did not realize in many instances that it was important to have the right lamp.

ANITA SCHNEE: I remember on that subject my dad was so curious about everything, and so he did a lot of research. I remember that he had found that when you watched TV, you mustn't watch it in a dark room. You needed to keep the pupil slightly open so that when you watched TV and then looked away, as was the natural thing to do, you needed some light behind in order to look into. And so he would talk about that to the customers. He would talk about so many small aspects that I could see so many people never thought one second about. But as my mother has just said, I really don't know whether that sold directly the thing he was talking about. I do know that people just really loved to come in and be educated by him.

{It was curious that our children's interest in the design of everyday objects was sometimes reduced to an investigation into: "How does it work?" I remember coming home one day to find that Danny, age eight, had dissected my mother's work light. It is illustrated in the Bauhaus books. I was aghast. I reprimanded him with the fact that he had just ruined a museum piece. He was undeterred and completely reassembled it. I thought that it not only spoke well for his mechanical talents, but also for the genius of Marianne Brandt, who had designed it in 1927 and the firm of Körting and Matthiesen who manufactured it so simply. Can we again design when "less is more?"}

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Eddie didn't care if we sold anything. He was more concerned that people loved what we had. But I think also our promotion and ads were geared that way. I did a lot of drawings, Anita did the words. We were selling beanbags, and here's an ad: "Our bag is full of beans," it says, "millions of shifty, little poly beans." We were selling chess sets, and we have an ad here referring to those whimsical little ceramic pieces that Lisa Larsen designed for Arabia, little porcelain chess people.

{I must not forget a little incident {in connection with the bean bags. We imported them from Italy at that time. It was a brand new approach to seating. When the Free Press editor came around to photograph this new "invention," I fell into that amebic shape in a most unflattering position. It appeared in the Sunday edition with my legs sticking up into the air. I was totally distraught. Eddie just brushed it aside with a remark: "Ah, here is my Marlene or is it Marilyn?"}

And that brings me really to the travels that we –

ANITA SCHNEE: No, no, no, let's stay with the shop just a second because we need to talk about the promotions you did with the bread and the –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The promotion for the bread. We got the bakeries in Detroit to get together at Easter time to produce the breads of that season. We showed them with the baking merchandise. It created wonderful, good spirit in the community, which, of course, we were very eager to have. People loved our shop. But it also had a message of educating people that the staff

of life was not very far from the unusual gadgets we were selling.

We called in a Finnish lady, Jutte Cutler, who demonstrated Finnish table settings. We sponsored gourmet lunches with one of the downtown hotel people because we were selling strange barbeques, like hibachis. No one had seen them before. {Including the director of the Detroit Department of Health. He would come around on a regular route to stick his thermometer into the A-- of a turkey were baking. This was supposed to determine if the poultry was eatable.} We got together with the chef of the downtown restaurant to promote that. We hired a bus that would take people from our shop to that restaurant with a band, people loved that.

We tried to make the merchandise and the designs that we so loved, democratic. We tried to bring them to the public in a lower price range. As I mentioned before, unfortunately that was very difficult because the manufacturers' production was extremely limited. They had to meet their expenses.

The other incredible thing to talk about were the travels to the glassworks. The European glassworks at that time, I'm referring to Orrefors and Kosta-Boda –

ANITA SCHNEE: At that time was, I believe, 1973. Does that square with your memory?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, it was in the early '70s.

ANITA SCHNEE: And by the way, all of these promotions you're talking about happened at Harmonie Park, isn't that true?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, the downtown store we had the ice cream promotion in the Livernois store.

ANITA SCHNEE: But not so much, right? They really took off in the Harmonie Park store?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. The ice cream cart was standing in front of the Livernois store.

ANITA SCHNEE: I remember it well.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: For the Harmonie Park promotions – we worked with the manufacturers very closely. We traveled to see those manufacturing facilities, so that we could talk about them and also to pick the very best possible merchandise we could find. The European manufacturers had studios which they would make available to topnotch designers.

{Deleted paragraph about the studio artists at the glassworks.}

But what I want to point out is that those pieces which had been rejected by the management, we purchased. They couldn't use them in their lines, but we felt they were unique pieces which we wanted to sell in our shop and bring to the public.

We had a house organ, so to speak, which Anita developed. We called it *The Bugle*. We, every month, would mail this sheet to customers explaining what was new, what we felt about design, what we felt was particularly interesting in the art world. It was a great community service.

Community service went further. We persuaded the city council to permit the planting of trees on Madison Avenue, as mentioned previously. They gave permission. I have recently returned there to find the trees mostly dead – all 157 of them.

As mentioned in connection with that, we tried to bring the area around our shop, which became pretty dilapidated, back into the community or into the center of the city. We created art fairs in the summertime. We were even instrumental in bringing the Detroit Symphony to Harmonie Park, as mentioned.

ANITA SCHNEE: And those art fairs were juried, were they not?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Juried, yes, absolutely. At the end, just before we sold the shop, we had about 250 participants who showed their work. And that was fun and gave us an opportunity to meet other artists.

Let's see, I lost my train of thought.

But the art fair wasn't the only community event that we sponsored. We loved chamber music. From time to time, we would ask our chamber music friends to come in and create a quartet or trio, and they played in the shop. At Christmastime, we had carolers who would walk around the park. The Detroit Artists Market was across the way from us and also a gallery next door. An architect had his offices next door. So there was enough for people in a very small sense to come in and enjoy those activities.

ANITA SCHNEE: And the Artists Market was a gallery, wasn't it?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The Artists Market showed the work of Detroit painters, sculptors and craftspeople, and actually, we had a lower level in our store which Hudson's had practically turned over to us free of rent. I had the idea of having a craft's gallery in that lower level, which became extremely successful. The crafts people from all over Michigan came in to show their work and to sell it. In the end, it was instrumental in my specifying these crafts for my architectural projects. We worked with some of the architects who had been commissioned to do the interior spaces of the Renaissance Center, the large commercial complex which was developed by Henry Ford II at the river downtown. I also was able to convince some of the hospitals to show crafts in their lobbies and in some of their patient rooms. It really served to show that current design and current crafts were absolutely vital for people's well being.

In line with promoting the crafts, we promoted artists whose work we felt was outstanding. One of them was Erik Högland, who worked for the Danish glassworks and who combined wrought iron with beautiful glass prisms. The other one was – what was the name of the ceramicist?

ANITA SCHNEE: Winblad.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Björn Winblad for an exhibition of his work, we asked Winblad to design a special plate for us. We promoted it and he designed the invitations. We had met him at his home in Denmark and were enchanted by the ceramics he created: people with hats that could be filled with flowers or fruit baskets on their heads for carrying fruit – those were charming pieces that would enhance people's interiors or gardens.

We also – turn it off a minute.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: So that was our life in a rented facility on Harmonie Park. One day, a little

guy came around and said to Eddie, "Would you like to buy this building?" It was a seven-story building in a turn of the century style. It had an electric elevator, which was unusual for that type of high-rise for those days, and large washrooms. Eddie's reply was, "Why the hell would I want to buy this old building?" And then when the man quoted the price, he had second thoughts. Occupying so large a space, surely our rent would be raised by a new landlord. Eddie got on the phone immediately and called me and said, "How would you like to buy this building for \$60,000?" Seven floors with seven-inch concrete floors and with two floors refrigerated for the fur trade that Hudson's used for storing their client's fur garments in a downtown location. Of course, I was enthusiastic and extremely excited.

{Prior to our move to Harmonie Park, I had done some research on the building. I found that it had been a cigar factory. Before Henry Ford made Detroit famous, this city had been the center of a tobacco industry. Tobacco was grown in Canada, then shipped across the border to Detroit. Where the Hemmeter family rolled it into cigars at 240 East Grand River, "our building." The first floor, our selling space, was oak paneled and used for offices. Two upper floors were refrigerated and used for assembly.}

At any rate, we managed to negotiate a very favorable purchase price for a downtown building, which Hudson's owned. When it came time to sign the papers, we met in Hudson's offices on the 14th floor of the Hudson building with Mr. Foster Winter. He took care of all their real estate. It turned out that Hudson's had lost two of the leases in the building, and their real estate department had designated the building to be eight floors high. When my husband read that, he said to Mr. Winters, "I think our 8th floor tenant is going to be mighty cold in the wintertime." We only have seven floors.

In any case, we then started an advertising campaign: how we had purchased that building and what we were planning to do. Our vision for the building was that we would ask artists and architects and designers to come and have studios in the building. That never materialized because people just did not want to come downtown after the '67 riots.

So we used the second floor for a poster gallery, and that was fairly successful. Nobody was selling posters in Detroit. We enjoyed quite a little business there.

ANITA SCHNEE: The posters you were selling were, I remember, Albers. They were like the galleries in New York, the André Emmerich Gallery.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Pace Gallery, the Maeght Gallery. They were very fine posters, and sometimes they were limited editions. People very much enjoyed that.

I forgot to mention that we were particularly interested in ethnic promotions. That was one of the reasons we decided to put our shop into the downtown area. In Detroit we have not only Hamtramck, which is a large Polish area, as I mentioned before, we have Greektown. There is a Mexican area. The ethnicity of the people was extremely important to us and the fact that certainly it was not plastic like the suburban areas.

I just want to mention that we had a thing about packaging our wares. In those days the big Hudson store had bags that were solid green. The Winkleman dress shop bags were black, and we just felt that we needed a racy bag to designate who we were. I designed a black-and-white checkered bag with the name Adler Schnee in one of the checkerboards. It was a great success. We had people calling from all over the country asking what exactly is an "Adler Schnee." We'd have to explain. In fact, we had a man from New York call us. He said, "I've been following a black-and-

white checkered bag down 5th Avenue and finally asked the lady where she got it. What kind of a shop are you?"

Those were some of the highlights of having a retail shop. Of course, there were many downsides too, when people just did not recognize what we were trying to do. But I think I'd like to just read from one of the little bulletins that we sent out that are daughter Anita put together, and here's how it goes:

"Examine Adler Schnee's merchandise, and you'll find the entire world represented: Danish everything, Swedish glass and gadgets, German knives and cookware, Dutch flatware, Japanese lanterns, French copper, Italian lighting.

"What's wrong with America? You'd think we were unpatriotic or something. The truth is that we would dearly love to stock American. We're not enchanted by the fact that all this foreign stuff costs a fortune to ship and therefore costs you, the customer, a small fortune.

"We do not think that to buy foreign is somehow to buy status. It's just that we have to flatfoot the corners of the earth to find something we should have right here: quality.

"Now, American industry is conservative. It can't afford to take chances. An experiment which fails on the super large scale of American mass production bombs and could carry the company right down with it. So American manufacturing sticks with the same basic product and dolls it up a little differently each year. This year it might be luscious lavender, next year amiable avocado. This year it's got square handles, and next year they'll be round."

So that was really – end of quote – our rationale for bringing in well designed foreign merchandise. It goes without saying that we learned from those manufacturers and from those designers, I also think they learned from us. We made many, many friends among them.

ANITA SCHNEE: Mom, just talk a little bit about the Hamtramck connection and the one Polish –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, that was a promotion. We had, one of the ethnic promotions. We befriended a young Polish student who had been brought up, not as an American by his family, but as though he lived in Poland. [It was Dan Kozak. To my great distress I read this week that he had a heart attack last week and died. July 21, 2003]

ANITA SCHNEE: But he was American?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: He was indeed American, but he was into Polish dances, Polish costumes. He painted wonderful Polish Easter eggs for us. He was able to do lovely Polish cutouts that we enjoyed displayed and sold.

ANITA SCHNEE: They were very, very intricate, weren't they, kind of like the snowflakes that schoolchildren cut out, except that they were just like almost like Tibetan Mandalas? They were just wonderful.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: We loved them.

{All this in a strict sense, was Eddie's contribution. It should probably not be part of this interview. However, we worked so closely together that I find it hard to separate our activities. My architectural clients became customers of the store; I accessorized their houses with merchandise from the store. They recognized it as being "on the edge." I specified crafts, wall hangings and

finishing materials from major commercial projects out of our “cellar gallery.” The planters in the Eero Saarinen designed G.M. Tech Center first saw the light of day in our basement.}

{Deleted section.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Just a brief word more about Greektown. Here it is, 2002, and downtown has been completely transformed with gambling casinos and sports arenas. One of the casinos backs up off Greektown, but there it is, one block on Monroe Street, just as it always was. It’s almost the last remaining little enclave, but it really is just as it was.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, the reason I’m bringing this all about is because as a designer, one can make a vast impact on people’s lives, I think that’s been the philosophy of my life, really.

That brings me into space design, because the process is a little bit different from the textile design area. When I first meet a client, I need to know what his tastes are. I need to know his background. I want to know his hopes and how he dreams to have the work completed, what his commitments are, so that I can get into the heart of his culture and to best solve his problem. It’s my firm belief that good design is really problem solving, and that one has to create an aesthetic unity of pattern, color, texture, and address the human needs of pleasure and economy. If that has been accomplished, the search for perfection, is bound never to go out of style. I don’t believe in styles.

And that rather brings me to some of the restoration work that I was –

ANITA SCHNEE: If I could just interject, let’s talk about commissions and we’ll do them more or less in chronological order. Then we can get to the restoration, if that’s okay with you.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Good.

ANITA SCHNEE: Good. So that first story you told me about the commission you had in New York, when Eddie was driving the car and he let you off to go meet with the people who had commissioned you, tell that story.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh. That was way back before we were married. There was a fabric house that was interested in buying my designs. I had never done this, sold any of my work. I had not even thought about what kind of pricing I should put on it. Since Eddie had a car and I didn’t, he brought me to their offices. The firm was in midtown or maybe lower Manhattan. I can’t really recall it, but he dropped me off at the front door of the building. The office of this corporation was upstairs naturally. He said, “I’m going to wait for you down here.” Parking was so expensive in New York.

I rushed up the stairs. The first thing they asked me was how much did I want for those designs. It, of course, was a question I had never even considered so I said, “Just a minute. My fiancé is parked downstairs. Would you mind if I run down and discuss it with him?” No, that didn’t seem to be a problem. Eddie was sitting with his car at the curb. All these cars were honking around him. I posed the question to him. He said, “Just a minute. I have to move. Hop in. We’ll drive around the block.” Well, the block turned out to be Brooklyn Bridge. We ended up on the other side of Brooklyn Bridge and still had not come up with a price. I never did go back to the office and tell them what we came up with. We were in love – it just didn’t matter. I don’t know what happened to the people who were sitting around the table.

ANITA SCHNEE: They may still be there.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: They may [laughter].

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, talk about the association with Buckminster Fuller in connection with the Ford commission.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: This was also a fabric commission. We were very friendly with Walter B. Ford, who had a design firm, and his chief partner Harley Melzian. We actually became so fond of Harley that my parents during one of the Melzian's trips – came to upper Michigan where they had a summer place to house sit for them while they were traveling.

{These notes pertain to tape six, and particularly in this case to track eight, where I am referring to the Ford Rotunda and the work for W.B. Ford, which later became Ford-Earl.

We, as I mentioned before, had a great friendship with Harley Melzian, who was a partner of that firm, but we also greatly admired Mr. Ford himself, Walter B. Ford. I remember a time when it was Christmastime. We had the lower level gallery where we showed the crafts of Michigan artists.

ANITA SCHNEE: And this is Harmonie Park.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: At Harmonie Park. Mr. Ford came in to buy his Christmas gifts. He came down into the gallery and found a piece of soft sculpture that he fell in love with. And what was it? It was a lunch bucket that had those little – what do you call those little cupcakes that they sold in the machines?

ANITA SCHNEE: Hostess Twinkies?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Hostess Twinkies. It was filled with Hostess Twinkies and other things that one would eat at lunchtime [fast food]. He zeroed in on that and bought it. He said, "Ruth, I finally have a piece on my desk that will remind me of lunchtime," and I thought that was a lovely little touch.}

Harley really loved my designs, one of the very few who actively specified the fabrics in their interior projects.

[End of Tape Six.]

ANITA SCHNEE: Do you remember around what date?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, I don't remember any dates.

ANITA SCHNEE: It was roughly –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: In 1953, I got this from the archivist at Henry Ford Museum; they decided to restore the rotunda. This was the building that Ford had shown at the World's Fair in Chicago, I don't remember the date, but I think it was the late 1800s, if I'm not mistaken, but this could be totally off.

Anyway, they had asked Bucky [Buckminster] Fuller to design a dome for the rotunda. They asked me to supply draperies for the public spaces, to design custom draperies for the public spaces. One of the spaces was the auditorium.

When I got to the auditorium design, I absolutely blacked out. It was a very important commission. I had never had such a large commission and so important. I just couldn't come up with a design that I really liked.



As usual, Eddie came to the rescue. He said, “Why don’t you try the word Ford, F-O-R-D, and script it all over the fabric, all over the cloth. See if they’ll accept it?” It seemed like a pretty corny idea. I had never done anything like that, but I did it. Lo and behold, the Ford executives enthusiastically approved it. We printed it, and we even were put in charge of sewing the draperies.

The opening came for the rotunda. I walked into that auditorium, and to my horror, I found that the drapery workroom had sewn the draperies with F-O-R-D upside down. I wasn’t the only one that was having problems. It had been a very, very rainy day – it was just coming down in buckets, and the dome was leaking. The maintenance people had put up buckets everywhere to catch the water. The guests were drenched, and Bucky was totally unmoved by this. He said, “Well, the dome didn’t collapse.” No, it didn’t collapse. To me, it was just a sign of modern architecture, I had been involved in many architectural projects where the roof indeed leaked. I should mention one of them was the Yale art gallery?

ANITA SCHNEE: Philip Johnson?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No. Louis Kahn. In the Yale Art Gallery, that roof leaked, and buckets filled with water were placed all around. We had first thought it was a piece of modern sculpture until we found out that it was the leaking roof. It was Frank Lloyd Wright who always said: “If the roof leaks, just move your chair.”

ANITA SCHNEE: Did you leave the Ford draperies as they were?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, we did not do anything about it. Nobody else noticed it. Eventually, the rotunda burnt down, and I said, “Thank God.”

But I should mention here that I had the good fortune to meet a lady who had purchased one of Bucky Fuller’s books. I think there were only three or four editions of it. He had designed that book in a triangular shape [like the geodesic dome]. The way one could get at the text was to unfold the triangles. The triangles were put together sort of like a pyramid or maybe – I don’t know the scientific explanation of those shapes, but it was definitely a geodesic domelike construction. One would have to lift those triangles individually to get at the text. She wanted a bookstand designed for that book, and I did my best to accommodate that. We designed it and had it built in acrylic. I think to the best of my recollection, it was manufactured. It now has been donated to the Bienecke Library at Yale.

Eddie was an enthusiastic follower of Fuller’s. I remember that we went to absolutely every lecture we could get to. He had been hired by the University of Detroit to lecture to the architectural students. We sat right there in the first row.

What it meant was that you had to give up an entire day because he never stopped talking, never, except when he excused himself to go to the bathroom. Those lectures started at 9:00 in the morning and sometimes didn’t finish until 9:00 at night. That was difficult on the tush. With a hearing device in each ear, he had so much to say.

Now, back to restoration work.

ANITA SCHNEE: Not yet.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Okay.

ANITA SCHNEE: Private clients, private commissions, you mentioned something about Selma

Fraiberg. Do you have anything you want to say about that?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: {Also on track eight I'm referring to my good friend Selma Fraiberg. I should mention here that she was a great friend of Anna Freud's and worked with her both in London as well as in this country.} Selma Fraiberg, who became an important child psychiatrist and published books such as *The Magic Years*, which is almost like Dr. Spock's book on the raising of children, was my very first American friend in 1939 when I was hired at Fresh Air Camp, as a counselor. We were friends all during Selma's lifetime, until her death. She was actually younger than I.

I helped her with various interiors and greatly enjoyed that, particularly the house that they then moved to in Ann Arbor. Eventually she was given laboratory space at the University of California in San Francisco. And when we taught in Berkeley, we again picked up that friendship. In fact, we helped them find a house in San Francisco and subsequently furnished it – helped furnish it.

ANITA SCHNEE: Do you want to mention anything about difficulties you had in collecting on commissions?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: In collecting?

ANITA SCHNEE: Getting paid.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, in collecting money?

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: And what would that be?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: We designed a lot of custom work because it was difficult to get contemporary furniture, except the furniture that Herman Miller was producing and I think it was Widdicomb, Robsjohn-Gibbings designed for Widdicomb, very limited market so I designed a lot of pieces that were custom made in cabinet shops. And that's always difficult because you want to be able to have a client sit on a piece before they buy it, and in this case it's just not possible. So when the least little complaint came in, people, of course, would hold up our money.

One gallery owner did that with \$150, it taught us a lesson and ever since then – and we never did collect the money. It taught us to ask for a deposit before we entered into any kind of a sales agreement.

ANITA SCHNEE: And you have mentioned several times Frank Lloyd Wright. Did you work with him directly?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. The Affleck House in Detroit – the Afflecks asked me to help them because Frank Lloyd Wright had designed furniture for them, built into the house. It was so uncomfortable that they wanted me to see if I could improve on that.

Well, it was very difficult to get Mr. Wright to understand that. His theory was very much like Mr. Saarinen and subsequently Yamasaki's that if it's a beautiful slab that you sit on, that was enough for the comfort. Well, the Afflecks came from an early American house, and they didn't quite agree with that.

The other Frank Lloyd Wright –

ANITA SCHNEE: So you went ahead and improved on Frank Lloyd Wright?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. They got the upper hand on him.

ANITA SCHNEE: And what was the product? To what end instead of a slab?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It ended up to be a comfortable seating piece.

The other Frank Lloyd Wright interior was the Smith House. The Smiths followed Frank Lloyd Wright's plans up to the very, very last line. [The also had Thomas Church design the garden around the house. They did much of the actual work themselves.]

ANITA SCHNEE: And that was here in Detroit?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That was in Bloomfield Hills, yes.

Occasionally Wright's clients ran into problems, and I would try and help them. A cement house that Wright designed on 7 Mile Road in Detroit, ran into problems. I had some input there.

And I should add here: when I met my husband, he had never been in a contemporary house, having lived in Colonial architecture in Connecticut. He had lived in a traditional New England house all his life. Of course, he knew of the contemporary architects but to actually walk into the space he never had done.

When I taught at Michigan State, I made the acquaintance of Goetsch and Winkler, we drove to Lansing, to Okemos to see the Goetsch-Winkler House, which Wright had designed. I will never forget the reaction that came over him when he walked into the very small space that Wright had designed as a foyer, and then into the large, wonderful space with clerestory windows that he had designed for the great room. It was rather an eye-opener. I never really thought that space could affect someone like that because I had been used to it all my life, but it was a wonderful experience that we shared.

ANITA SCHNEE: And just say a few words about your feeling about Wright, despite the problems that you have had.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, every architect that I have worked with, every important architect that I have worked with, whether it was Minoru Yamasaki, Paul Rudolph or Mr. Wright, has an incredible ego. And I can understand it because they have developed a creative path that is unusual and must, I think, be respected.

When I disagreed, I felt it was for me to explain why I came up with a different design solution and why indeed I feel it has merit to be presented to them. And I have to say, in every case, I was able to convince them that, yes, this was better, and it was more compatible with the ideas of the client and let's do it so we did it.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, moving into the restoration area, I wanted to ask you about one trip you made to –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Wait a minute. I think I should say a few more things about Frank Lloyd Wright.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay, and then let me just tell you the next question, and you can go straight into it, which is talk about the Winkleman's trip to Williamsburg. But do finish your –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, that comes under commissions.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: When I first met Frank Lloyd Wright, I was still at the Rhode Island School of Design. He came to Connecticut College of Women in New London – to speak and he totally at that time disdained women and spoke down to them. So when I later was able to actually do some consulting for clients who worked with Wright, I kind of knew what I was getting into and almost braced myself, I knew that I had to come up with the absolute very best to satisfy that stringent requirement.

And that was also true for Yamasaki. I worked with him on the Feld-Weisberg Clinic. Dr. Feld was my –

ANITA SCHNEE: Gynecologist? Obstetrician.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Obstetrician.

ANITA SCHNEE: He was at my birth.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. He was at the birth of all three children. They needed a large clinic, a new one. I convinced him to build a contemporary building and to use Yamasaki as the architect. Subsequently, they asked me to work with Yami on the interior. It was extremely difficult because – {On track eight I am referring to Yamasaki and my work with him. I designed the interior of the Feld-Weisberg Clinic when I was pregnant with, I think – well, Feld was my gynecologist for all three children, but I think it was Danny that I was pregnant with. When we were designing the interior of that clinic I had the idea of using whimsical figures on the ceiling, because I had to be lying on the – what do you call those, those tables for the examinations, and I felt that one should have something fun to look at while one is being examined.

And so my suggestion to the doctors was that we paper all the ceilings in the examining rooms with Saul Steinberg's wallpaper. They were absolutely aghast at that idea, because it seemed so undignified. However, I was convinced that that's what I wanted and particularly as I was one of the patients, I wanted to see it. So we on our own, paid for that Steinberg wallpaper and paid to have it put up.

The reaction from the patients was unbelievable. I had calls morning, noon and night from women who had been examined in those rooms thanking me for finally doing something wonderful to those exam rooms, and, of course, it was done much against Yamasaki's wishes. He did not want any ornamentation anywhere. He was one of the purist architects in those days.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, you are constantly being asked whether your gender or your religion caused you problems, so please take this opportunity to say what you think.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. When I got out of school, the architectural offices were not hiring women and they were not hiring Jews. The only experience I had that Jews were hired was in the offices of Albert Kahn. Of course, he was himself Jewish, but not very. I have a feeling I said this before – he hired immigrants who came over from the European countries, particularly Vienna, and they were men. One of my very good friends developed stressed concrete and I think eventually

became partners at Albert Kahn's.

ANITA SCHNEE: That was Freddy Zweig.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Freddy Zweig. Yes. I used to baby-sit for their son George who has become a famous atom scientist.

ANITA SCHNEE: Women.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Women.

ANITA SCHNEE: People always want to know.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Women, I cannot say that stopped me. I am not a believer that women can't break the "glass ceiling," as they say. I firmly believe, and I really strongly believe that if women do a good job and they are good and they are dependable, they will get ahead. That has never stopped me.

I do have a firm belief, talking about the feminine aspect, that women must make a contribution. The world is a small place these days, and women must contribute to the world. I've lived my life that way.

It's difficult. You have to really have the discipline to do it and want to do it, because as our son Daniel has always said, "Kids are like rubber sponges; they sponge up the time." But in our household, first of all, I was incredibly fortunate that I had wonderful household help. I had a lady here who was in charge of the cleaning, one who was in charge of laundry and the cooking, and so that I was free to spend time with the children when it really counted, such as parent conferences, helping with schoolwork and that type of thing. I think that's incredibly –

ANITA SCHNEE: When we were sick especially.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, when the kids were sick. I geared my appointments around that and I was lucky to be able to do that. I was incredibly lucky to have a husband who totally supported me in this type of thing. When I couldn't drive the kids because something came up on a building project, Eddie jumped in and got them there. He jumped in when they got into trouble.

ANITA SCHNEE: We got into trouble?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: When Jeremy skipped school – or rather, Danny skipped school because he didn't like the fairy tale unit, and when we asked him why didn't he like it, he said, "Because there is a cow in there that goes moo, and I don't like cows." When Jeremy –

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, he was how old at that point?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, I think it was first grade. Also in first or second grade, Jeremy one day came home without shoes. I asked him, "What happened to your shoes?" He said, "I didn't like them." It happened to have been a pair of little red sandals that his grandmother had bought him. Eddie's mother always came to spoil the children and buy them clothes that I never bought them: penny loafers and stuff like that, which they loved. I thought they should have shoes that supported the ankles and were sensible.

But anyway, to come back to Jeremy, he didn't like those red sandals. I walked back to school with

him trying to find them. We finally found them under a manhole cover. He had lifted that cover and placed them on the outside of that sewer pipe. There they were. He hadn't thrown them down the sewer, but there they were neatly tucked under the manhole cover.

ANITA SCHNEE: And how old was he at that time?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That was second grade. What is that, six or seven? No, six probably.

Anyway, that was always the time when Eddie would jump in and give them a little lesson in life. The time when Jeremy swiped things from the dime store, and we found out. He was not much older than that. I think it was a pencil from the dime store, and we found out about it. Eddie was the one who went to the principal with him to have the principal tell Jeremy the importance of being honest and not doing that type of thing. I mean, it was a major, major conference in the principal's office. My wonderful husband always took care of those little events.

ANITA SCHNEE: Are we at the point for Williamsburg [Virginia]?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: One of the projects we had was to design a new store at Northland Shopping Center. The management wanted that store in early American style. I told them that I had never designed an early American interior, so they budgeted a trip to Williamsburg in order for me to study early American design.

I loved Williamsburg. The budget was large enough so I could take our daughter Anita along with me, and together we studied. I think it turned out to be a very successful project and gave Anita and I a chance to learn from each other.

ANITA SCHNEE: What did you do? How did you manage to translate your modernist background into being able to contribute to a job like that?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: First of all, having seen the original both at Williamsburg and then subsequently at Winterthur, the Du Pont estate, I was able to extract the simplicity and honesty of design. The muted colors were new to me. They gave a certain elegance and quiet dignity.

In line with that, perhaps I should mention a project that I had for an analyst. I'd quite forgotten about it. This was a young woman who was a child psychiatrist. I had furnished her place, when she was a bachelor lady, in Scandinavian furniture, in white bleached beech, beautiful lines.

One day, I had a phone call from her telling me that she was getting married and – to a man who furnished his place with dark oak Grand Rapids furniture. She was totally distressed. How to handle that? Would I please come and help her, particularly to get rid of the dark oak furniture because she loved what I had done for her before.

I went to their house. He lived in a beautiful farmhouse in Franklin, Michigan. When that door to the house was opened, I faced a beautiful Stickley settee. I said to her, "Under no circumstances are we going to get rid of this furniture." Then I started to sit down and tell them the history of Gustav Stickley and the Grand Rapids mass production system that he established. Indeed, it was dark oak, but these were museum pieces. It did not deter them.

After I spent about two hours discussing the arts and crafts movement and the architecture of Greene & Greene architects, they said, "No, we do not want this furniture. We want contemporary and if necessary, we'll take Scandinavian, but we want the latest in contemporary."

So in my dismay, I said, "Well, if you want to get rid of it, we will buy it from you." And then immediately after I said that, I caught myself, thinking how in the world are we going to pay for this and where are we going to keep it? We had just come back from the Philadelphia museum where they were very proud to have one Stickley chair. Here was a house of Stickley. I showed them the little metal tags under the furniture with the Stickley name. It didn't seem to help.

I left there thinking, Eddie is going to absolutely kill me. We can't afford this, and where are we going to store it?

She called me a week later and said, "Ruth, we got rid of it," and my heart stopped. I said, "How?" She said, "Well, we had an antique dealer come and pick it all up." He gave them \$75 for each dining room chair, \$150 for the dining room table, and I could not eat for a day. I was totally distraught about how some art dealer could have cheated them like this.

But anyway, that's not exactly a restoration story, but it's a story of – what is the story. What is the story? What is the lesson learned here? There is great value in the old, and one has to respect it and work with it. I don't mind having contemporary pieces in an interior mixed in with Gustav Stickley. Whether it's my parent's furniture that reaches back to the first Thonet factory or Biedermeier, which I have inherited from my parents. If it's well designed, it will all go together like a bouquet of flowers.

ANITA SCHNEE: Did that feeling that you have influence you in the Whitney and Orchestra Hall restoration commissions that you got?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I've always had that feeling that the good design in the old must be incorporated with the good in the new. We were able – I think it was the 1970s, to be involved in a number of restoration jobs. The Whitney Mansion here in Detroit was the home of a lumber baron. It had been built in 1870 in Romanesque style and had been bought by a nursing association. They touched very little of the original. The painted ceilings were peeling. In the Tiffany glass windows, the lead joints had become weak because of the traffic on Woodward Avenue. There had been streetcars rattling along the front of the house. Unfortunately, the Whitney's had wonderful French Gobelin tapestries glued to fireplace walls. The heat of the fireplace chimney destroyed much of the needlework.

Being a textile designer, all my life I have loved the needlework that my mother used to do. Perhaps I should interject here that my mother's needlework was extremely important to me. As a little girl, I remember her bringing back patterns from the Louvre of the famous tapestries like the *Lady and the Unicorn*, which she then fashioned into a purse. I have an evening bag of her needlework. Eventually when we came to this country and in her 80s, she did a lot of bargello work. I still have it on my favorite pieces of furniture; I have her sampler. I set out to try and find the best craftsmen to restore the Whitney's tapestries. Competent people to restore not only the needlework but also repaint the ceilings in the original style are hard to find.

We used clear Plexiglas sheets, and embedded the Tiffany glass between those two sheets to protect it. It was really a matter of trying to find the craftspeople who would work with those materials. That wasn't easy. This day and age, it's extremely difficult to get people to do that and, of course, extremely expensive with today's labor prices.

ANITA SCHNEE: So what use was the Whitney put to after the restoration?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It was made into a restaurant, and it is a very fine restaurant to this day.

I'm not sure if I remember more. I remember we restored the ballroom upstairs, which they used then. It's used for parties up there, and the restaurant, of course, is a going concern.

Did you ask me about Orchestra Hall next?

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Okay. Orchestra Hall had been built in 1909 for [Ossip] Gabrilovich. This was the conductor the Detroit community hired. It is interesting to note that he was married to Mark Twain's daughter.

Gabrilovich demanded that before he would come to Detroit he would need a hall to conduct the symphony and so the powers to be, Mrs. Dodge and important automotive people, such as Ford, gathered money together from their friends. Orchestra Hall was built in something like six months, an unbelievable feat, and then became the home of the symphony. Well, eventually, it became the Paradise Theatre for jazz and eventually became a vaudeville theatre, and eventually, it was abandoned and doomed for demolition.

In 1972 it was bought by a group of musicians from the symphony who recognized the superb acoustic quality. With monies donated from the community and corporations we were able to restore that wonderful hall.

I remember the first concert which Sixten Ehrling, who was conductor of the symphony at that time, staged at Orchestra Hall. The architectural community sponsored it. We were sitting on – actually there were no seats. There was improvised seating, and the roof was open to the sky. There was no roof on the building. And Ehrling started that concert with Copeland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*. I thought that was so appropriate. Of course, the restoration job is now completed, and the hall is again the home of the Detroit Symphony.

ANITA SCHNEE: It had gone to a modern hall downtown, didn't it? It was for many years in the Ford Auditorium.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: The symphony had performed at the Ford Auditorium for many years prior to the restoration of Orchestra Hall. The sound was ghastly. People complained. And then when we were able to restore Orchestra Hall, they moved.

I should mention here that the Chamber Music Society was the first tenant in the restored hall. We no longer, unfortunately, are the tenants in the hall because the symphony has taken over totally. It was difficult to get dates to coincide between the Chamber Music Society and the symphony people, so we moved out. That is, when I say "moved," it's the Chamber Music Society, which moved to a new hall that had been built.

ANITA SCHNEE: And the Chamber Music Society that you referred to is the same one that you referred to earlier in your talk when you were talking about Eddie fundraising?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Right, same thing.

ANITA SCHNEE: Now tell us a little bit about some work that you did for residences for the elderly, commissions that you got to do.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think the oldest one or the longest ago one, if memory serves me right, was given to me by our good friend the architect Louis Redstone. It was Hannon House. It was this



very special situation because the building was built on a court order. Evidently in the early 1900s, monies had been invested by a Detroit real estate person for the elderly. It was to support them in a home where they could live to the end of their days. These were to be specific people. They were to be people who had made important contributions but had fallen on hard times in old age: opera singers, sea captains, people who had had great careers but couldn't support themselves any longer. Money had been invested and the building had never been built, and so the courts demanded that the building be erected.

Louis Redstone asked me to work on that. The people who then lived at Hannon House had me come back every year to refurbish certain things that needed freshening.

ANITA SCHNEE: So had you done the interiors as the first matter, and then you would go back?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, I did. That's what I meant.

Then came the project for the Jewish Home. We were competing against some very important design firms, one of which was the firm of Albert Kahn with a large staff. People on the building committee knew that it was just my husband and myself who were the organization.

ANITA SCHNEE: Who were the owners of the project, the Jewish Home?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It was the Jewish Federation.

Eddie and I were teaching at the University of California in Berkeley when they called one day and asked me to come in, to make a presentation. I came. I came, having been prepped by my dear husband, who knew that they would ask me why would we think that we could do a better job than these large design firms. The answer to that was, according to Eddie, that if they choose us, they would have about 80 years of experience – we were combining his and mine – as against a large firm where a young person would handle the account, certainly not the partners, with much, much less experience than we had.

Well, we got the job. It was only much later that I found out that the people from the Federation were suing the architects who had done the previous job for them, because some young draftsman had made a mistake in the calculating. [That firm was Albert Kahn.]

At any rate, we took that job very seriously. We researched the problems of an aging community because for people uprooted from previous life modes, we felt they must have a warm and inviting environment. People moving into a senior facility should have a support system, which gives them increased awareness of their individuality and uniqueness.

{This note again pertains to tape seven and particularly track two where I am referring to the Jewish home. I worked with a very conservative architect. We did not really see eye to eye on the construction, and particularly the space. When I first saw the blueprints for the interior, to my dismay, he had designed six – no, I think it was eight – eight 16-inch square columns that were surrounding the atrium. I felt very strongly that old people could not navigate around those columns. I wanted spaces where people could converse with each other. I couldn't create any kind of a seating plan because the columns were always in the way. I constantly complained that we had to come up with a new space plan.

The building committee decided to go to Chicago and look and sit in the furniture that we were specifying. All through that trip, I was bitching that I did not like those columns and I did not see where they were enhancing the space. It was totally against what I believed we should be doing.

Well, the long story or the short story is that as we were getting off the plane the director of the facility took me aside and said, "Okay, if you feel those columns should go, tell the architect to redesign it, but if that roof falls down it falls on your head."

I was delirious with joy. I didn't go home from the airport. I went directly to the architect's office and I said to him, "I have permission to get rid of those columns. How much more is it going to cost them to put steel there to support the roof without the columns?" He took one look at me and he said, "It's not going to cost them a penny more. In fact, they're going to get a credit." I said, "What, a credit?" He said, "Those columns were designed to define the space, end of story."

ANITA SCHNEE: Not to support anything.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No.

ANITA SCHNEE: Pure decorative.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: And what was the owner's response, do you remember?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: To the credit? They were happy to get the credit.

In any case, it was again an example where I think clear thinking on the part of the designer saved the project.}

We were concerned with physiological changes, for instance, eyesight. We found that when people get older, the retina thickens and yellows, colors are no longer seen as they really are; they're distorted. It required a certain light level, non-glare lighting. Disorientation was a problem, so we designed railings that were illuminated and led to exit doors. Hearing was a problem. We were very aware of the acoustics and covered walls with fabric panels. [To keep chatter more quiet, in the dining room, I designed an undulating ceiling, which won an award from the International Illumination Society.] We wanted intimate areas, so fireplaces had seating around them. I designed a large copper-hooded fireplace for the lounge area with bench to that people could sit around that. We wanted to make sure that mailboxes were easily recognizable by color, which coordinated with each residence floor color. For arthritic limbs, we designed sculptured lever-handled hardware for the doors and sculptured eating tools.

The art had to be bold and easily recognizable but also relate to their lifestyle. This was a Jewish facility, and so we tried to gear the art toward the Jewish ceremonial objects and Jewish festivities.

I had never designed a chapel except – no, I take that back. I designed a Catholic chapel for a facility that housed young women from broken families who needed a place to stay. I designed that chapel and then subsequently commissioned one of our sculptor friends, Glen Michaels, to do the major altar piece, the background, for the altar.

ANITA SCHNEE: Do you remember the name of that place?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: St. Mary's.

I really developed a wonderful relationship with those nuns. They told me that at Christmastime, they called on an old Jewish gentleman to be Santa Claus, and they loved the way he treated them. It was wonderful.

In line with that perhaps, and I have to come back to the Jewish home, I was commissioned by the McIntyre family to help with the interior of their new home. The McIntyre's owned Monroe Shock Absorbers, a very important automotive product. When I was first hired by the McIntyre's, Mr. McIntyre pointed out to me that they had never worked with a Jewish designer. In fact, the only Jews they would hire was, number one, their lawyer, their jeweler, and now an interior designer. The jeweler went to the Orient with them to purchase the jewelry for the family.

I want to be able to come back to the McIntyre's because that was a very special project. The house was so large that when I took the children with me to check out a construction problem, Danny thought it was a hotel. He called from the bedroom to have me rescue him because he was totally lost in the house. He thought I was in the lobby, which was really the foyer of the house.

Coming back to the home for aged and the chapel that I designed. There were special problems, in developing the Jewish belief system. Prayer books are not allowed under the seat or under the chair in religious services. I designed a chair that would have a pouch hanging from the arm, a leather pouch, so the prayer book could be accommodated and would not be underneath the chair. Religious elements had to be obscured during secular functions, because the chapel also served as an auditorium-type situation. The Eternal Light had to be a burning bush, and the ark doors – behind which the Torah is situated and the Torah is the Jewish law, those ark doors had to have the initials of the Ten Commandments.

We had a budget, of course. My idea of designing those ark doors was that I wanted a tapestry. The best price we could get for manufacturing that tapestry was from a Chinese resource – or Japanese resource, to have it woven in the Orient. It was my nightmare for months that the Hebrew letters that I had designed as the beginnings of the Ten Commandments, the ten Hebrew letters, would come woven as Japanese calligraphy. Thank God it didn't happen. They really did a beautiful job.

But a little bit about the colors of those ark doors. My parents had many friends in Mexico. In fact, going back to the early immigration days, many of their friends could not enter the United States because of a very strict quota system. Their friends then went to Mexico City. They could take their money into Mexico and they did extremely well. They were very successful. And Papi and Mutti would spend every winter for 30 years in a little garden cottage on the estate of one of their friends. We visited them there.

We were first very hesitant about coming to Mexico because we had an image of a lazy Mexican sitting under a palm tree with his donkey sleeping. That was not our lifestyle. Once we were introduced to the Indians who are so dignified to their crafts, which we absolutely loved, nothing could keep us away from the winter trips to Mexico. We went there for 18 wonderful years.

We had just come back from one such trip. We had worked with the Indians on woven carpets, which we needed for our shop. I was filled with the Mexican colors; the hot pinks, the oranges, the purples, the brilliant yellows, the brilliant greens were all in my head. And so when I was designing the ark doors for the Jewish facility, I incorporated those colors.

Eddie took one look at them, and he said, "This is never going to get accepted. You'd better change. The design is okay but the colors, they will never accept them."

[End of Tape Seven.]

Well I was so much in love with those colors that I decided to take a chance. At the presentation to

the building committee, out came the ark doors in those colors. I explained what I wanted to do. There was a long silence and I thought, well, here it comes. I was prepared to have my design knocked down. But to my incredible amazement, the director of the facility, Chuck Wolfe, came up to me with outstretched arms, and he said, "Ruth, you have really done your research. Those are King Solomon colors." They were accepted and they are still on the ark doors, much to my delight.

I designed a candle wall for that facility – but I don't want to forget the drinking fountain. The tile around the drinking fountain was designed according to an old Polish tile pattern that I found. Many of those old people had emigrated from Eastern Europe to Detroit and I felt somewhere I should make them aware of the land that they had left. That turned out to be an incredible success.

The candle wall: The fire marshal did not permit the open flame, obviously. A Jewish woman lights a candle at the beginning of the Sabbath, every Friday night. This is part of the ritual established in the family. My idea was to design a ceremonial wall that would divide the dining room from the lobby in such a way so every resident had a little electric light that they could turn on to welcome the Sabbath. That was a great success.

In the snack bar I designed tiles made in Safed, Israel. We hung tapestries all around to demonstrate and show the Jewish holidays.

We were able to accommodate the physical infirmities of the residents and incorporate them into our interior. Every design decision became an important element of the solution.

The same was true for the facility that I designed in Minneapolis. The donor wall is always a very important part of such a facility. To accept that job we had driven from Detroit through Wisconsin to Minneapolis. I was made aware of the beautiful location that city was in, and so the donor wall reflected the landscape of the surrounding area.

When the new Detroit home was opened, the Jewish Federation decided to close one or two of their other facilities. To my horror they decided to melt the dedication plaques which had been mounted all around that facility, giving donors credit.

The Jewish community here in Detroit is a very old one. Those plaques were extremely old and some of the families no longer existed. When I heard that they wanted to melt them down I was absolutely beside myself. I went to the director and said, "It's only in Nazi Germany that they do this; we must preserve these old plaques and do something creative with them." I turned them over to Arthur Schneider, who was a great friend of ours and a sculptor. He designed a stabile and mobile sculpture for their gardens. The dedication plaques are preserved and are standing. And some of those residents recognize the old Detroit families, and claim that some of their relatives belonged to those families.

I think that's about all I can say about that.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, no, no. Please talk about the lighting for the dining room.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, in the dining room I had come up with an idea of a color in the ceiling, I wanted ambient lighting. Of course, when you throw bright light into a color, the color reflects, and reflects on food, certainly, in the case of a dining room. We had two problems. One was the acoustics, I did not want that to be a noisy dining room, and the other was that I did not want color to reflect on the food.

So with that problem in hand I designed a ceiling – what would you call it, curvilinear ceiling?

ANITA SCHNEE: It reminds me of Romanesque arches.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, but the ceiling sort of goes up and down.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, oh, right. It's sort of wavy.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It's a wavy ceiling. I designed that with strips of aluminum color so that as the wave is down, we have the color, and that color grades into a white, which is at the top of the wave, and the white is then illuminated by indirect lighting so that the reflected light is white.

Between those sheets of aluminum I was able to – well, the very curve itself – helped the acoustics, but we in addition put an acoustic material between the strips of aluminum, and it's a totally quiet surrounding, which very rarely comes into a dining room because people sit down and they chat. That's the idea, sitting at little tables and catching up with your neighbor. I received an award for the design from the International Illumination Society.

It brings to mind another project for a chain of restaurants here, Aged & Rare. They had me design a number of their interiors. I had never attended any of the restaurants so – Eddie and I decided to go there for dinner once. I was appalled at the noise level around me, and was determined that the next project would be quiet. I wanted heavy acoustic materials everywhere, in the ceiling, on the walls, on the floor and in the chairs. When I presented that scheme the owners were totally against it. They felt that the noise level of their restaurants contributed to the camaraderie and the –

ANITA SCHNEE: Conviviality.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: – conviviality of this space, and so I had to do that project all over again.

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, no.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I like quiet dining spaces, but evidently I am alone in that. To have a piano player at a dining space is totally against what I believe it should be. We went all through Europe sitting behind noisy pianos when we dined.

ANITA SCHNEE: Going back to the Jewish home, could you talk a little bit about – oh boy, I'm going to use this phrase – branding the facility?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't know what branding is. It reminds me of steer. But they needed a logo and I started out designing a – what do you call those candles that you light, the twisted candles?

ANITA SCHNEE: Oh, Havdalah.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I started out with a Havdalah candle, which is a braided candle. I think – I'm not too religious but I think that's the candle that is lit on the Sabbath.

ANITA SCHNEE: It's to celebrate the end of the Sabbath –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, okay.

ANITA SCHNEE: – and integrates the Sabbath with the rest of the week.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, that's nice. Okay. Well, anyway, that's what I started out with. That did not quite work. So from that came a menorah, a seven-branch candleholder, which eventually

evolved into the logo.

ANITA SCHNEE: Which reminds of the tree, right? You have the leaves and then talk about how you picked up that theme in that donor wall.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Are you asking me a question?

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes, I was going to ask you about the donor wall at the Jewish home and how you carried that theme through.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I should first mention before I designed the tree – it was a tree of life, with each donor name having a leaf and the color of the leaf would designate how much the donor gave. If someone gave \$100,000 the leaf was a different color than a donor that gave only \$5,000.

ANITA SCHNEE: And what was the choice of color for those different –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It was actually metallic colors, copper and steel and a dark color.

ANITA SCHNEE: So the big donors got gold I assume?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, absolutely. But the interesting part about the project was my idea of using materials that related to the facility and to the psyche of the inhabitants. We used stones from Israel. We found a resource that imported Jerusalem stones. We had been to Israel for my parents' 50th wedding anniversary – Jerusalem is always called the Golden City, and for very good reasons because when the sun hits that stone – it's a very special kind of quality – that stone turns to gold. My parents went to Jerusalem to spend their 50th anniversary just for that reason. I remembered that and felt that here was a wonderful opportunity to use the stone from Israel as the background for the donor tree. It was an incredibly successful design.

ANITA SCHNEE: So are there any other private commissions, private clients that you can think to talk about, some of the private homes?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think as a general rule I have been extremely fortunate to have clients who had the money to back my ideas. But in any case, whatever it was, whichever interior I designed, I made very sure that the clients' hobbies were displayed, whether it was an art collection or whether it was just a person who did photography. We would pull out those photographs, mount them and place them into important areas. Or whether it was just somebody who was into family, I'd pull out the family pictures and have them up on the wall. And I think I can truthfully say it endeared me to many of my clients who after 50-odd years have come back time and again to have me help them. In some cases, I am on the third generation.

ANITA SCHNEE: Tell the story about the high rise in Florida and the kitchen color.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That was a client of old standing. They retired to Florida and I helped them design the penthouse apartment that they occupied. My idea of Florida is, of course, sun, they had an interior kitchen. The idea was to paint the ceiling a brilliant yellow. Somebody saw it from the ground and immediately called the management company to see – it seemed to disturb them – to see if it could be repainted. I think all we did was change the lighting so that it wasn't quite as intense.

But I have run into that in the past from time to time. I have been involved in designing stores for the Taubman malls and found that the restrictions of the mall owner were almost more than the

restrictions by the people who lease the space. In one case – this was a Taubman mall – I had a call from Mr. Taubman himself asking me to change the bright color on the very back wall of this beauty shop because he felt it was not appropriate for his centers. Talk about loving detail work.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes, on his part, keeping track of every conceivable aspect.

So in general, how did commissions differ from other work that you had that was not under a commission?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't understand. Every job is a commission.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, I think that it's just work that you would do just for yourself. I think that's the thrust of the question.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, well if it's a comparison between the work that I did for our own home and commissions, it is ever so much more difficult to work on your own house.

ANITA SCHNEE: I'm surprised. I thought you were going to say for someone else.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Not at all. I can analyze a client's space by asking him certain questions. When it comes to our own house there is this enormous resource of sources, all of which I love or they wouldn't be my resources. Which to pick is almost impossible.

ANITA SCHNEE: So it's the freedom, the total freedom that you have?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: That's hard. You really need to have borders or –

ANITA SCHNEE: Constraints.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Constraints.

ANITA SCHNEE: Did the circumstances of any given commission have an impact on the work?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think it's a given, absolutely. It sets the standard for the work – not the standard; it sets the parameter of the work. It puts the work in its place. I try to take each problem and analyze it, and this is one thing I learned from the Saarinens. You break down each problem and you look at it and you try to solve each little detail of that problem and then put it back together, and that will certainly affect the work and make it as perfect as you can make it.

ANITA SCHNEE: Can you think of particular circumstances that have posed difficulties, or opportunities in any particular commission?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Any commission poses difficulties. The difficulties are unending. From the time the contract is signed to the time the doors are opened it is a string of difficulties: first, designing the space for the client, then getting the materials the way you want them. No matter how careful those purchase orders are written or the specifications are written, invariably someone interprets it differently or the supplier cannot deliver. Then you have to say, "No, this is not what I had in mind; please replace it or reship it or we will have to make another selection." Of course, when you make another selection it affects the entire scheme. In my work everything is so well thought through that if I have to change one item it will affect everything around it.

I think I should mention here the fact that there were jobs that I've had to do over and over and over

again. I don't mind doing that but there has to be a reason.

[Doorbell].

In redoing, one project comes to mind that gave me particular problems. I was asked by one of the modern architects here in Detroit to work on the interior of a library extension job. It was particularly important because it was near the Cranbrook campus in a very wealthy neighborhood. The original library, had been designed by a well-known architect, who later became head of the architectural school at Cranbrook. The building committee was incredibly difficult. I made six presentations. Every time I made a presentation there was another objection. After the sixth presentation I came home and I just broke down. I didn't think I could go on. Eddie said, "I know exactly what's going on here; the next scheme you develop you'd best have the architect make the presentation." That's exactly what we did. My designs were immediately accepted, which leads me to believe that in some cases it's either being a woman or anti-Semitism does enter the fray. That's very unfortunate.

{Other projects that I can remember: I was asked to design a very large house for a family that owned 57 McDonald franchises. There was no budget.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No budget at all.

ANITA SCHNEE: The sky's the limit.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, that happens once in a while.

ANITA SCHNEE: Are you glad when that happens?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, actually I'm not because I like to have parameters. But it's a good feeling when you get it.

I designed a kitchen for those – no, before I designed the kitchen I came to the owner and said, "I think your people would probably want to design that kitchen," thinking if you owned 57 franchises for McDonalds you've got to know something about cooking and kitchen design and I was not to be the one. He turned to me and he said, "Ruth, it makes me think that you've never been in one of our restaurants." And I said, "Absolutely true." He said, "We don't have kitchens in our restaurants. You design the kitchen."

I designed that kitchen with a pantry to accommodate fine china and crystal, and after the job was built I visited the family to see if everything was placed right, and when I got to the pantry those cabinets were filled with McDonald glasses and their – what do you call those things, those – that they have Mickey Mouse and the puppets, decals – with McDonald glasses and decals of all the Disney characters on them. That's certainly not what I had designed those cabinets for.

On another occasion I was commissioned to design a dedication plaque for the lobby of a building and for a very important donor. He constantly called me and said, "Mrs. Schnee, just make sure – I don't care what you design; just make sure it's conspicuous and it's placed conspicuously in the lobby."

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, where is this going to go?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It was for one of the Jewish facilities, for one of the geriatric facilities.

It was a problem for me because I feel strongly that if you give money it should not be conspicuous. I



designed the stand and I designed the plaque in clear Plexiglas. And when he saw that donor plaque he had to agree that it was in exquisite good taste, totally inconspicuous except when you looked for it because you can see right through clear Plexiglas, of course, and he was very pleased. And what we did in order for people to see it I arranged to have fresh flower pots put around that Plexiglas stand so that people would not miss it, but I thought that was a very nice way to show that this lobby had been – the monies for this lobby had been given by this wonderfully generous donor.}

{This really should be on tape seven and I think about track two. It really refers to commissions. At the time that Eero Saarinen was designing the General Motors Tech Center in brilliant glazed bricks – each building had a different color brick – we supplied a number of items through our store, such as planters for some of the reflection pools, but particularly I remember the design of the executive dining room that the Ford-Earl people were planning. It was an executive dining room for just eight people. The table was round and was really a giant turntable.

But I'd like to particularly refer to the ceiling because the ceiling had been designed in panels of stainless steel with Thaibok silk, which we supplied at the time, stretched between very delicate veins of stainless steel. I thought it was absolutely beautiful and a genius design, but the head of General Motors, and I don't remember the name, did not approve of it. He hated the Thaibok silk. He probably didn't think it was macho enough to have a silk ceiling in the executive dining room. So the design had to be done over three or four times at great cost to General Motors, but I think they finally got it so that it was approved. But I felt it was just another sign of the excesses of the automotive industry.}

ANITA SCHNEE: You've often spoke about the difficulties of getting suppliers to respond to what you wanted, and I seem to remember that you said that changed over the years. It didn't used to be so hard. Is that right?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, it really is. I don't know whether it's the computer that's made things more difficult, but in many cases in the old days suppliers knew us and knew exactly what we needed and how we wanted it and were able to supply it post-haste. Nowadays everyone is a number. I call up a supplier that we've dealt with for 40 years and the person on the phone can't find a record, or if we haven't ordered from them in six months we're taken off the computer screen and a new credit reference has to be handed in.

In fact, I find it so incredibly difficult that in one case when I needed a little rubber gasket for an Eames folding table I had the product number with me. I called for that product number when I called Herman Miller. The answer I got from the voice on the other line was, "I can't find it." I subsequently said, "Well, it's this and this table and it was designed by Charlie Eames." And her reply was, "Did he ever work for us?" That was the Herman Miller operator.

ANITA SCHNEE: Wow.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: And that little conversation only pointed out to me how important it is, number one, for the employer to train his employees – number two – and for design students to know what designs were made by whom. I think that's one of the reasons why I have decided to take on a teaching position this winter in Florida.

ANITA SCHNEE: Tell me about the travels that you've made in your life.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I've already discussed, I think, the travel to the battlefields in Belgium where

my dad fought during World War I and where he wanted to show us the destruction of trees and houses and the whole landscape, saying hopefully that there would not be another war. Of course, he was very wrong.

Another journey that – now, this is besides the twice-yearly journey that the family made to Ostende in Belgium and to the Taunus near Frankfurt. That was absolutely mandatory that everyone in the family met there once in the summer and once in the winter. In that connection the winter of 1932, is particularly imbedded in my mind because –

ANITA SCHNEE: This is the story of the guy standing there. Well, say it again because I'm not sure at this point which time you've told this story.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: New Year's Eve of that year, 1932, a member of our family stood up and – what do you call it when you said prosit –

ANITA SCHNEE: Toast.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: – toasted the New Year, and in toasting it said, "This is probably the last time that the family will get together." The scepter of the future Hitler regime was very much on everyone's mind, and very much already on the horizon, and indeed it turned out that after January 30th, 1933, when Hitler came into power, the family never again got together and, in fact, except for my parents and my brother and the English branch, my cousins, was totally destroyed in Auschwitz and Lodz. That was 1932, '33.

The only time we traveled in those years was to Belgium and Holland. My parents absolutely loved Holland, particularly my dad, and had business connections there. My mother loved Belgium because of my grandfather's business connections. At one point actually my parents, I remember, were considering sending us to Dutch schools. They were known for their expertise in foreign languages. Every student had to learn at least five foreign languages. My parents were very keen on that. My mother had spoken Italian and French before she knew German. She had nannies who spoke those languages. In fact, my parents' greatest wish was that I join the diplomatic service. Of course, I fought that one tooth and nail, wanted no part of it. At age eight or seven I of course already knew that I was going to be a designer.

In any case, in the early '30s, those travels, brought us to Katwijk on Zee – we had a little summer place there by the North Sea – we visited my mother's Bauhaus roommate, Herta Metz, in Scheveningen. The Dutch people were so wonderful that I even learned Dutch.

In any case, then subsequently in '36 my best friend's family had already left Germany and I was allowed to visit them in Brussels for the 1936 World's Fair. That was the first time I had ice cream on a stick dipped in chocolate, a "Good Humor," as it is called here. Ice cream was not a product that was being sold that way in Germany. That summer was also the year that Queen Astrid was killed in an automobile accident, and I had great admiration for her. She had an incredible style, wonderful wardrobe, and I felt she was so dignified.

Other trips: Our honeymoon to the Southwest. As I mentioned, we had gotten a brand new Plymouth car convertible and set out to see Albuquerque and Flagstaff and surrounding country. I made many sketches out there on our honeymoon. We had a little honeymoon cottage in the canyon. What was the name of it?

ANITA SCHNEE: Oak Creek.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oak Creek Canyon. We had to wade through the cold water to get to that little cabin. It was so cold at night that we moved our bed into the fireplace actually. But the Indian work that we found out there – I still have some of the leather accessories that we bought, wonderful Indian woven little rugs, a little silver armband which I gave to Anita many years later. As I mentioned before, the design *Germination* was developed there.

Then in the late 1950s, I think it was '58, somewhere around there, my parents had the idea of asking their German friends who tried to save us during the Holocaust to come over and spend a summer with them. My parents were well enough at that point to pay for their trip. So Helmut and Hedio Goedeckemeyer came to stay with us that summer and spend summer vacation up north with us.

We had in the meantime purchased a Kollwitz from the Valentiner estate. Valentiner was the director of the Art Institute here. We very proudly showed that to the Goedeckemeyers because they had a large collection of Kollwitz. In fact, most of it was purchased directly from her. They knew Kollwitz. Helmut was extremely knowledgeable. They owned a Rodin, they owned Degas, and we kind of depended on him – that is, Eddie and I; my parents, of course, were very knowledgeable about the value of these paintings and had followed them in auction catalogues to determine prices and so forth.

But anyway, when the Goedeckemeyers came to our home – the first thing Helmut said after he came into our apartment, "I'm sorry to tell you, but that is not an original Kollwitz." We assured him it had been bought from the Valentiner collection. Valentiner would not be selling a reproduction. It had not been signed. It had not been numbered, according to prints made from it, and it was printed on the wrong paper. We said, "Well, okay, if it is a reproduction we love it and we will cherish it for that." Helmut insisted on going to the main library and looking up the Kollwitz estate. The book, of course, that he pulled from the library had been dedicated to him. There, lo and behold, was our picture without a signature and without having been numbered. Helmut found that it was not numbered and signed and then determined that this was possibly an experimental engraving that she had done on different paper which she had not used in other prints.

Going back to our European trip in 1960, Eddie did not want to plan that trip. He wasn't used to planning American trips. I insisted because my dad would never set foot outside of the house for a trip without having every hour planned, every reservation made, every event accounted for. I was used to that kind of traveling. Eddie said, "No, we're going with the Goedeckemeyers, they know the terrain" – my parent's friends, who met us in Rudesheim on the Rhine. We were to travel with them through Belgium and France – Belgium, Holland and France. Eddie depended on them making the reservations.

Well, it didn't turn out that way. Although Helmut had been with the German army in Paris for two or three years, the army of occupation, he had not made a reservation in a Parisian hotel, and without a reservation during the summer heat you had to pretty much sleep anywhere. Indeed we found a hole of a hotel at Place Pegalle with cellar windows, men peeing into the windows. It was really quite an experience. At that point Eddie decided, this is enough – traveling with Europeans, particularly Germans. "We are going to American Express where they deal in green dollars, they speak my language, it's air-conditioned and they can direct us from there."

{I'm mentioning our trip with the Goedeckemeyers. I mentioned that we met them in Rudesheim and it gave me a chance to speak German for the first time after having come to America. And the curious situation there was that I spoke German and people answered me in English because they felt my German had an English dialect or an American dialect.

The other thing that I remember about that trip was that Helmuth had found a painting in Paris on the Left Bank in one of the stalls that had attracted his attention. It to the – and it was in pretty bad shape. He took it to the restorer at the Louvre, whom he had an acquaintance with, to have it restored, and weeks later he called us and said that that painting had been a Bruegel. Of course, we were very excited that we were there when he found it.}

ANITA SCHNEE: And if I could just ask, Mom – your mentioning that Helmut was a member of the army of occupation makes me wonder what it was about the Goedeckemeyers, how they had saved you, that made them not the average Nazi.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I really don't know enough about their family background. I know that Helmut was a very dear friend of Papi's sister, my Aunt Berthe [who was killed in Lodz]; he was really familiar with Jewish customs and Jewish family life. As it turned out later, once Hedio died, many years later Helmut was in a nursing home. My parents tried to contact the family and were totally rejected by the Goedeckemeyer family, who as it turned out, were not only Nazis but extremely anti-Semitic. The fact that Helmut came to Düsseldorf on his own during the night of the Holocaust, November 8th, 1938, to try and rescue us, made me finally realize how heroic a trip that must have been for him.

In any case, Helmut Goedeckemeyer was a great collector, as I mentioned, without much money. That was unusual for us because in this country great collectors have great budgets. They had saved every penny to invest in these great works of art that they had around them. He was really a minor official in the Pelikan works. Pelikan, of course, makes the pencils. As Eddie has often mentioned, the *Venus de Milo* is in the Louvre but she's also on their pencils.

In any case, the trip with the Goedeckemeyers was unusual. They had great knowledge of the masterpieces, and in the Louvre they were wonderful guides. But as far as socially and being with them, that was another matter. They skimped with meals, they stayed in third- and fourth-class hotels, and by the time we got through with that trip, we had figured a certain amount of money for, we had gobs of money left over, which Eddie then invested.

In any case, it was Paris that kind of broke the camel's back because at that point Eddie said, this is enough. We went on to Scheveningen to see my mother's roommate and we told them about our plight and they put us up. And since – no, I should say since Mr. Theo Metz, was in the diplomatic service they put us up in Kastel Wassenaar. It was a little castle which the Queen of Holland uses to entertain her visitors.

{There was a particular situation because we one day got up and saw the Palestinian flag flying from the steeple of the Kastel, and upon inquiry found that they were expecting Ben Gurion, who was then president of I think it was Palestine still – maybe it was Israel at that point – they were expecting Ben Gurion to be their guest, and this then led to getting to know Ben Gurion as guests of the hotel, which again was an incredibly inspiring situation.

ANITA SCHNEE: The Kastel is a hotel?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. It was an old – it was a chateau to begin with, was beautifully situated with the grachten around, but they were taking in paying guests sort of like a bed and breakfast in the diplomatic style; wonderful food.

ANITA SCHNEE: And grachten are canals, are they?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, those are canals.}

ANITA SCHNEE: Now, Mom, when you said that Herta was Mutti's roommate, where?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: At the Bauhaus and in Munich at the Hans Hofmann school. It was the first time I had seen them since we emigrated to America. They came with unbelievable stories of what had happened to them during the war. This was true of everyone whom we met. That's why that European trip, which was my first one after coming to America, totally tore me apart. The stories people had to tell us, of friends and my classmates, who had either been killed or done away with in one manner or another was almost more than I could take. When we arrived at the airport in Düsseldorf and I saw the police in black leather jackets and long black leather coats, I was totally hysterical. My husband had to carry me off the plane screaming and struggling because I saw those terrible Nazi years in front of me again.

In any case, the Metzses welcomed us with open arms. During the Nazi occupation they were chased away from their house to sweep the streets of Scheveningen with the members of the Concertgebouw Orchestra and eventually were transported to Poland. In the concentration camp in Poland they met a gentleman who became their friend and companion. When the Russians liberated the camp he came back to Scheveningen to live with them. It was Otto Frank, the father of Anne. While he stayed at their house, someone rang the doorbell and delivered loose pages. The messenger turned out to be their housekeeper and the pages turned out to be Anne's diary.

Then he and Mr. Metz got together and established a fund to reunite Jewish children with their parents, if at all possible. Otto Frank at that time decided that every bit of money that he would be able to collect from the publication of Anne's diary would go toward that fund. Metz helped him with that. They traveled back and forth to Germany many, many times. I just couldn't understand how you could do that, knowing the circumstances when we all left Germany.

In any case, that European trip was quite memorable. I don't think it had an influence on my work except that I was doubly grateful that I had been spared all that and that I was now free to live my life.

Before we left – we had to see the museum in Amsterdam. To my incredible amazement I found that Rembrandt had painted that *Night Watch* wall to wall, ceiling to floor. I had only seen it in tiny little pictures in art history books. That was really a wonderful discovery.

We then – let's see, what other trips did we have?

ANITA SCHNEE: You visited Papi and Mutti in Mexico.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh yes. The Mexican trips were total pleasure. The memory of those is incredible. We at that point had our shop. My dad had a car in Cuernavaca where they had rented this little house, and with them we would take baskets and newspapers and we would go into the hinterland to collect crafts. These crafts were for our shop; we sold them. We had them shipped from Mexico City by an American. That was his business, and during one of those trips we met a puppeteer who was the head of the puppet department for the board of education in Mexico City. We found out that Mexican children learned manners and hygiene and all the good things from puppets.

Roberto Lago became not only a wonderful friend but he also traveled with us to Oaxaca where we would collect the black ceramic pots. He dealt with the Indians for us because in the way

backcountry they don't speak Spanish; they speak Zapotec. That was a language he knew and we didn't, of course.

The other thing about Roberto was that he never stayed at the hacienda with us. He wanted to stay with his people. He wanted to eat with his people. And so we always excused him when he would go down to the market for his meals.

We found a potter in Oaxaca. I don't remember the little town's name. Actually, the towns in Mexico, either they are full of ceramics when they are in clay areas or they're full of weavers when they are in fiber areas, or where there are a lot of sheep or copper, the whole town will work on copper. But Roberto introduced us to a Mexican potter; Dorothea Blanca was her name. We would travel across dried riverbeds to her little hut. We entered it and it was totally empty except for a little stack of straw in the corner, her bed, and the crucifix on the wall. She created large figures in ceramics. I'm not sure how, she didn't have large kilns, but she would assemble the parts once they were hard, then she fired them. She did not use glazes. But these figurines stood about six-foot high, some of them, certainly five foot – between five and six. They carried large baskets on their heads. We bought them as garden ornaments for people to plant flowers in, either the hats or the baskets that were on the heads of these ladies. They were wonderfully whimsical, and we dealt with her for many years.

During one of the trips to her little – what do you call those, the clay huts?

ANITA SCHNEE: Adobe.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Adobe hut and she pulled out a photograph to show us where she had been – first of all, we knew she was a national treasure. The custom, of course, in Mexico is to bring the national treasures to Mexico City, pay for their visits, and have them honored in a ceremony at Chapultepec Park.

Well, Dorothea – got even further. She had been sent to New York to the American Crafts Museum. This picture showed her with Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb, shaking hands with her. She was very proud of that. She was so humble it had not affected her in any way. All she wanted to do is teach the children in the village her craft and have it accepted by the people around her. Of course, we were one of her great fans.

Mexico in many ways is unforgettable travel. We worked with not only the Indians, as I mentioned, but also weavers, Americans, who had emigrated to Mexico. They were producing cloths in marvelous colors, colors we could never have bought in this country. We bought a lot of yard goods, which we had made into tablecloths or bedspreads.

We worked with people who did macramé. I myself have a dress made out of macramé. We also worked with prisoners. In Mexico the prison system is such that people who are incarcerated are taught crafts and they produce them in the prison. The prison sells them and the profit then goes either to the prison or helps the inmate be rehabilitated. I think that's a wonderful system.

ANITA SCHNEE: Do you remember any particular item that they would make?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, yes. I have purses that were macramed by prisoners, and of beautiful craftsmanship. Of course, the prices are a lot less expensive than if you were to buy them from a regular weaver.

[End of Tape Eight.]

Those were wonderful years during which we worked together gathering things for the shop.

We also took trips to South America, buying trips. Those were difficult, because people in South America really do not like Americans. In Guatemala, they absolutely hate Jews, at least at that time. In fact, when we arrived at the hotel, we were told never to leave at night. The head of the Jewish community had just been kidnapped, and it was best to just stay cool, so to speak.

That was in the city, but in the country, working with the Indians, was quite another matter, and we really were impressed by the dignity of those people and the eagerness to please us and to speak our language. It was quite touching.

We bought rouanas from them. On one of the trips we went to Peru –

ANITA SCHNEE: What are rouanas?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Rouanas are the warm throws that the shepherds throw around their shoulders when they're out in the Andes Mountains on cold nights with their sheep. It's very heavy wool, woven wool, sometimes raw wool. We never brought it into this country as raw wool. We would never have sold it. It's too prickly. Americans like wool soft.

I still have a coat that I made out of one of those rouanas that got burnt. One of the salespeople had draped it over a lamp and burnt a hole into it. I wasn't about to give that up. I love the orange and olive colors of it.

But also, we bought large hides, which we sold for area rugs in dens and boy's rooms. These were really steer hides, I think. I remember on one occasion when we were in a wholesale facility. They had a retail store on the first floor and the second floor was the wholesale division. The retail store was a beautiful jewelry store. Of course, the emeralds and the gold in Peru are unforgettable. I have never seen emeralds so large and so green as they are there. I spent my time in the jewelry store downstairs admiring the stones and the gold. Eddie was upstairs working in the wholesale division ordering merchandise. It was lunchtime, and a gang of three young people came into the shop, went to the telephone, cut the wire and proceeded to empty the store, pulled things off the walls and out of the cases. I rushed upstairs, and I said, "You won't believe this, but they're emptying the store downstairs." Eddie turned around and said with a straight face and quite perturbed, "Ruth, you're always exaggerating." I wasn't exaggerating at all at that time.

Our trip to Machu Picchu was not so good because in Cuzco I got sick.

ANITA SCHNEE: In Ecuador or Peru, which one? Peru.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Machu Picchu is in Peru.

ANITA SCHNEE: So we were talking about Machu Picchu and Cuzco.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: We never got to Machu Picchu because I was so sick. In Cuzco, I had altitude sickness, and Eddie had a hard time finding an oxygen tent for me – after being in terrible shape for three days, they transported me to Lima where I could finally breathe. And that was the end of our South American trip. Especially after an attempt to steal my watch off my arm in broad daylight, right on the street in front of our hotel.

ANITA SCHNEE: So after that, you did make one more trip that I have to Israel.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, we went to Israel to celebrate my parents' 50th or golden wedding anniversary and to surprise them with Danny on that trip. We had actually no illusions about the Israel crafts. They were very traditional. But to our great surprise, we found that some very wonderful modern silverwork was being made, which we then bought for the shop.

ANITA SCHNEE: So does that cover the travels?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I should also mention that we climbed Masada with my mother, who was in her 70s at the time. She climbed ahead of us, wonderful stamina. She was quite a lady.

What's next?

ANITA SCHNEE: So how about travel in this country?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: We went to Savannah, Georgia, with the National Trust. And talking about the National Trust, I really forgot that we took one summer to study at Oxford's Christopher Wren architecture and that was very, very special. We lived in the dormitories. This was a Yale group that went. We ate in their dining halls being served with their own wines. Every college had its own bottled wine, was very fussy about how their house was run and how their garden was tended. I think that Oxford experience with Christopher Wren was a wonderfully educating period. We loved the little bookshops.

{That was a wonderful summer because my relatives in London – oh, we had to spend a week or two in London on occasion and my relatives there turned over their car with Haskey the driver so that in the mornings we were able to visit the stately homes with their wonderful collection of paintings and incredible libraries. In the afternoons we would visit the museums, and the British Museum was our favorite, particularly the rare book collection and the Elgin marbles, which we were in awe of. And for the evenings Richard had turned over his ticket agent and we were free to attend the theatre. It was sort of like paradise.

On one of those occasions we attended Glyndebourne. Glyndebourne, of course, is the estate of Lord Christie and was turned over to the performers of opera. We were dressed to the nines at 2:00 in the afternoon to take the car with Haskey driving to Glyndebourne. We attended *Falstaff*, which was performed by the – what is the opera company in Italy? Help me out a little bit. We attended *Falstaff*, performed by La Scala, with artists with the London Symphony Orchestra. We saw Christie's incredible art collection during intermission and then retired for the main meal in one of the outhouses where a seven-course meal was served with waiters in white gloves and then went back to the opera for the remaining performance.

I referred to outhouses and my daughter, who has been in England for a number of years, is correcting me. These were outbuildings on the Christie estate.

ANITA SCHNEE: So you ate there. It was in the intermission, was it?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: During intermission.

ANITA SCHNEE: And then you went back.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: To see the rest of the performance. That is really a wonderful custom that they have in England.

We went to the Shakespeare plays at Chichester and we were able to order our snack, our dinner



before the performance, and then sat down in the tent afterwards at a private table with our name on it, being served the goodies that we had selected before the performance. Unfortunately we don't have that in this country, and I think it's a wonderful way to attend – whether it's opera or Shakespeare plays, it's just a wonderful way to do it.

I should also go back to recollections of Holland and our time with Theo and Herta Metz. It brought back remembrances of my youth in Holland and the wonderful vacation days that we had. The Dutch children were fortunate enough to have bicycles and tricycles with balloon tires. We didn't have that in Germany because the German colonies had been taken away from Germany after World War I and the Kautschuk, as they called it in Germany, or the rubber industry was I think only existing on what they called Ersatz, which is substitutes.

My greatest dream was to own one of those little tricycles. In fact, my mother and father were very particular that the toys that we played with were well designed, and I felt those tricycles were beautifully designed with balloon wheels and I wanted one. And they were in brilliant colors. Papi traveled back and forth to Holland very often, almost every week, and I begged him to bring back one of those tricycles. He brought back Belgian chocolates, which are superb, of course, but he never brought me a bicycle. And when I asked him why I couldn't have such a bicycle, he felt that Jewish children should not be so conspicuous by riding bicycles with balloon tires that had been manufactured in Holland.

In line with that, I remember the dolls that I had. You would now call them designer dolls I think but in those days it was Käthe Kruse, who was the famous doll designer. I loved her work and I was only four or five-years old. And, of course, the teddy bears with the button in the ear. That's a trademark, Steiff Knopf im Ohr. The translation of that, it just occurs to me, Steiff is the name of the factory, Knopf is button, im Ohr is in the ear, and that was their logo and their trademark. Käthe Kruse was the name of the designer and the dolls had papier-mâché – I think it was papier-mâché painted heads. They weren't porcelain. I didn't like dolls with porcelain heads. I was very fussy about that, because you couldn't really hug them. Their bodies were nice and soft, and I have recently found at the *Antique Roadshow* through the TV that the Käthe Kruse dolls are selling for large sums of money, in the thousands of dollars, and I wish I still had those dolls that I cherished in those days.}

Travel in this country – we loved Savannah and, of course, studied the old architecture there. We went to the various plantations. That trip was with the National Trust. We enjoyed that immensely and a trip to New Orleans. I was very disappointed in New Orleans except for the Garden District. I thought the architecture left much to be desired. I thought the French Quarter was very tacky. I don't have much good to say about New Orleans.

I found, to my amazement, that Degas had lived in New Orleans and painted there for a year, had family there, but I didn't realize at that time how dull Degas' paintings are. I didn't realize that until we had an exhibit here at the DIA of Degas Dancers and, except for differences in poses, I really think it's very dull. I really like the Impressionist painters much better.

ANITA SCHNEE: You know, it just occurred to me the van Gogh exhibit that came to Detroit –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, that was a wonderful thing.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes, at least the mention of that, van Gogh.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, of course, I sympathize with van Gogh's colors; I love everything that he has ever done. Vis-à-vis Degas, I think it's a very good way of comparing it, van Gogh was so

vital. I can't say that about Degas but one shouldn't be that way.

I know my mother once reprimanded me when I made a derogatory statement about Turner. I'd never liked his landscapes. And my mother actually hit me on the face and said, "You never do this about a recognized famous painter." And she did that in front of Dr. Scheier, who was an expert art historian and friend of the family.

Later in my life when I saw the sketches that Turner developed for these paintings, I saw them I think in London at the National Gallery; I felt she was absolutely correct. Those sketches and the drafts of them were exquisite, but somehow in the painting, I think he lost it.

ANITA SCHNEE: So turning back to the travel in this country, I remember you admiring a woman architect in California. Who was that? We went to see some of those buildings, and it was in the Mission style, wasn't it?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, and unfortunately her name has escaped me. I admired her for her persistence to get into L'Ecole des Beaux Arts when female architects were rare and for her great competence in designing about 800 buildings.

ANITA SCHNEE: Marion, was it?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No. She worked with Hearst, William Randolph Hearst at San Simeon, and put his art collection, I think, together. And I should have done the research on this, but I know I was a great admirer of hers. [Yes, it was Julia Morgan.]

ANITA SCHNEE: So any other travel, any influence in Florida, for example?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Eddie never really liked Florida. He felt it was too damp. He had emphysema, and dampness gave him great problems. He really preferred the west. He loved the subtle colors of the desert. The first few years when we could take time away. Our children were grown up and in some cases married; we traveled to Key West and loved the old city, not the tourist traps but the old city of where Hemingway had lived. Then as Eddie's heart problems increased, we kept coming further and further toward the mainland. We stayed in Islamorada for a number of winters. I was very nervous about it because the hospital was not equipped for heart patients. They had no machinery there, and I felt we really needed to have doctors nearby.

So we moved on to Sarasota. We stayed on Anna Maria Island, which we both absolutely adored because it was a laidback place, very quiet, very beautiful, and we could feed the herons and all the animals and birds that came around.

What was the question?

ANITA SCHNEE: Florida, just to talk about it.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh, to talk about Florida, yes. Last year, the last two years I went to Florida by myself, because I lost the love of my life and found that there was an architectural society that was interested in bringing back the houses of the '50s. I discovered that Sarasota architecture in the '50s was incredibly important.

They staged a conference and the book they published, as I leafed through it, lo and behold, there was a house that I helped design the interior for. It was the Daisley House in Sarasota, which Paul Rudolph, who at the time was head of the architectural school at Yale, had designed. There was

that house with furniture that I had specified in the '50s when they were building that house. It was Vladimir Kagan's furniture. What happened there was that Mr. Daisley passed away during the construction of the house, and Mrs. Daisley never completed it and evidently sold it with the furniture that was planned for the house. The new owners retained it because now Vladimir Kagan's furniture is sought after. It's in a biomorphic shape with rounded corners and rounded arms. It's a very definite style that is being brought back. I have now seen it being auctioned for incredible prices. So I was very, very thrilled that they had retained the furniture and that it was still being shown on the architectural tour and is in the book of Sarasota architecture of the '50s [*Paul Rudolph: the Florida Houses*; Christopher Domin and Joseph King, photographs by Ezra Stoller; Princeton Architectural Press, 2002].

{To my great distress, I have since learned that these beautifully designed, simple structures are being torn down to make space for "Spanish Pavilions." The property is deemed to be more valuable than the home. This was particularly evident when I visited with friends of Jeremy's who live in an original Breuer house on Long Island. Real estate agents are trying to get their hands on the beautiful property, disregarding the house which requires much repair. I suggested that a clause be put into the contract to the effect that no sales agreement will be permitted unless the home is retained in its original design.}

ANITA SCHNEE: So do you work at all in Florida, or do you feel that time is for rest?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh no, no time is for rest. I work in Florida. I have clients who like my work. Last year, I designed a kitchen for some people who have a beautiful glass gallery. This year, I'm planning to teach at the Ringling School of Design, and who knows what will turn up.

Did we forget Stratford?

ANITA SCHNEE: Stratford has got to be one of the places that figured very prominently in all our lives. Can you talk a little bit about how you went there?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Stratford is a very special place, Stratford, Ontario. We have been to Stratford, England, twice. We loved the diction and the whole way the actors presented themselves. That was very special. And, of course, the Lygon Arms in Stratford, England, I will never forget with wonderful after theatre snacks. Stratford, Ontario, is the place that I really think has developed Shakespeare to new heights. Their productions are so unique, and the scenery, the lighting, the costumes are just superb and perfection.

ANITA SCHNEE: I was going to ask you about the beginnings and how the new building came about. Didn't they start in a tent?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes. The beginning of Stratford, of course, was with Sir Tyrone Guthrie. We were great admirers of Guthrie's and attended some performances in the tent, and that is now more than 50 years ago. Subsequently, we went every summer to attend a few performances, but we could never stay very long because we had small children and a shop.

After we gave up our shop, we decided it was time to attend the seminars that McMaster University offered, which are totally inspiring. One meets the actors, talks to the lighting engineer, talks to the production people, the people who cut Shakespeare short because some of the plays are longer than what a modern audience can sit through. Eventually you do attend eight plays. It's what Eddie used to call the cultural bloodbath.

But before we attended those seminars, when we lived on McNichols [a.k.a. Six Mile Road], I one day looked out the window and saw a couple that looked very much like a picture of the Guthries walk across the street. I had learned previously that the University of Detroit brought him in to discuss Shakespeare in the English Department. I said to Eddie, "That looks like Tyrone Guthrie." He said, "Absolutely not. How can he be walking on 6 Mile in Detroit?" And I said, "No, but look it up in the telephone book." Sure enough, there it was. I immediately called and said, "Would you care to come over and have tea with us?" as though we were having tea every afternoon at 5:00, and Lady Guthrie said, "Oh, Tony is writing a play, and I don't think he wants to be disturbed."

Okay, that was the end of that, except that three minutes later, Tony called up and said, "Absolutely, we want tea." I started rushing around the house cleaning up, getting our gooseberry jam out, because I knew Europeans liked gooseberry jam and Americans had not gotten used to that. When I looked up from the sink window, there was towering over me Sir Tyrone Guthrie looking into my kitchen window. Well, he came through the service entrance. He had torn shoes on, cutoff pants, and he was totally engaging, absolutely charming, absolutely interested in every little thing that we had to tell him. It actually ended up in a wonderful friendship between the Guthries and the Schnees.

He told us the story of how he started a jam business in Ireland on his estate, because the young people were all leaving the country, the farmland, for the city and couldn't earn much. In order to keep them on the farm, he established a jam business, and those jams we carried in our shop.

He was interested in absolutely everything. He read the Shakespeare sonnets to the kids that were there. He spent Thanksgiving dinner with us. We took him to chamber music concerts and just absolutely took him into our lives. And they asked us many times to come and visit them in Ireland, but that never came about because shortly after that, he had an engagement in Brighton [England] to conduct or to stage an opera. Our Anita was about to get married, and we asked him to come to the wedding [in Scotland] but that never happened because he died shortly afterwards.

But Stratford is an unforgettable experience. I still go every year to attend the seminars and the plays.

ANITA SCHNEE: Do you feel that you're part of an international tradition?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't feel – first of all, I really don't like that question because it's not up to me to make the decision whether or not I'm part of an international tradition. I just work. I think it's part of a tradition, but whether that is international or American, it really doesn't matter to me. I do think I have brought to this country many of the European traditions, because I was raised that way but as far as that – and it might show up in my work; I don't know. I think that's for others to make that decision.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, do you feel like the American aesthetic has contributed in any way, to the extent that you can even say what an American aesthetic is?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I don't know what it is. The American aesthetic. I have a difficult time with the American aesthetic. I don't quite agree with it always.

ANITA SCHNEE: Can we define it? Is there any way we can identify it? Perhaps you could just say what it is that you don't like.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, I love America. It's given me freedom to work and to think and to be

creative, but there is a lot of America that I don't like. I prefer to concentrate on the positive things of America, the openness of the society, although it's extremely difficult to live with when you come from Europe and have had certain restrictions.

I think Americans are in a way – [phone ringing] – very –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: You asked me about the American aesthetic. In my experience, Americans are quite innocent and quite ignorant of how the world views them. There's a lack of tradition. They give very little thought to history or even how they got here, and certainly show a lack of appreciation for what they have. That part of America I cannot – I cannot embrace and find it quite deplorable really.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, America has got a very huge industrial tradition. If there's anything we do well, it's that. And I'm wondering whether the streamlining design influence that you may have felt at Raymond Loewy's or at least during that era, which was, let's see, Raymond Loewy was '48 for you, '47?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes.

ANITA SCHNEE: Was that something that you could maybe call American?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, of course. The car and plane has introduced that. The horizontality of the architecture has almost reproduced the speed that we find in transportation. I think perhaps that is typically American. Possibly also the Shaker tradition, would that be considered typically American, the simplicity of it? Vis-à-vis a baroque style.

ANITA SCHNEE: Is there any European equivalent, the Danish –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No, it's not quite the same. The Danes come out of a different tradition. Should we call it a tradition of woodworking? I have to say I only know the Danish tradition of furniture through Ingmar Bergman. [Laughter.] I haven't studied it.

ANITA SCHNEE: But absolute simplicity in Danish, Swedish – I don't know about Norwegian actually or Finnish.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Finnish, probably not.

ANITA SCHNEE: So what's the difference between that and the simplicity of the Shaker furniture?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, the simplicity of the Shaker furniture, if I'm not mistaken, comes from their belief that it's God-given to live simply and work that way. I don't think the Danes quite feel that way.

ANITA SCHNEE: No, no.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: And the Danes come from a tradition of working with woods and the Finns, and I think that's where the simplicity enters into it. Their love for the natural materials. And I think it's reflected in their designs.

ANITA SCHNEE: Maybe the Shakers are more utilitarian?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well perhaps.

ANITA SCHNEE: That life in this country as a frontier was pretty tough, and you needed a chair to be a chair, not an aesthetic experience, and their aesthetic is almost inadvertent, isn't it really? But we don't know, because there aren't very many Shakers around to ask anymore.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: No. That is really a religion or, forgive me for saying so, a cult. And I think the simplicity of the Shaker style, the bench and that type of thing, comes from trying to live a very precise and simple life from what I know about the Shakers.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, what about the arts and crafts influence here in the California architecture like Julia Morgan or Greene & Greene? Is there something particularly American about that or is it really close to what was going on elsewhere? I don't know.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I think that probably is – well, now wait a minute. William Morris in England, it really comes out of that tradition. But I think there too religion more or less entered into it because Roycroft was a religious community and that's what we have. Part of that is the arts and craft movement, and then eventually Frank Lloyd Wright came out of that. But I'm not sure if that is considered specifically American. I think we're closer with streamlining.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: I'm not sure. I'm not an art historian and I can't really address that part of the question.

ANITA SCHNEE: Okay. Well, another art history question for you, can you see any similarities and differences between the work that you did in your early years and your more recent work? How has your work evolved, if it has?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Well, to me, there's very little difference. I still work the same way. I do things over and over and over again until I'm convinced of the validity of my own statement. And if the early designs are reflecting some of the artistic movement of the time then I would say, yes, my work has changed because I no longer need that kind of – is it a crutch? I don't know. But in that respect, it has changed but as far as – how am I going to put this – evolving out of those old archival designs I don't know. I think that's a period behind me. And the only thing that I am bringing into the present from that era is that I must have the discipline, I must be able to do the design over and over, and I feel very strongly that if I've solved all the problems, it's bound to be a good design. I'm not sure if I've answered the full question, but there it is.

ANITA SCHNEE: Well, you speak of discipline, and there is no question but that your design process is supremely disciplined. But I'm wondering whether you can feel a difference in a discipline that's reflected in the designs of the early days and a loosening of the strictness of the design statement in the later work. Is that something you would agree with?

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Yes, I think probably. In the early design days I had so many pressures of earning a living, raising children, pleasing a husband who I was totally devoted to, running a household and all the other problems that come with all those demands, I can see where the designs would be quite stiff and "controlled" probably is the word. I no longer have those problems, and I think I can design with a much freer hand.

Is that answering the question right? I'm not sure.

ANITA SCHNEE: It's brilliant, Mom, as all your work has been.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Oh no, don't say it's brilliant. I'm just speaking from the heart, how I feel in my soul.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yes, and that's what I mean. I mean, it's authentic. You're brilliant. [Laughter.]

Well, yes, we can talk about semantics, but I just want to express to you from my own point of view how marvelous it's been to sit down with you and examine, turn over every pebble we could think of, speaking of pebbles. It's just been really an education for me and also such a pleasure to see your designs in toto. It's this tremendous, tremendous body of work and I hope everybody is as grateful as I am to –

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: It's very nice of you to say that. It's the first time I ever heard it.

ANITA SCHNEE: Yeah, yeah.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Lovely. Thank you.

ANITA SCHNEE: I'm glad we lived long enough, but we really haven't had such a chance. I mean, as you've said, life has been sort of awfully hectic, and sitting in the early winter sun here is just an amazing pleasure.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Have we covered all the questions?

ANITA SCHNEE: We have really covered it all to the best we could. I expect though that when you review what we've been saying, there will be things more that you need to say. So perhaps we can end this portion of the discussion, and then resume when we've collected all these little scraps of things that you would want to add.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Okay.

ANITA SCHNEE: So let's adjourn to do that.

RUTH ADLER SCHNEE: Okay.

ANITA SCHNEE: Thank you.

{I don't think we should end this interview without mentioning the many people who brought me here. My parents, particularly my mother, were an enormous support. Compliments were never showered on me. I dreaded my mother's harsh critique of my work, but it helped me see with other eyes, though I rarely agreed with her. My dad was patience personified. He was able to put everything into perspective. My husband, the love of my life, he was able to analyze design problems. He simplified solutions. He was a quick thinker. He knew my thoughts before I could express them verbally or on paper. Mrs. Sether, my art teacher at Cass Tech. High School. She helped me assemble the portfolio which earned me a four year scholarship to RISD. Royal B. Farnum, director of RISD, who saw my potential. John Howard Benson, my calligraphy teacher at RISD, who taught me the principles of design and an appreciation of American primitive paintings. Uncle Ludwig, who always stopped in Providence and later Detroit to cheer me. Fred Butzel, a prominent Detroit attorney, whose financial contribution set me up in business, and covered the first print order. Bill Woolfenden, curator at the Detroit Institute of Art, who personally came to our print shop to pick up the work, when we forgot to deliver it to the Michigan Craft show.}

[END OF INTERVIEW]

