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Oral history interview with Frances Higgins,
2003 November 8

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Frances Higgins on November 8, 2003. The interview took place in Riverside, Illinois and was conducted by Glenn Adamson 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.

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

Interview

GLENN ADAMSON: This is an interview of Frances Higgins being conducted for the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution. We're in Riverside, Illinois, and it's Saturday, November 8, 2003.

You are 91 years old?

MS. HIGGINS: I will be.

MR. ADAMSON: You will be 91.

MS. HIGGINS: Christmas Eve.

MR. ADAMSON: Christmas Eve. You were born on December 24, in 1912?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: You're from Georgia. Is that right?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up?

MS. HIGGINS: I grew up in Haddock, Georgia.

MR. ADAMSON: Haddock - H-A-D-D-O-C-K. And what did your parents do for a living?

MS. HIGGINS: My father was a farmer.

MR. ADAMSON: What did he grow?

MS. HIGGINS: You know, I don't know, but I'll think of it.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. HIGGINS: He was a cotton grower.

MR. ADAMSON: And so it was pretty countrified?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Pretty agricultural. And what did your mother do? She helped with the farm and the house?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, she mainly did things in the house. She sewed.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you interested in sewing when you were young?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: I know you did a little bit of weaving, right, when you were younger.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Was it something you were good at?

MS. HIGGINS: Pretty good. When I went to the Georgia State College for Women [now Georgia College & State

University, Milledgeville, Georgia] I got started.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So you went to high school in Georgia in Haddock?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And you went to the Georgia State College for Women, probably about, what, 1930, something like that?

MS. HIGGINS: [Inaudible.]

MR. ADAMSON: When you were 18 years old maybe?

MS. HIGGINS: No, I was younger than that - 16.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you do some weaving there at the college?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember anything else that you did at the college that might be interesting?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, I did some artwork.

MR. ADAMSON: And what was your teacher like?

MS. HIGGINS: She was very nice.

MR. ADAMSON: Did she weave and paint and so forth, or -

MS. HIGGINS: No, she just taught. She knew what she was doing.

MR. ADAMSON: She knew what she was doing. Do you remember her name by any chance?

MS. HIGGINS: Mamie Padget.

MR. ADAMSON: Mamie Padget. How do you spell her last name?

MS. HIGGINS: P-A-D-G-E-T.

MR. ADAMSON: So you graduated from there with a bachelor's degree?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. And then you became a teacher, right?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: So -

MS. HIGGINS: That's all you could do.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] How do you mean?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, I mean -

MR. ADAMSON: You weren't qualified to do anything else particularly, or -

MS. HIGGINS: Well, it was the time -

MR. ADAMSON: There weren't that many job opportunities?

MS. HIGGINS: No, except teaching.

MR. ADAMSON: So you taught art?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. And so, were you teaching in high schools or colleges?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, I taught – let me see – nine years in a junior high school. And then I – then I went to the University of Georgia and taught there four years. And I was getting my master’s degree from the Institute of Design [Chicago Institute of Design].

MR. ADAMSON: Here in Chicago?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Why did you decide to go all the way to Chicago to get a master’s degree? Because you were teaching in Georgia the whole time, right?

MS. HIGGINS: This was the place.

MR. ADAMSON: So it was famous enough that you had heard of it.

MS. HIGGINS: [Inaudible.]

MR. ADAMSON: Right, right, and from the Bauhaus? So you really wanted to go. Did you have other friends in Georgia that knew about the Institute of Design, or was it something you became interested in on your own?

MS. HIGGINS: I think I had one or two friends.

MR. ADAMSON: Other art people maybe?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: So before you went to the Institute of Design, you were already weaving. Did you do any work with ceramics or glass at all down in Georgia?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And how had you gotten interested in working in ceramics and glass?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, I went to Ohio State [Ohio State University] and got interested in jewelry.

MR. ADAMSON: Interested in jewelry?

MS. HIGGINS: No, not jewelry –

MR. ADAMSON: In ceramics maybe?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Ceramics, uh-huh.

MS. HIGGINS: I have to stop and remember.

MR. ADAMSON: No, that’s okay. So you went to Ohio State just before going to the Institute of Design? Is that right? So you had taught for quite a while –

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, well, I went to school every summer –

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, every summer, I see.

MS. HIGGINS: – for some reason –

MR. ADAMSON: Uh-huh, okay.

MS. HIGGINS: – except one summer I was sick.

MR. ADAMSON: Badly sick?

MS. HIGGINS: I had my appendix removed.

MR. ADAMSON: I see, okay. And this was during the Depression, right? So you were just glad you had a job, I bet.

And then when you went to the Institute of Design in Chicago; it was during the Second World War, I guess [1948]?

MS. HIGGINS: I think so.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe just afterwards?

MS. HIGGINS: I went there - [inaudible].

MR. ADAMSON: One thing I've read is that you first got the idea of doing slumped glass, or bent glass, at a demonstration you saw in 1942 with a group called the Ceramic Society. Do you remember anything about that?

MS. HIGGINS: I remember going to the meeting.

MR. ADAMSON: This was in Georgia?

MS. HIGGINS: No, I went - I went to a meeting they had in Cincinnati.

MR. ADAMSON: Cincinnati, okay. And do you remember who the other people might have been that were there?

MS. HIGGINS: Not really.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So it was just a group of people who were interested in pottery?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Because I had not heard much about a group called the Ceramic Society before. I was curious about it.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: It wasn't necessarily professionals?

MS. HIGGINS: It was teachers.

MR. ADAMSON: Teachers. I see. So people in art education?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And so you then decided you were going to try to do this on your own.

MS. HIGGINS: Well, I went home and thought, if they can do that, I can make plates and bowls.

MR. ADAMSON: Out of glass. So you made a mold?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Out of what, clay?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And where did you get the glass?

MS. HIGGINS: I got it at - they had a place where they did repair work for the university.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. HIGGINS: They gave me the glass.

MR. ADAMSON: So it was window glass, like plate glass.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. HIGGINS: And some of it was just single strength.

MR. ADAMSON: I'm sorry, say it again?

MS. HIGGINS: Single strength.

MR. ADAMSON: Single strength. What does that mean?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, thinner. And then plate glass is stronger.

MR. ADAMSON: And it was better to have the single-strength glass because it was easier to use?

MS. HIGGINS: Easier to – well, it was easier to form.

MR. ADAMSON: Because it melted more quickly?

MS. HIGGINS: No – oh, yes, maybe. But you see, you couldn't do anything to – [inaudible] – drawings on the plate glass.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. And it was on the surface or was it – it wasn't in between two layers?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you recall how you got the gold drawings onto the surface of the glass?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, when we first started glass I thought, how can I draw on the glass? So I – somebody gave me some tubing and I made some glass tubes. I heated and pulled them.

MR. ADAMSON: You pulled them so they got thin?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And you used that as a kind of drawing?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes – and then I could fill it up and then it would flow.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. HIGGINS: And it'd be just right.

MR. ADAMSON: But eventually you started drawing with other materials on the glass – or was it always glass threads, essentially?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, enamels.

MR. ADAMSON: Enamels, right.

So, at the Institute of Design you met your husband, Michael?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And he was a teacher of yours? Is that right?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember what the class was?

MS. HIGGINS: All kinds of things. Let me think. It's been so long since I've thought about this. [Pause.] Well, it was silk-screening, leathering.

MR. ADAMSON: He had some experience as a newspaper designer, is that right?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And he was from London.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Did he seem to you to be very exotic and foreign when you first met?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Was he handsome?

MS. HIGGINS: Pretty much.

[They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So the two of you decided that you would leave the Institute of Design and start –

MS. HIGGINS: Well, he didn't like what they had him doing, and he wanted to do something else. That's when – [inaudible]. He was crazy.

MR. ADAMSON: Crazy how?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, he was sort of a crazy man. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Really ambitious?

MS. HIGGINS: Well – what did he do before he came to the Institute of Design? Anyway, he was very exotic, and I almost didn't marry him. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: You almost didn't marry him?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Because –

MS. HIGGINS: Well, he was a different person.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were very different – you weren't sure you could live with him?

MS. HIGGINS: No, but, see, if I made up my mind to do something, I usually stuck to it.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. HIGGINS: We got married, and we had a little apartment in Chicago.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. HIGGINS: So we lived there for two years.

MR. ADAMSON: This was on Oak Street?

MS. HIGGINS: It was on – I can't think of the name. Well, anyway, we moved – we had to move because we didn't have enough space. See, I was single and I had this apartment with one bedroom and a small kitchen and a bathroom – just a living room. Anyway, it was impossible for three people – two – two people to live there and work there.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So you had to move to a larger place.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. And we moved to Oak Street, which was very interesting.

MR. ADAMSON: The street itself was interesting?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. But the place we had was interesting.

MR. ADAMSON: How so?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, it was on Oak Street, which is uptown, and there were a lot of interesting things happening.

MR. ADAMSON: Like art kind of things?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So there were other artists that lived on Oak Street.

MS. HIGGINS: No, but it was an interesting street. Have you ever heard of – [inaudible]. Then we moved to Wells Street to get more space.

MR. ADAMSON: About three years later?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, two years later.

MR. ADAMSON: Two years later. Okay.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: That's a lot of moving.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, but I had energy.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. [Laughs.] And you were already starting your glasswork as soon as you were at Oak Street, right, or even before that? Or did you really start doing -

MS. HIGGINS: At the University of Georgia I started.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, you had already been doing glasswork on your own, right.

MS. HIGGINS: And then I married Michael, and he just took to it right away.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. I see. And so did you have to teach him how to do the glass slumping originally? And how did the idea of doing this glass sandwich come about with the different layers and the image trapped between the two layers? Was that something -

MS. HIGGINS: Well -

MR. ADAMSON: But that was something you did before you met him.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. Okay.

MS. HIGGINS: But he took to it right away because he was interested in art, and he did some very nice things. You know, we just hit it off.

MR. ADAMSON: One thing I've read is that in your glasswork your style tended to be more like drawing and his tended to be more like piecing chunks of glass together. That's pretty much true?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: So when you look at a piece of Higgins glass, can you usually tell whether it was you or Michael that designed it, according to that?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. Okay. But you would collaborate together on the design.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Give each other ideas?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. I'm looking at a piece now, the backgammon board over there.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. HIGGINS: That's pieces of glass in between other pieces of glass.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. HIGGINS: And I did that.

MR. ADAMSON: You did that, even though it's pieced. So you might expect it to be more something Michael would have done.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, so it's more complicated than that. But you would know, if you were to look at a piece, whether you had designed it or Michael had, certainly.

MS. HIGGINS: I've seen pieces - you know, we had a windstorm here that loosened these - [inaudible] - windows.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, no.

MS. HIGGINS: Well, it shook the windows, so it moved the - [inaudible].

MR. ADAMSON: So you had some broken things?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. So all the pieces that he made - [inaudible].

MR. ADAMSON: So one thing I'm curious about is whether you had a hard time affording to have your studio and the apartment. Did you have a lot of money in those days?

MS. HIGGINS: Well -

MR. ADAMSON: It was tough?

MS. HIGGINS: Tough.

MR. ADAMSON: So was it the kind of thing where you'd have to almost live from month to month not knowing if you could keep going?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. We'd look in pockets to see if we had any money to buy coffee.

MR. ADAMSON: And so why did you stick with it? I mean, why did you decide to -

MS. HIGGINS: Well, it just - this man came along and he said, "Would you make a line of glass for me and wholesale it?" That's why we moved to Wells Street.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. And where was it being sold? Was this at the Merchandise Mart or -

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. HIGGINS: And he had people traveling. It was an interesting life.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you sell it before you had the wholesaler helping you?

MS. HIGGINS: We just had people walk in the studio.

MR. ADAMSON: Like today.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: That's interesting. It kind of came full circle.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. And people didn't have the idea - they didn't appreciate it as much as they do today.

MR. ADAMSON: They didn't really know what they were looking at?

MS. HIGGINS: No. See, it's taken a long time to get to this stage.

MR. ADAMSON: What do you remember about the Merchandise Mart, because that was a big part of the way that you got your business going.

MS. HIGGINS: This man, Richard Morgenthal -

MR. ADAMSON: Richard Morgenthal?

MS. HIGGINS: - yes - had a showroom there.

MR. ADAMSON: And he just walked into your studio?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, he had a friend who took him there.

MR. ADAMSON: You don't remember who that would be, do you?

MS. HIGGINS: I'll think of his name.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. HIGGINS: Everett [sp]. That's all right now.

MR. ADAMSON: What was the Merchandise Mart like in those days?

MS. HIGGINS: Wild.

MR. ADAMSON: Wild?

MS. HIGGINS: It was crazy.

MR. ADAMSON: And just the size of it?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. It was the biggest building in Chicago.

MR. ADAMSON: And so people came from all over the country just to go there.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So how did you feel about having your things shown there?

MS. HIGGINS: Real happy, because you could sell more there.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were doing most of your business through the Merchandise Mart after that started going, would you say?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And did you still keep selling things out of your studio at the same time?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, okay. So, eventually you started to work with the Dearborn Company [1957-1964; Dearborn Glass Company, Bedford Park, Illinois.]?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, somebody told – somebody told – I think Richard Morgenthal, he went to Dearborn.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So he introduced you to them?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. And this guy who was a friend of ours. His name was Sam Borderlan.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you spell that?

MS. HIGGINS: B-O-R-D-E-R-L-A-N.

MR. ADAMSON: He worked for Dearborn?

MS. HIGGINS: He worked for Richard Morgenthal.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. HIGGINS: No, wait a minute. I forget. What can you expect? [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: But one way or another you started working with them?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. They had just – [inaudible] – this woman named – what was her name? I'll think of it – Sylvia Janus [sp].

MR. ADAMSON: Sylvia Janus?

MS. HIGGINS: Do you know about her?

MR. ADAMSON: No.

MS. HIGGINS: She had – they were mad at us because we switched.

MR. ADAMSON: You mean because you switched to Dearborn?

MS. HIGGINS: No, switched to Sylvia Janus.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see.

MS. HIGGINS: She was a crazy woman.

MR. ADAMSON: She was a dealer?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And did she –

MS. HIGGINS: Like Richard Morgenthal.

MR. ADAMSON: And she had a shop in the Merchandise Mart?

MS. HIGGINS: Yep.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So you switched from Richard Morgenthal to Sylvia Janus. Why did you switch?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, they sort of let us down.

MR. ADAMSON: They let you down.

MS. HIGGINS: Richard Morgenthal let us down.

MR. ADAMSON: Not selling the way that you had hoped they would?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. HIGGINS: We were starving – it was terrible. It was like – I'm trying to remember all of this. If I'd known what you were going to ask me, I would have thought of it sooner.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Sorry. Well, we can always do it again, too.

But I guess what I'm curious about is, you know, how different it was working for Dearborn as opposed to working in your own studio and making things just to sell, you know, one at a time. Because Dearborn had a big factory, right?

MS. HIGGINS: We went with them because they had salesmen on the road.

MR. ADAMSON: So you felt like you could do better with them?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And was that true? Did you have an easier time making a living after you started working with Dearborn?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, pretty much. We did all right for a while.

MR. ADAMSON: You certainly made a lot of glass.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you still see a lot of it around today?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. And we silk-screened it. We silk-screened on one side and put a clear piece on it.

MR. ADAMSON: A clear piece over that, so the image was protected inside.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And Dearborn also made television glass, correct?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: I read in one place that you actually were reusing some of the gray glass that they used for the TV tubes.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes, we did.

MR. ADAMSON: Because they were throwing it out?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Was that your idea or Michael's idea?

MS. HIGGINS: It was my idea. I think.

MR. ADAMSON: So what would you make out of it?

MS. HIGGINS: Lots of things – *Barbaric Jewels*.

MR. ADAMSON: *Barbaric Jewels*. That's one of the patterns, right?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Where did the idea for that come from – African jewelry?

MS. HIGGINS: Me.

MR. ADAMSON: Just you, just out of your head?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: So it wasn't something specific you saw.

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Why the title, *Barbaric Jewels*?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, because we silk-screened round things that you could put pieces – silk-screened pieces of the gray glass.

MR. ADAMSON: I see, okay.

MS. HIGGINS: And people loved it. A lot of it around.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, and so Dearborn manufactured a lot of it.

So, when you were working with them, did you make it all yourselves? Or you designed it and the factory made it.

MS. HIGGINS: The factory made it.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. And what kind of supervision did you have over the production of it?

MS. HIGGINS: We had to be there every day.

MR. ADAMSON: Really?

MS. HIGGINS: They didn't want us there because – [laughs].

MR. ADAMSON: So why did you need to be there? To make sure it would go well?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Because otherwise they'd get sloppy?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. They did, too.

MR. ADAMSON: They did. And who were the workers? Were they just the same people that were making the TV stuff?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. And they would – they would lie.

MR. ADAMSON: They would lie? About what?

MS. HIGGINS: About why something's breaking –

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. HIGGINS: – and why the jewels were slipping in the kiln.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So you didn't really trust the staff there very much, huh?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, we stayed there about six years, then we went with Haeger [1965; Dundee's Haeger Potteries].

MR. ADAMSON: Right, Haeger in southern Illinois.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: But that was fairly brief, right - only about a year?

MS. HIGGINS: No, more than that. Then let's see - What did we do? I've forgotten, but I'll think of it.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you feel like the glass that you made at Dearborn and Haeger was pretty financially successful for the companies?

MS. HIGGINS: They were.

MR. ADAMSON: They were. I read, at one point when you stopped working for Dearborn, they actually sold a lot of the stock to Goodwill - is that true? - because they didn't want to worry about selling it?

MS. HIGGINS: Salvation Army - they gave it to Salvation Army.

MR. ADAMSON: Huh. And so what did you do?

MS. HIGGINS: We went and bought it from Salvation Army. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Hmm. And so then what did you do with it, just sold it all yourselves, part of it?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, we kept it. We didn't want it to be classified as Salvation Army stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. HIGGINS: It was a big blow to us.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, but it was really because the company was just trying to get out of that line of business?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Were there specific people at Dearborn that you worked with that knew something about art?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: None of them really did?

MS. HIGGINS: It was a strange place. It went out of business after we left them.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, it did? So they were struggling anyway.

MS. HIGGINS: Well, they didn't have to.

MR. ADAMSON: They didn't have to go out of business?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. They just wanted to.

MS. HIGGINS: I called up this man from Dearborn. [Inaudible.] He's now dead. He was a lot younger than I am. [Inaudible.]

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really? This is one of the executives at Dearborn?

MS. HIGGINS: The owner.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, the owner. I see. I think I might have his name here. Was this Bill Williams?

MS. HIGGINS: Herman Paulict.

MR. ADAMSON: How do you spell that?

MS. HIGGINS: P-A-U-L-I-C-T.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. HIGGINS: His father – his grandfather started this business.

MR. ADAMSON: I see, okay.

MS. HIGGINS: And one of the things that they did that made money for them was doing these television implosion –

MR. ADAMSON: Implosion plates, right.

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And that's where you got the great glass for the *Barbaric Jewels*, right?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: There are some other lines of the Higgins ware that I was curious about, where the designs came from, like the *Keys* and the *Clocks* patterns. Those are your idea? They're sort of like cartoons of keys, and those you had drawn yourself?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Were you interested in graphic design, would you say, like advertising design?

MS. HIGGINS: Not really, but Michael was.

MR. ADAMSON: So maybe there was some influence from him there?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, I guess so.

MR. ADAMSON: And the other thing I was curious about was the *Classic Line* pattern, and I understand that you actually executed that with an ear dropper?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, it was like an ear dropper. It was a glass tube.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So it had like a pump on the end to get the –

MS. HIGGINS: A syringe.

MR. ADAMSON: A syringe. So it was like a suction device, and that's how you got that. So you would actually draw those physically on each plate?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: They weren't silk-screened?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, they were later.

MR. ADAMSON: Later.

MS. HIGGINS: When we were at Dearborn.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. But you had started doing them all yourself by hand.

MS. HIGGINS: Oh, yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And, you know, a lot of people think of that period as being the period of the designer craftsman, and the idea was that craftspeople were supposed to have an influence on industry. Was that something that you thought about or cared about in particular?

MS. HIGGINS: No, I don't think so.

MR. ADAMSON: No, you were just trying to make –

MS. HIGGINS: Make a living. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: What about Michael? How did he look at it? How did he look at the relationship with the industry?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, he liked it better than I did.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really?

MS. HIGGINS: He was always interested in industry, and it didn't bother him, mass production. It bothered me.

MR. ADAMSON: Because you felt like you didn't have enough control?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And you weren't dealing with artists; you were dealing with –

MS. HIGGINS: People who – and they didn't keep the quality up. We'd really have to, you know, yell and scream about that.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. But that didn't bother Michael so much?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, it did.

MR. ADAMSON: But you more. [Laughs.]

One thing that I noticed you made a lot of at the Dearborn plant was the *Mandarin* pattern, the bright orange pattern. Where did the idea for that line come from?

MS. HIGGINS: I think that came from me. Mandarin –

MR. ADAMSON: Were you interested in craft and art from other countries?

MS. HIGGINS: Oh, yes.

MR. ADAMSON: I know if you go back and read the *Craft Horizons* magazine from those days – did you used to read that, *Craft Horizons*? There are a lot of articles about craft traditions in other countries. I was wondering if you were keeping up to date with that sort of thing.

MS. HIGGINS: I think so.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you belong to a lot of craft organizations?

MS. HIGGINS: There was one in Chicago that was – I can't remember the name of it.

MR. ADAMSON: Is it the Midwest Designer-Craftsman maybe?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, and Michael started that.

MR. ADAMSON: Michael cofounded it, right? Right. But there were people in other media as well, not just glass?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you remember anyone in particular that you were close with?

MS. HIGGINS: I'm trying to think.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe Harvey Littleton?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you know him?

MS. HIGGINS: Through this crafts organization.

MR. ADAMSON: That's how you met? And he was a potter in Wisconsin when you met probably, yeah?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And already teaching in Madison, maybe?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. And do you feel like you introduced him to glass maybe?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, see, his father worked for – his grandfather worked for – [inaudible].

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So he had it in his blood.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. And we – I have to get this straight. We judged a show at the museum.

MR. ADAMSON: The Art Institute, you mean, here in Chicago?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Which museum?

MS. HIGGINS: Pittsburgh. And Michael made a speech at dinner – and he said, “I think you’ve got an obligation to get blowing going in this country.” So it got started. And they asked us to lead it.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. HIGGINS: We just didn’t have time.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. HIGGINS: We didn’t have the technology.

MR. ADAMSON: About glass blowing?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. Well – [inaudible] – suggested Harvey because he was starting to get into it.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

[Pause in tape.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, so we just had a brief interruption. So we were talking about Harvey Littleton and the fact that he got the glass-blowing movement going in the country? But you were never really interested in learning glass blowing yourself?

MS. HIGGINS: We blew one piece at that first meeting.

MR. ADAMSON: At the first meeting.

MS. HIGGINS: It would have been too expensive for us. You’ve got to keep the furnace going night and day.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. HIGGINS: We thought about it, but we felt – I think we felt that fusing glass would be more interesting to more people.

MR. ADAMSON: That’s interesting. It seems like fusing glass was a little bit more like ceramic somehow, to me because it’s slower and it’s not as dangerous. [Laughs.]

MS. HIGGINS: Slower?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. HIGGINS: Well, you don’t have to keep the furnace going all the time.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Right. You were pretty interested in pottery as well, weren’t you?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And was that something you kept up on the side, making ceramics?

MS. HIGGINS: I made the molds.

MR. ADAMSON: But that was really where all your interest in ceramics went into?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, I made quite a few pots. I went to Ohio State.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you still have some of them?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. I don't know where they are, but they're around.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. But that was always a secondary interest after you started the glass?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. One thing that I was really interested in was your dropout idea, where you had the glass kind of fall down in the form of a vase. Was that also something you came up with on your own?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: You hadn't seen anyone else do it necessarily? It's almost like really slow-motion glass blowing, but all using gravity.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: It seems like everything you did involved gravity one way or the other. [Laughs.]

And you also made a good many other things out of glass, like lamps and mobiles and so forth. There's a lamp right there -

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: - the glass base.

MS. HIGGINS: And that one.

MR. ADAMSON: And that one here. Who tended to design the lamp bases and the mobiles? Was that more Michael's line or yours?

MS. HIGGINS: That was both. That's pieces of glass in - [inaudible].

MR. ADAMSON: Almost like stained glass. You never worked with stained glass per se much, though, right?

MS. HIGGINS: We fused it.

MR. ADAMSON: And you also had quite a bit of success with the rondelays.

MS. HIGGINS: They'd keep us going. [Laughs.] And they were hard to sell when we first started. They're selling much better now than they did then.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think people had a difficult time understanding what they were for?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. They'd see them around and then think, oh, I should get some of those.

MR. ADAMSON: The color system on them is very interesting. They all have three letters - is that right - to tell you what colors they are?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, but we don't put colors on them anymore.

MR. ADAMSON: You don't put colors on them anymore? They're just solid?

MS. HIGGINS: And that was sold by salesmen.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MS. HIGGINS: It was their sample.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. HIGGINS: And we haven't put colors on them in a long time.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So one thing I'm curious about is whether you had any influence on how they were installed when they were put into buildings sometimes.

MS. HIGGINS: Sometimes.

MR. ADAMSON: How would that work?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, let me see. Sometimes we would visit people's houses.

MR. ADAMSON: And you would suggest how they could use them?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you ever work with architects?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. [Inaudible.]

MR. ADAMSON: How did you find that process? Just as good as anything else? [Laughs.]

MS. HIGGINS: I didn't find that - [inaudible] - using glass.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, right. I mean, did you like working with architects and thinking about the way that the glass would work in a space?

MS. HIGGINS: We didn't work with architects.

MR. ADAMSON: You didn't. Okay.

MS. HIGGINS: We're still selling more than we ever did.

MR. ADAMSON: That's great. You still see them around a lot.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. And that was something that Michael came up with originally, the rondelays, I mean?

MS. HIGGINS: You know, I think so.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you have any idea how the idea came about? Was it just sort of a -

MS. HIGGINS: Well, this architect had a job down in - I'll have to think about where it was. He wanted this colored glass, so we worked on - [inaudible].

MR. ADAMSON: I see. So it was for a specific commission originally.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. That was very unusual for you, though -

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: - to commission for a specific place. I know you also did that glass front wall for a bank up in Wisconsin -

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: - which is gone, unfortunately. But that was a big job too.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you remember anything else about that commission? This was in, let's see -

MS. HIGGINS: Appleton.

MR. ADAMSON: Appleton, right. Exactly. Do you remember anything else about that commission?

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A.]

MS. HIGGINS: - had done a job for this - [inaudible]. She sort of got the job. I don't know, we just made it.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. It's too bad that it was destroyed.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. Crazy people bought that thing. The piece was broken, and they threw it away.

MR. ADAMSON: It's terrible.

MS. HIGGINS: [Inaudible.]

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe we could talk a little bit about some of the other things you made, like clocks. I know you made a clock for General Electric –

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: – Company. How did that come about? Was that through Dearborn, or was it after that?

MS. HIGGINS: No, I can't remember exactly how that came about, but I think a friend of ours gave me the idea.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, and quite a few of those were sold, probably?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And were they all different, or was it all the same design?

MS. HIGGINS: The same design.

MR. ADAMSON: Who manufactured them? General Electric?

MS. HIGGINS: We did.

MR. ADAMSON: The glass. So you would send them the glass piece and then they would make the clock out of it?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So you didn't have to fit the clock into the glass piece at all?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: So you'd just send them boxes of them.

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And I was told that you once worked on a toaster with glass sides for Sunbeam. Is that true?

MS. HIGGINS: I can't remember, but I think we never got around to it.

MR. ADAMSON: But there was a plan for it.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. Okay. And then you made a lot of ashtrays.

MS. HIGGINS: That's the reason I'm still living today. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, that's how you made your money, huh?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. Everybody wanted an ashtray. They still do.

MR. ADAMSON: Even though people don't smoke as much anymore, right? I guess they put their keys in them now. [Laughs.]

Do you remember how the idea came about for doing those odd shapes? In the book they're called rogue ashtrays. [Donald-Brian Johnson and Leslie Pina, *Higgins: Adventures in Glass*, Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 2000.] I don't know where that term came from, but they're sort of a weird, like, biomorphic shape, soft shape. Do you know what I mean? Instead of being rectangular they're kind of blobby. Was that because of the slumping technique?

MS. HIGGINS: It was a new design, I think.

MR. ADAMSON: You had to come up with new designs very frequently, right?

MS. HIGGINS: Every new season.

MR. ADAMSON: Which is, what, every six months, every year?

MS. HIGGINS: Every six months.

MR. ADAMSON: And this was true whether you were working with Dearborn or just on your own?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: You always tried to come up with something new for each season?

MS. HIGGINS: Well right now we don't have to come up with anything.

MR. ADAMSON: Now people sort of want them to look old probably, right, in some ways? Is it sort of a nostalgic thing? How do you feel about that?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, at least we're still living. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: So as long as people buy them, you're happy, essentially?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: I was on eBay last night -

MS. HIGGINS: You what?

MR. ADAMSON: On eBay last night. You know, you can go on the computer and buy these things off the Internet, and I put in "Higgins glass" and 48 things came up, just that one, you know, at random. There's a lot of it out there.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: But it seems like a lot of people are interested in it because it seems like the 1950s or 1960s to them.

MS. HIGGINS: Well, it has been an interesting life. We've almost stopped so many times.

MR. ADAMSON: Because it was difficult?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Was there any point at which you started to feel like you were really making a very good living, or was it hard all the way through?

MS. HIGGINS: The first year we were at Dearborn we did pretty well. In fact, we went to England for the first time. I went to England for the first time.

MR. ADAMSON: And did you meet Michael's family and that sort of thing?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: That's nice. But you didn't go back very often?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, you did.

MS. HIGGINS: We went back almost every summer.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really? Did you know artists over there at all?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: But you would go to museums and that kind of thing?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: One thing I'm also interested in is that a lot of your glass has ended up in museum collections, like the Victoria and Albert and the American Craft Museum and the Renwick and Smithsonian. When that's happened, have you helped get the pieces into the museums, or does it just sort of happen?

MS. HIGGINS: It just sort of happened.

MR. ADAMSON: It's nice to be in a museum though, huh? [Laughs.]

MS. HIGGINS: As a matter of fact, I think the Smithsonian – no, Victoria and Albert is ready for some new stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really? That's good.

In the 1980s you had a big show at a gallery called Fifty/Fifty in New York.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: How did that happen? Did they approach you?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And you showed a lot of your older things that you had kept over the years?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. They came here, and they picked them up.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. From your house?

MS. HIGGINS: We had them down in the studio.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see, on display.

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. And they weren't for sale in New York; they just were there for show?

MS. HIGGINS: They were for sale.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, they were? And so a lot of them sold.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. HIGGINS: We did all right with that.

MR. ADAMSON: Good. Did you have any reason that you kept something when you held it back instead of selling it? Because you had collected a lot of the – you still have a lot of your things here.

MS. HIGGINS: Not a lot.

MR. ADAMSON: Just the things you particularly liked that you wanted to hold onto?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you talk a little bit about the employees that you've had over the years? It seems to me like you had a lot of employees downstairs helping to make the glass these days.

MS. HIGGINS: They seem to stay with us for a long time. But Louise has been here – 17 years, I think. And the woman – named Jane, she was here 17 years, and then she sold her house and moved down to be near her daughter.

MR. ADAMSON: Louise's last name is Higgins?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Or that's a different Louise.

MS. HIGGINS: Rima [ph].

MR. ADAMSON: Rima? Okay. And what about Jane?

MS. HIGGINS: She worked here for 17 years, and then she sold her house because she could buy one down there a tenth of what this house was.

MR. ADAMSON: So she had to stop working for you?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm. So now we have - [inaudible].

MR. ADAMSON: Did you and Michael keep doing all the designing, though, when you had people working for you?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: They were just helping you produce the pieces.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Now, you also had a vacation house in Valparaiso, Indiana?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: I read it's called "Higgins' Diggins"? [Laughs.] Where did that come from?

MS. HIGGINS: Oh, Michael.

MR. ADAMSON: It sounds like a name he would come up with.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. He was good with names.

MR. ADAMSON: You don't still have the cabin now, though?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: When did you start going out there?

MS. HIGGINS: You know, I don't know. I can't remember. Maybe by the time we have another session I'll remember.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. That was just a place you felt like you needed to get away to?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, we lived in a slum area on Wells Street.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. HIGGINS: And we had to have some different -

MR. ADAMSON: Different place to go?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. So you never made glass out there or anything?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: But when you moved here, you got rid of the cabin, when you moved here to Riverside?

MS. HIGGINS: No. We got rid of it sooner than that.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, sooner than that, okay. So you only had it for a little while - 10 years maybe, something like that.

MS. HIGGINS: No, we had it 25 or something.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really, okay. Good long time then.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: So you had friends out in Indiana as well?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. And, see, some very good friends of ours bought with us, bought the land. It was a log cabin, and it was really very nice.

MR. ADAMSON: It sounds rustic. Did it remind you of living on the farm as a child?

MS. HIGGINS: I never lived on a farm.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I thought you grew up on a farm.

MS. HIGGINS: No. I grew up in a small town.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. But you said your father was a cotton farmer.

MS. HIGGINS: Well, that was – he was not well.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see.

MS. HIGGINS: He had a lot of – he had depression. His father was a farmer.

MR. ADAMSON: Your grandfather.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. So he helped him farm.

MR. ADAMSON: I see. But he never owned his own farm? So you probably weren't very wealthy growing up, I'm guessing?

MS. HIGGINS: His father – his father was.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, but your family wasn't necessarily?

MS. HIGGINS: Not my individual family.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Did you have brothers and sisters?

MS. HIGGINS: Two – I had two brothers, and they're both dead.

MR. ADAMSON: Were either of them artists? You got all the art genes, huh?

MS. HIGGINS: [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: And did you and Michael have children?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Decided not to?

MS. HIGGINS: Didn't have time.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MS. HIGGINS: And didn't have the money.

MR. ADAMSON: It seems really interesting to me that you're a southerner and he was British. It's kind of an interesting match, you know?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you find that you looked at the world in different ways?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: How did you both kind of fall politically? Were you interested in politics, either of you?

MS. HIGGINS: I think we became Republicans.

MR. ADAMSON: Early on?

MS. HIGGINS: Not early on.

MR. ADAMSON: And were you very actively involved, or just, you know –

MS. HIGGINS: Not very actively involved. It was not too long ago.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Because the craft movement got to be sort of associated with hippies and the counterculture. What did you think about that? Did you have anything to do with it particularly?

MS. HIGGINS: Not really.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you feel like, at some point, you stopped being as involved with the kind of national craft organizations?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, we get all these flyers from the organizations.

MR. ADAMSON: Like the American Craft Council?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. Michael was big in –

MR. ADAMSON: He was?

MS. HIGGINS: Very big.

MR. ADAMSON: And you weren't as interested?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, I let him have it. [Laughs.] But we used to have the American Craft Council meetings here.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, here in this house?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And did you feel like the other people in the organization looked at craft the same way you did, or was it kind of a different thing for them than it was for you?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, I think it was more or less like it.

MR. ADAMSON: A lot of people trying to do the same thing: make a living?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Were there other colleagues that you had that you knew particularly well, aside from Harvey Littleton, that spring to mind?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, I'm trying to think who they are.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, I was wondering whether you knew other people that made glass early on, you know, before people started doing glass blowing – whether you knew Maurice Heaton?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, we did.

MR. ADAMSON: You did. How did you come to know him?

MS. HIGGINS: Somebody saw what he was doing and introduced us.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. HIGGINS: I didn't like it.

MR. ADAMSON: You didn't like the work so much, because why? Too simple?

MS. HIGGINS: Not good design.

MR. ADAMSON: Hmm.

MS. HIGGINS: We went to his shop one time.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you describe what about it seemed like it wasn't good design, or was it just sort of it didn't look right to your eye?

MS. HIGGINS: It didn't look right to my eye.

MR. ADAMSON: So you knew a lot about design obviously, having gone to the Institute. Do you feel like your aesthetic has anything to do with the kind of Bauhaus German influence at the Institute of Design?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, I think the Institute of Design certainly changed my ideas about design.

MR. ADAMSON: In what way?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, they didn't change it all that much.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] Did you have color classes, for instance, because there's a lot of color in your glass.

MS. HIGGINS: I don't know.

MR. ADAMSON: I always wondered how you figured out which colors to use.

MS. HIGGINS: It's natural.

MR. ADAMSON: Just natural. Maybe we should go back to other people you might have known that were early glass pioneers. Did you know Glen Lukens at all, from California?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: No. Did you know Edris Eckhardt?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah? Do you remember anything about that relationship?

MS. HIGGINS: I'm trying to remember.

MR. ADAMSON: It's okay if you can't. [Pause.] Or Earl McCutcheon maybe?

MS. HIGGINS: Oh, I taught with him.

MR. ADAMSON: At the Institute of Design or after that?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, at the University of Georgia.

MR. ADAMSON: At the University of Georgia, okay. I didn't realize he was there at the same time as you. And did he learn to use glass from you? I see.

MS. HIGGINS: He wouldn't want me saying that though. [They laugh.]

MR. ADAMSON: But you had been doing it earlier.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And he also used that same slump technique, correct?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, and then he got to blowing.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, later on.

Did you know other people involved with design as opposed to glass, people like Charles and Ray Eames or -

MS. HIGGINS: I know them.

MR. ADAMSON: Your work is often compared to the Eames's work, I know.

MS. HIGGINS: They came along at the same time.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. So you were paying attention to what they were doing?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: How much do you think you were influenced by other people working in - I don't know if you can call it industrial design, but furniture and houseware design?

MS. HIGGINS: You know, I don't know if I've had some influence.

MR. ADAMSON: Not so consciously?

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: I'm sitting in a Hans Wegner chair here.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: And that's a very nice chair. Is it something you got at the Merchandise Mart?

MS. HIGGINS: Huh-uh [negative].

MR. ADAMSON: No?

MS. HIGGINS: I bought it at Carson's.

MR. ADAMSON: Is that here in town?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. HIGGINS: And Chicago.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. For how much money?

MS. HIGGINS: Fifty-two dollars, I think.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] That's a good deal.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: So, were you looking at a lot of Scandinavian design?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Because I know that was really hot in the '50s when you started working. And did you feel like your work fit into that aesthetic, particularly?

MS. HIGGINS: You know, I can't say, but the first year I went to the Institute of Design, Eames and his wife made a lot of stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, so there was a lot of talk about what they were doing.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Mostly positive?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you happen to know Eero Saarinen? I know he worked with them a little bit.

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: He was an architect.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, I know him.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, but you didn't get to know him necessarily?

MS. HIGGINS: No. I think I didn't -

MR. ADAMSON: Anyone else in the design or architectural world spring to mind as people you were close with, here in Chicago maybe?

MS. HIGGINS: You know, I can't say. I can't remember right now.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. That's okay. What about when people started blowing glass, people like Dale Chihuly and Josh Simpson. Did you get to know that younger generation well at all?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, I feel like I know Josh Simpson.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. I noticed you have his book there.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. He gave it to me.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, he gave it to you – just as a friend?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. You never worked with him, though, in any way.

MS. HIGGINS: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. And what do you think of the kind of glass movement in the 1980s and '90s and how successful that's gotten?

MS. HIGGINS: I think it's done very well.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you kind of wish that it had been around in the '50s? [Laughs.]

MS. HIGGINS: Well, I don't know. I think we had more influence –

MR. ADAMSON: That's interesting.

MS. HIGGINS: – because there was nobody, absolutely nobody, doing anything with glass.

MR. ADAMSON: So you really feel like you were one of the pioneers?

MS. HIGGINS: I think we were. Maurice Heaton was the only one doing anything –

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. HIGGINS: – and I still like his stuff.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MS. HIGGINS: In fact, I don't think he fused anything to metals.

MR. ADAMSON: Really? That's interesting.

MS. HIGGINS: I don't think so. He fitted one sheet and he screened it on the back. I think I'm right – [inaudible] – that he slumped it over on the back.

MR. ADAMSON: I see, rather than fusing it, like you were doing.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. I think he started that – [inaudible].

MR. ADAMSON: So he might have gotten that idea from you, after seeing your work?

One thing I'd like to do is ask you about the book.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe I'll bring a copy of it over here. You've got one sitting here on your coffee table. Was this something you and Michael had to help with a lot, when they did this book? This is the Schiffer book by Donald-Brian Johnson and Leslie Pina.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. There will be another one coming out.

MR. ADAMSON: The same publisher?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. Did you supply most of the photographs in this book?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And where are the photos now? Do you still own them?

MS. HIGGINS: I think we got them back.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So there's you and Michael.

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: We're looking on page six here of the old Schiffer book. There's Michael in his rainbow suspenders. [Laughs.] Did you both - do you both feel like you both had a real love of color?

MS. HIGGINS: I think so.

MR. ADAMSON: I look at this picture, and you've got the bright red jacket and he's got the bright suspenders on. Is it something that came natural to you?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And you got to know the authors of the book pretty well, I bet.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Here's an example of the process that you used, the pieced and drawn process you used, on page 11.

MS. HIGGINS: You know, I've never looked at that book.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, really? Well, this is your big chance.

[Cross talk.]

MR. ADAMSON: It says this is done for an article in *Chicago Daily News* in 1962. Do you feel like people in Chicago really got to know who you were, through the newspapers and that sort of thing?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And people eventually started coming to the studio in large numbers? I was just hearing about your -

MS. HIGGINS: They come at Christmastime.

MR. ADAMSON: Christmastime especially. Do you think you've always done a lot - a big part of your business at Christmastime? It seems like a lot of people buy your things as presents for weddings or for Christmas.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Here's a really early article, on page 12, from 1951. It shows you there.

MS. HIGGINS: This was a picture that we made - that Everett Glessing [ph] made. That was our - that was our first Christmas sale.

MR. ADAMSON: This on page 15?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And you've been doing it every year since then?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes.

MR. ADAMSON: And so you would design the cards as well, for the announcements?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. Well, we silk-screened these ourselves.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. And you had all the silk-screening equipment because you were doing it on the glass anyway, right?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

That's us when we first got married.

MR. ADAMSON: Hmm, on page 16. He was pretty good looking.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. He's got on his suit.

MR. ADAMSON: And here's supposedly the first mold you ever made, with the snail on it? Do you still have that?

MS. HIGGINS: [Inaudible.]

MR. ADAMSON: That's a nice piece of history.

MS. HIGGINS: That's us when we were at Dearborn.

MR. ADAMSON: On page 20, uh-huh. So is this your – this picture of your shop?

MS. HIGGINS: That was in a – in a studio they built for us there.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, in the Dearborn Company, uh-huh.

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And did you get to decide what the studio would look like? They just set it up for you?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

I noticed this plate is made – on page 25 – is made up from pieces of lots of other different patterns.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, that's Michael – [inaudible].

MR. ADAMSON: And they were pieces that had broken in the process of being made?

MS. HIGGINS: No, not altogether. He used to find some shards of it.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MS. HIGGINS: And cut it up.

MR. ADAMSON: These brochures that Dearborn sent out, of your pieces, did you help to design the brochures?

MS. HIGGINS: [Inaudible.]

MR. ADAMSON: So they would do all the photography and organize them themselves.

MS. HIGGINS: That's *Barbaric Jewels*.

MR. ADAMSON: On page 34, right. So it's a combination of silk-screening and colored glass.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MS. HIGGINS: Some gold silk-screening. Now, it's not only gold. These things, the jewels, were.

MR. ADAMSON: Right, the centers. Right.

Here's the order form. It's pretty complicated. [Laughs.]

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. The reason they're doing the second book, he's pricing them way below what they are now.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, I see. So it's really –

MS. HIGGINS: I think that's the reason they're doing it.

MR. ADAMSON: So it's really more of a new edition of the first book.

MS. HIGGINS: But it's not got the same pictures in it.

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, different pictures in it? Okay, great.

I like these Betty Crocker pictures up there of your table services. [Laughs.] Did Dearborn sometimes request you to make a certain design, like these stands, or did you come up with all the tableware ideas?

MS. HIGGINS: I came up with all these things.

MR. ADAMSON: And they let you produce whatever you wanted to; they didn't ever say, "No, we don't think we can sell that?"

MS. HIGGINS: More or less.

MR. ADAMSON: I'll turn the light on for you.

MS. HIGGINS: Will you turn that up higher?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: I noticed you use a lot of these concentric patterns that are almost like rays, growing out of the middle of the pieces.

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: Did that work particularly well with the slumped technique?

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah, but you know, everything wouldn't work with the slumped technique.

MR. ADAMSON: Because the design would get stretched out?

MS. HIGGINS: Oh, bubbles in the wrong place.

MR. ADAMSON: Sometimes, like here, looking on page 48, of these *Posy Pockets*, it looks like there are bubbles in the glass intentionally?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And you were able to control that using the kiln?

MS. HIGGINS: Well, it's the way the design was made.

MR. ADAMSON: Here on page 53, looking at your different signatures, you actually engraved your signature into the back of the pieces that you made in your studio. Did you have an engraving tool to do that? And then the other ones are – the ones from Dearborn are silk-screened with gold, right? – the signature?

MS. HIGGINS: Sometimes we have people ask us to design something. I think that was –

MR. ADAMSON: For the St. Louis centennial – or bicentennial? We're looking on page 57 here. So you were actually asked to design something for the occasion in that case?

MS. HIGGINS: I think so. We did this – this was gray glass.

MR. ADAMSON: This *Clocks* ashtray?

MS. HIGGINS: Yes. This is actually about five sheets that –

MR. ADAMSON: This is the red piece on the bottom on page 59?

MS. HIGGINS: Mm-hmm.

MR. ADAMSON: And here's a Maurice Heaton piece.

MS. HIGGINS: Yeah. I'm trying to remember what these are –

MR. ADAMSON: It says they're Sydenstricker.

MS. HIGGINS: Hmm?

MR. ADAMSON: They're Sydenstricker, it says. It's a different company.

MS. HIGGINS: I've never heard of it.

MR. ADAMSON: I think they're just –

[Tape stops. End of Interview.]

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