



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Olga Hirshhorn,
2006 May 16-19

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

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Olga Hirshhorn on 2006 May 16 and 19. The interview took place at the Mouse House in Washington, DC, and was conducted by Nora Halpern for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Olga Hirshhorn and Nora Halpern reviewed the transcript together in 2008; Hirshhorn reviewed the transcript again in 2013. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

NORA HALPERN: So, if you want to tell me your name and spell your name?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: My name is Olga Hirshhorn. O-l-g-a H-i-r-s-h-H-o-r-n. I'd like to say here at this point that there is a difference between pronouncing my name "Ahlga" and Olga, and I never bothered correcting anyone until maybe ten years ago or so, because I grew up as "Ahlga," as though it were A-H-L-G-A—my teachers, my parents, my children, you know. I mean my sister and brother. Anyway, but as I've gotten older, you know, I feel I should be more known as "Ahlga" rather than Olga.

NORA HALPERN: Absolutely.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And as you know, at the Hirshhorn, we have an Olga [Viso, director, 2005-2007], so I'm the "Ahlga," and she's the Olga. [Laughs.]

NORA HALPERN: And is that because of your parents' upbringing in [Ukraine], you think?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I don't know. I don't know what it was, because they often called me by a Ukrainian name, which is Olga, [pronounced Oilga] and I would often be called Oilga. You know, I was really Oilga Zatorska. What a great name. I should have been a ballet dancer.

NORA HALPERN: Now can you spell [Zatorska] for us?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes. Z-a-t-o-r-s-k-A.

NORA HALPERN: And do you have a middle name or is it just Olga?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: My middle name is Mary, taken at my confirmation. My communion or something, one of those reasons.

NORA HALPERN: Now, while we're talking about your family—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But I never use it.

NORA HALPERN: You don't?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I mean it's—

NORA HALPERN: Officially you're just Olga Hirshhorn.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But I do have a middle name.

NORA HALPERN: Now, while we're talking about your family, tell me about your parents.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Mother and daddy both came from Ukraine.

NORA HALPERN: And where in the Ukraine?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I found out four years ago when I went back to look at my relatives that they came from western Ukraine, and actually their villages were about ten miles apart, but they met in New York at a church function.

NORA HALPERN: So they emigrated separately.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: The emigrated separately.

NORA HALPERN: And do you remember the names of the villages your parents came from?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I have it in my—I have it in my address book.

NORA HALPERN: Well, you know what?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I can—

NORA HALPERN: —if you give it to me I'll make sure it goes in the record.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I have it here somewhere, because I now communicate with relatives.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So I know where they are. But it's on the western part of Ukraine, next to Poland. And, well, they met in New York at a church function.

NORA HALPERN: And how old were each of them when they emigrated?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well—

NORA HALPERN: Do you know?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Mother was about 12. Daddy had to have been about 16 or so when he emigrated.

NORA HALPERN: And they came with your grandparents?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No, no, daddy came separately and, well, I think it would be better if I explained that they met at a church function and were married three weeks later.

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Mother was 16; daddy was 21. And it made great sense that they married because they were—had left their parents, in the United States struggling with the language, with not too many friends, and marriage just seemed like a logical thing for them to do. And mother came alone. The story of—daddy came, I think to avoid the draft, avoid the army, rather.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And—

NORA HALPERN: This would have been the Russian Army.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Because it was—Ukraine then was Russia.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And—but he had a job when he came and mother, mother was very young when she came. Her best friend was coming to the United States with her mother and her two brothers, and my mother was very upset about losing her best friend, so she begged her parents to let her go with this family.

NORA HALPERN: At age 12?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: At age 12.

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And this woman's father - mother - husband had come to the United States earlier and saved some money—

NORA HALPERN: So he was settled.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —and sent the tickets back for his wife and three children. And at the last minute she

decides to take my mother with her. And the only thing then that you had to do was have your eyes examined— isn't that interesting? —

NORA HALPERN: Yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —before you were allowed to enter the United States. Anyway, so mother begged her mother to get her eyes examined. Her mother did not want to do it, she didn't want her to leave, but she prevailed on her father and her father took her and had her eyes examined.

So they traveled from Ukraine through Russia and I guess through Poland and Germany. And they ended up on a ship, which goes to London first—from Germany I guess to London, where she had her—where she saw her first black person. She had never seen a black person before. And then they flew—they sailed steerage. So mother had never seen a banana [or] an orange, which was thrown down to them by the other people up in the first- and second-class cabins.

Anyway, they get to emigration and the stories the mother, the woman had cooked up was that she was going to tell the immigration authorities that mother was an illegitimate child that she had when her husband had left her and had gone to the United States and he was there for quite some time. And they all agreed to—my mother and the other children and this woman agreed that that was the story she was going to tell them.

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So they get to Ellis Island and they're being quizzed by the authorities. They must have sensed something fishy, with that story and so they point to my mother and said, is she your mother? And as mother related the story to me, her eyes filled up with tears—[phone rings].

[Side conversation.]

NORA HALPERN: So your mother's eyes welled up with tears when she was asked if this woman was her mother.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: She looked at this woman, her eyes welled up with tears because she suddenly—she was very homesick and she remembered that she left her mother, father, and four brothers.

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: She was the oldest of the family, you know. She looked at the woman and said no, and so the authorities threw them all into Ellis Island and they wouldn't release them, threatened to send them back to Ukraine unless they found a relative that would claim my mother. And so it was a horrible position for her. Her husband was there waiting for his family. They wouldn't release the family. The kids were furious they couldn't see their father. The wife, of course—and they just made my mother's life miserable for that waiting period, until they found an uncle that—my mother's uncle that came forth and claimed her.

NORA HALPERN: So did she stay in touch with that family then or did that destroy the relationship?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No, unfortunately that destroyed whatever relationship they had.

NORA HALPERN: So she was 12 years old and she went to live where?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: She went to live in New York. I guess in the Bronx where her uncle had a store and a family. And I remember meeting the family years later.

NORA HALPERN: And did you ever meet your maternal grandparents?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, yes. Well, no, just my maternal grandmother eventually came to the United States and lived in New York City, and I used to love to visit her in New York City because we lived in Greenwich, the country, , and my grandmother lived in the Lower Eastside and she had a fire escape. We kids, well, I thought that was the best thing, to sit on the fire escape and watch the world go by right underneath you.

NORA HALPERN: Do you remember what street she was on?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And I think it was something like Avenue A. I don't know why that sticks in my mind as the avenue.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And—

NORA HALPERN: And then your father's family, so he came over at 16.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, and so my daddy came over and eventually his brothers and sisters came over. Most of them settled in Canada. He had a sister who came to the United States, but then she was deported because she had come illegally. She'd originally come from Canada and came down, and she ended up in Argentina, actually. And I never saw her again, and I was very fond of her.

And so they would have emigrated in around what year?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: We're talking—we're talking about 19—well, I will have to say about the 1920s.

NORA HALPERN: No, but you were born in—you were born in—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I was born in 1920.

NORA HALPERN: So, they—but they had already been here for some time.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yeah, when I—I knew them—I knew them—

NORA HALPERN: No, I mean when your parents came.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, when my parents came, when they were married in 1916.

NORA HALPERN: 1916. So, around that time.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's right. They all sort of—well, I remember my family in 1926, '27. I don't know when they came. I mean—I don't know when my uncles and aunts came. All I know is that my brother—my father's brothers went to Canada and they would come down and visit once in awhile.

NORA HALPERN: Now, so much of that immigration at time were Russian Jewish immigrants, but your family was Russian Orthodox?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, we were—mother used to point a finger at me and say, remember, you are not Russian, you are not Polish; you are Ukrainian. And we—it wasn't—and I—she was very nationalistic. I hated my name as a child, growing up at WASPy Greenwich, Connecticut.

NORA HALPERN: Being called Oiga?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yeah, I wanted to be called Tiffany, or Kelly, or anything but a European-sounding name. And mother's name was Barbara.

NORA HALPERN: Really?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yeah. Barbara in Ukrainian, it was Varvara, but she was Barbara, and I used to say, why didn't you name me Barbara? She named my sister Stephanie, my brother was Nicholas Ignatius. Those were great names but I—and mother said, you were named after Princess Olga. And for years I naively thought I was named after the Romanov family, the Russian. They had the four girls and one was Olga. Until about four years ago, when I got to Ukraine for the first time, I was flying into Kiev, sitting next to a Ukrainian girl and we were talking. I was telling her about my name, and I said mother named me after Princess Olga of the Romanov family and I've always hated the name. And she turned to me and she said, you weren't named after Princess Olga of the Romanov family. She said, you were named after Princess Olga who brought Christianity to Ukraine. Western Ukraine is Christian under really, Rome, the Pope in Rome. And so mother and daddy both, are—they were Ukrainian Catholics. And I—so in Greenwich I was raised as Catholic.

NORA HALPERN: So, did you speak Russian at home or—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Ukrainian.

NORA HALPERN: Ukrainian, sorry.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, big difference. Mother wanted us, and daddy wanted us, to learn Ukrainian, and we had a tutor that came to the house. We did not want to learn Ukrainian. We wanted our parents to learn English.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And it would—in those days you were ashamed of our—our foreign speaking—broken English-speaking parents. You know, that's not true anymore. But in the early days, when all my friends'

parents spoke the King's English it would—it, anyway, you don't feel that way anymore now, but as a child growing up I wanted my parents to learn English—

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —which they did, but they spoke to us in Ukrainian and we answered them back in English, so they learned quite quickly. And as a result, I learned to understand Ukrainian and I used to sing a few Ukrainian songs when we had company and that kind of thing. But I never was able to speak it myself. And mother died in 1980 and I never heard Ukrainian after that. And when I went back to Ukraine four years ago, it was hard for me to understand the language. But then I went back a second time and spent a full week with my —the first time I went I just spent an afternoon; we had lunch. Five Olgas sat at lunch. Anyway, that was the first time. And the second time I went, I stayed in their village for a whole week and I spent time with each—

NORA HALPERN: And that's the name of the village that you'll get me later.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I'll get you—well, I'll get you the name of the village that daddy's family lives in—

NORA HALPERN: Okay.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —and the name of the village where mother's family lives in.

NORA HALPERN: Now, your mother's—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I think it's—well, I'll let you know.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, and I'll make sure the spelling is correct.

The one thing is that we're 15 minutes into this that I realize that I was suppose to at the very beginning—you did say your name. I'm supposed to say that we're having this interview at the Washington D.C. home of Olga Hirshhorn. It's May 16, 2006 and this is an interview being given by Nora Halpern, N-o-r-a h-a-l-p-e-r-n, on behalf of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is disc number one, we're still in track one, and we're at 1548 on the counter.

So we'll get the villages' name. Now, your mother passed away in 1980—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Daddy—mother passed away in 1981.

NORA HALPERN: '81 and your father?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: '75. He died in 1975.

NORA HALPERN: '75. Okay.

So, let me ask you in terms of your life—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But I'm the youngest of three children.

NORA HALPERN: And your siblings? Are they—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, they're still alive.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, and where are they?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: My brother lives in Old Saybrook, Connecticut and Florida—St. Lucie, Florida—and my sister lives in Riverside, Connecticut.

NORA HALPERN: So, they—the two of them just stayed in Connecticut for most their—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, they stayed in Connecticut.

NORA HALPERN: Now, in terms of your childhood and growing up, were there artworks in your family's home?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, no.

NORA HALPERN: Were there icons?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No.

NORA HALPERN: So—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No. No, I was so happy as a child growing up. I lived in an ethnic neighborhood. There were —there were a lot of Polish and Russian and Italian—they were mostly domestic workers: gardeners, and cleaning women, and laundresses. Mother was a laundress. Daddy was a chauffeur/gardener.

NORA HALPERN: And so this was in Greenwich, Connecticut.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It was in Greenwich, yes.

NORA HALPERN: And you were born in Greenwich?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I was born in Greenwich. I was born in Greenwich and—

NORA HALPERN: And Greenwich is G-r-e-e-n-w-i-c-h. Okay.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Okay, right. And what question did you ask?

NORA HALPERN: Just in terms of what you grew—what you had in your house growing up. If there was—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh yeah, of course. Yes, and most of them were Catholics. I think all of them were Catholics as a matter of fact.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

NORA HALPERN: And occasionally we would—I would wander into the homes of our friends, and a lot of them had religious—

NORA HALPERN: Icons and things?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, mostly religious prints on the wall of bleeding hearts and Jesus on the cross, and blood dripping. I used to hate those kinds of things but we never had that in our house.

NORA HALPERN: And what do you remember having growing up, in terms of pictures on the wall? Were they photographs?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, we—we had mostly photographs of the family that mother had taken. Mother—I can remember the first photograph taken of us as a family when I was probably about eight years old, and then she would take them every couple of years and—professionally—and send them back to the family. I remember one of them is in front of a — they have a backdrop of a winding stairway.

NORA HALPERN: Nice.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And several were taken with a very interesting background of an interior of a building, and so it looked as though we were—mother and her husband were flourishing. These are pictures she sent back to her family.

NORA HALPERN: So they were studio photographs then.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, yes, yes.

NORA HALPERN: Now, part of—this particular interview is part of a whole series that ArtTable is sponsoring. One thing I learned in the process of doing this archive is that there is really no budget in the Archives in American Art to do these oral histories, so they have specific programs. One is the Art Dealers Association [of America] has given money to interview, you know, historic art dealers. And then ArtTable wants to have a fund, which it's established, to interview important woman in the arts. So ArtTable has specific questions that they want me to ask you specifically as they relate to ArtTable's history. So I'm going to go through these first and then I've got broader questions.

So the first question is how long you've been a member of ArtTable and if you remember?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, golly, let's see. It was Janet Solinger that got me—so maybe shortly after Janet got involved.

NORA HALPERN: And so that would have been some time ago?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes.

NORA HALPERN: So, it was Janet then that introduced you to ArtTable. So when you joined, you joined the Washington D.C. chapter?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, yes.

NORA HALPERN: Okay, and what kind of involvement over the years have you had?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Not much because of the fact that I'm only here in the spring and fall. And they—at the beginning they weren't offering much.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

MS HIRSHHORN: And now I know you have your morning breakfasts.

NORA HALPERN: Yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Did they—have you had them?

NORA HALPERN: They still have them, the networking breakfasts.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And you didn't have much of a program, which you do now. I know I've taken some of the tours and some things—

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —that you had done, and I've joined you for breakfast a couple of times, you know.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And I get invitations to a lot of great things that you're doing.

NORA HALPERN: Right. And I think over the years it's really expanded quite a bit.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Of course.

NORA HALPERN: And then a couple of years ago we honored you at the luncheon.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's right, last year.

NORA HALPERN: Was that last year? That's last year. And tell me about that event because I had to be out of town, even though we bought a table.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, you weren't there.

NORA HALPERN: I bought a table that I filled with people, but I unfortunately had to be working someplace else.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Who was it—Janet Solinger—[Wilhelmina] Billie Holladay—myself. All of us, who knew each other very well, each of us with our group of friends, so it was a nice little get-together.

NORA HALPERN: Now, as a member—let me see. Some of these are very, sort of more, you know, business-y kinds of questions. As a member of ArtTable, were there any opportunities that came to you as a result of your involvement or information that you were able to use to your benefit, based on the membership?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No, not really, because most of the women—is it only open to women? I guess it is.

NORA HALPERN: It's only opened to women.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's right, I forget. Most of the women were young women, you know, really either early or halfway in their career and—

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —and women looking for other opportunities and—

NORA HALPERN: So, perhaps you were a more—you were the person that people sought out rather the other way around.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, you know, I was just—

NORA HALPERN: Because you really mentored many people.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, I don't know, but it was—that's a fascinating group of people. And I can remember at the breakfasts, you know, asking what each one of them did. I was amazed at what their—

NORA HALPERN: The breadth of it.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —jobs were.

NORA HALPERN: They just had a luncheon in New York that was fabulous and there was a young curator who was based—I cannot remember her name, but she was based at MoMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY] and worked on the Elizabeth Murray retrospective.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh.

NORA HALPERN: Had such an incredible spirit, and she won the first annual young person in the field award. She was so impressive.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That ArtTable is giving.

NORA HALPERN: Yes, at their annual luncheon.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I think it's a great idea, whoever started it.

NORA HALPERN: It's—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Because it's a good way to get people like you together and exchange of jobs and so—I guess you know about interesting job openings.

NORA HALPERN: Well, it helped me when I moved here, because I was a longtime member since the '80s in Los Angeles, but when we moved here for Kerry's [Brougher, Nora's husband] job and I didn't know anybody. I just called ArtTable and had an instant community.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, ArtTable is comparatively new out here.

NORA HALPERN: It's—well, I don't how long it's been in D.C., but it's 25 years old.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Is that right?

NORA HALPERN: As an organization.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I never knew that.

NORA HALPERN: Now, let me ask your educational background. Do you—you did, you know, kindergarten up through high school and—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Up through high school—

NORA HALPERN: —in Greenwich.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: In Greenwich, and then I was very active in high school. I mean, I should have gone on to college. I certainly was college material, but I fell in love and I was seduced by high school English teacher. And, you know, at that point sex to me was more important than leaving and going somewhere else—

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —unfortunately. And so I was 17 years old, but I ended up—I was editor of the school newspaper and the man I married was the faculty adviser. I mean, that's how close the whole thing was.

And I was 17 when I was graduated in January and we decided we would get married, but we should wait a whole year, you know, so that it would look right to the authorities. I mean, when we were married, the headline of an article was, "Board of Education allows teacher to marry former student." They never actually discussed it with him, but that's a newspaper taking freedom. But—

NORA HALPERN: And what was his name, your first husband?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: John Cunningham.

NORA HALPERN: John Cunningham. C-U-N-N—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —I-N-G-H-A-M.

NORA HALPERN: And John, J-O-H-N?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: J-O-H-N.

NORA HALPERN: And so with John Cunningham you had three children?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, but what happened was I—we were going to wait a whole year before we were married and so I got myself a job. I got a job in Franklin Simon, and

NORA HALPERN: And what is that, Franklin Simon?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It was a—it was like Lord and Taylor.

NORA HALPERN: Oh.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So you're too young to know Franklin Simon, but your mother did. But anyway, and I got a job as a packer. And I can remember at one point they even sent me into New York to Norcross, and I spent a whole day learning how to tie pretty packages. It was great experience; I mean, I've never forgotten it.

And then, so I had a whole year and I decided I would commute to New York University. Three days a week I left my job at five [p.m.], raced down to the railroad station, got on a train, into New York, and then got on the subway to go to NYU.

NORA HALPERN: Wow. This is before kids.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, this is before I was married.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, before you were married, okay.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That one year.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That one year.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, the year that you were waiting. I see.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: The year I was waiting. And I just loved it. I ate it all up. I took three courses.

NORA HALPERN: Do you remember what you took?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, yes I certainly do, because it's what has made me what I am today. I took a course in "Textile Fabrics," so that taught me about fabrics. And it's interesting because I still have a page that I tore out of *The New York Times*, or the other one, the *Herald Tribune*, or whatever it was at that time, advertising this new thing that was – had just been discovered, was coming out, called nylon, and that they were putting it in toothbrushes first. That's when nylon came out of, how far back I go with that. And then the other course that I took was "Color, Line and Design," and that taught me a lot about art and color, of course. And then the third course I took was "Furniture."

NORA HALPERN: Furniture history or furniture making or—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No, the history of furniture, you know, and so I learned about the different periods of furniture, and that with the fabrics and with the art—it's made what you see here.

NORA HALPERN: Yes. I see it all around.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes.

NORA HALPERN: So, when you chose those three classes, were you thinking maybe of a career in decorating or —

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No, I was thinking of a career because—I thought I'd work as—I thought I would like to be a buyer, I thought I'd like to work in a large clothing store or something.

As a matter of fact, I was—I was a packer for about a year, and then I was graduated up; I became a saleslady, but I never forgot how to tie a pretty package.

NORA HALPERN: That's great. That's fantastic.

So, then you had your first child, who was Chip.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: John. [His nickname is Chip.]

NORA HALPERN: John.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, so a year and half after I was married, I had my first child.

NORA HALPERN: So, you were 18, 19.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Nineteen—no, I was actually 20.

NORA HALPERN: Okay.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He was born in September and I was 20 in [the prior] April.

NORA HALPERN: Okay, so—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And by the time I was 25, I had three boys.

NORA HALPERN: Wow, under the age of —

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, I had five, three, and one.

NORA HALPERN: Wow. So, that's incredible.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And I'm exactly 20 years older than my oldest son, and then I'm 22 years older than my middle boy—

NORA HALPERN: And his name is?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Denis.

NORA HALPERN: Denis.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And my third son is Graham Charles.

NORA HALPERN: Graham Charles.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: G-R-A-H-A-M Charles. C-H-A-R-L-E-S. My youngest son we call "Ham."

NORA HALPERN: Ham. H-A-M?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, because my European father would call him Gra-ham instead of Graham.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, that's funny.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That got shortened to Ham.

NORA HALPERN: Now, what—one of the questions that they have for—from ArtTable—we have your birth date and we have your place of birth. They want to know a little bit about your cultural and socioeconomic background, although we talked about that a little bit. Your mother—your father was a—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: When mother married daddy, he was then working for the American Felt Company, and many years later I went through the American Felt Company. Boy, was I glad daddy never worked there for a long time, because it was—it had to do with steaming fabrics and making felt. And the men that worked there wore boots and rain gear because it was wet and heavy and awful.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But anyway, so daddy did work there at the beginning. I think that was the job he got when he came from Ukraine. And mother was a laundress. And mother had—she felt it was better to be a laundress than a cleaning woman. She would not clean anybody's house, but she felt laundry was a very clean kind of thing to do.

NORA HALPERN: Okay, now I'm going to check my notes here, because I had thought that this skipped from track to track, which may not be doing that because we haven't pressed pause. I know that we're still on, so let me just look through this. I think—I think it's working fine.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, may I say another thing at this point?

NORA HALPERN: Sure.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: While you're looking at—

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, please.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I always felt as though we were the rich kids in the neighborhood.

NORA HALPERN: And why is that?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, I'll tell you why. We always had a telephone. No one else did. They used to come and borrow our telephone, which would annoy my mother, and you know, and then make a long distance call and put ten cents on the table. And then as mother used to say, she would spend it and then the phone bill would come in and—

NORA HALPERN: And she wouldn't have it.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —she'd have to pay and she wouldn't have it. But anyway, we had a telephone. We had a car. No one else had a car. Everybody walked—it was close to town, so everybody walked. And then—

NORA HALPERN: So, were you in town center then, your house or -

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No, not really. I was always about a half a mile from town, a very nice little area.

NORA HALPERN: In a house?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: In a house; oh yes, in a house that daddy built, I remember.

NORA HALPERN: Do you remember the address?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, let me finish the train of thought.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And another reason why I thought we were wealthy—three reasons: We had a telephone, and we had a car, but we always took vacations.

NORA HALPERN: Oh.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: We always would pile in the car in the summertime and visit relatives that lived in Utica, New York, so I can remember going into daddy's Maxwell car. But when I thought we were really rich was Christmas, when daddy would—we'd pile in the car and we'd go to town and we would buy a real Christmas tree to decorate—most of the neighborhood kids, the father went out in the woods and chopped down a cedar tree.

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But we had a real—isn't that silly, but—

NORA HALPERN: No, but it's the things you remember—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yeah, I can remember that so well—

NORA HALPERN: Now, did you have - because you had this telephone, was your house the center of, sort of, the community, that people would come over?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Not really, no.

I was born on [Le Grand Avenue]. It wasn't a very long street. There were about maybe about four houses on each side of the street. And at the beginning was actually a farm. It must have been about three or four acres of land. It had been a farm years ago and an Italian family, [the Christianos,] had bought it many years ago. And they were in the construction business, so they had a lot of big machinery like cement-turning machinery, big trucks, and that kind of thing.

And we—it was where I played as a child because of the fact that that particular family didn't let their children have anything to do with the other kids in the neighborhood, but I was allowed to—I became very friendly with one of the daughters. And right next to this farm-like area was a three-story apartment house, and we called it "the flats." They were all one-story houses all around, but this one three-story, just straight, square, nondescript-looking building. And my mother—I was born on the second floor of the flat. And the reason that is so important in my memory as a child was that it had a three-story outhouse.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, my goodness. How do you mean a three-story outhouse?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, I finally, years ago, when I was doing one of these for Greenwich—and they said, how do you—what—and I said, well, I'll call my brother, my brother who's a plumber. And I said, how does this three-story outhouse work? Anyway, so it worked, it had—it was three stories but it had a back porch that went the three stories, and the outhouse was on the back of the back porch, you know.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And so, up here—here's the back porch. Here's the wall of the back porch, okay. And so, and you have to look at it this way. Here's the wall.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

MS. HIRSSHORN: So there's always like a two- or three-seater, right here and here. And that's on the third floor. On the second floor it was here. On the third floor—

NORA HALPERN: So it would drain sort of behind the next one.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And we kids used to always go up to the third floor.

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Because we just had to—we'd listen.

[They laugh.]

NORA HALPERN: It would go all the way down.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: All the way down.

NORA HALPERN: That's fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Isn't that funny?

NORA HALPERN: That's fantastic. It must not have smelled so good in the summertime.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But anyway, and I can remember when mother and daddy bought a lot up the street from that and built their house.

NORA HALPERN: And what was the name of the street, do you remember?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Le Grand Avenue.

NORA HALPERN: Lee Grant.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: L-E-capital-G-R-A-N-D.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, Le Grand.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: We called it "LeeGrand." And it's interesting because it was—we never had a paved street, you know, it was always a dirt, gravelly kind of street. And I remember when daddy and mother moved into that house from the apartment. I must have been four or five years old, because I do remember the neighbors, the men, carrying my mother's coal stove—

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —from one house to other.

NORA HALPERN: But it was called Le Grand Avenue, so—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Le Grand Avenue.

NORA HALPERN: So they must have had great hopes for the street.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I know.

NORA HALPERN: They gave it such a big name.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I know. I know.

NORA HALPERN: And do you—have you been on it in the past years and was—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, yes, I, often, as I go through, stop in to see what the neighborhood looks like.

NORA HALPERN: And what is it now?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, wow. What is it now? I got a call last summer from a friend of mine in Greenwich to say that, what street did you live on? And I said, Le Grand Avenue, she said, because the houses are now selling for a million and a half.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, my goodness.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It was just a working-class neighborhood.

NORA HALPERN: So, I'm going to ask you some questions because I'm always intrigued by, as you say, the classes that you took when you were 17 or 18 that really got you thinking about visual art and tactile quality of fabrics and things. And I'm wondering, as a child—because as I look around your house and I know you; you have a great eye for collecting things, not just art but everything. And I wonder, as a child did you have a doll collection or were there things—did you already have that bug then about putting things in juxtaposition?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, not much. Mother—though we owned a house, daddy had a job, mother always worked, we never felt—I never felt there was much money there for extras. There were no frills and, for instance, Christmastime; we usually got things that we needed anyway. Do you know what I mean? I wanted a bicycle. It would never occur to me to ask my parents for a bicycle. And I remember we walked to the beach every day in the summertime, sometimes with a group, sometimes by myself, or whatever, and I can remember walking to the beach and I had to—

NORA HALPERN: And how long a walk would that be?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I was about to say I think it must—maybe about a half a mile. It's hard because something which now is not very far—

NORA HALPERN: Right. When you're a kid—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —I thought was a mile, you know. But through the years, I know I had to walk through Le Grand, through Davis Avenue and down into Bruce Park under a railroad bridge. And then in the park where you could, kids used to cut through kind of a woody area to get to the boat to go to the beach. It was a beach you went to by boat. And I can remember once taking that shortcut and finding this whole pile of bicycle frames. And I looked at this—looked at them all and I separated them and I looked at them all. And I picked one out that I felt would fit me, and I carried it home, and then asked my brother to put it together, which he did. He traded his baseball mitt for a seat and I don't know where he got the—he put—all he had was the frame. And I ended up—I had that bicycle long into my marriage. I just loved it.

I wanted a tennis racket. I began playing tennis. I ended up being tennis champ when I left high school and I became an avid tennis player. It wouldn't occur to me to ask my parents to buy me a tennis racket. And by the then I was working, got a job paying 25 cents an hour. I was a mother's helper. I wish I had one now.

And I saved my money and I remember going into the hardware store and paying like \$9.95 for this wonderful tennis racket that I had for years, you know, inlaid with different kinds of wood.

So when you talk about the ways—that kind of things I was introduced you, we always kind of had nice things because daddy and mother often got things from the people they worked for. I can remember in the living room, had a wonderful oriental rug, bigger than this, and I just loved it as a child. And finally, when I was married, mother by then had already moved out to another house, and wall to wall carpeting, and so we—she didn't need that. So I had it. I had it in my house as I—when I was first married, and had it for all those years. Then one of my sons ended with it. And three years ago when I went visiting him, as I do, back and forth going to the Vineyard, and they had it in the bedroom by then, and I said, where's the rug, the family rug? And he

said, it's in the garage, in that black—big, black bag. I said, what are you going to do with it? It's not any good anymore, he said; it's ragged and it's worn and it's—well, I said, you can't do that, that was—that was a good rug. Well, he said, mother, it isn't anymore; you forget, you know, you've had it and I've had it. Well, so I went —

[Telephone rings.]

[END OF TRACK AAA_hirshh06_4468.]

NORA HALPERN: All right, hello. This is May 16, 2006. This is an interview with Olga Hirshhorn in her Washington home, the Mouse House. I am the interviewer, Nora Halpern, and this is an interview being given on behalf of the Archives of American Art, which is part of the Smithsonian Institution. So this is the second disc.

And we were in the middle of a story about a family rug that started on the floor of the Zatorsky family in Greenwich, Connecticut, and then became Olga's, and then became her son's.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, okay. And so that was in the garage. It's just stuck in this great big plastic bag. So when I got to Washington, I called up a man that I knew that had sort of mended oriental rugs of mine before, and asked if he could maybe do something about the rug. He said he would. I sent it to him here. And then he called me up—by then it's a couple of weeks later—he has got the rug spread out in front of this place where he—like, a garage or something. I never saw such a beat up rug in my life. And I thought, God, no wonder my son took it out of the bedroom. He has got a torn area—it always did have a torn area, but it was a nice, neat tear, and not—the whole thing was worn, bad, bad, bad.

And I walked in and the guy said this is a beautiful rug. I said, but it so badly—the edges and everything, the fringe and everything. He said, but it can be repaired. It's a tribal rug; he said, you should repair it. Anyway, to make a long story short, the rug went to Turkey and first it was put in a great, big [tub] that undulated in this bath, and then, like, the children's fingers, the little fingers, you wouldn't believe the way the rug turned out.

NORA HALPERN: And where is it now?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And now it's in my new house in Florida.

NORA HALPERN: [Laughs.] Good.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And I just love it. And my children haven't see it yet.

NORA HALPERN: How great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It's just great.

NORA HALPERN: So it's come full circle.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Full circle.

NORA HALPERN: It's had a long life.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But let me tell you where I—this farm that I told you about.

NORA HALPERN: Yes, on your street.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And this one girl that was really my best friend, Rita [Christiano]. She was the youngest of three children too in her family. We became great friends. And she lived in the garage apartment of this farm. Her grandmother lived in front on the street in a very pretty, large, sort of early American house. The house was probably built about 1850, I think originally. And so in the back, there were all the—there was the chicken farm, the chicken house, under which was the pigs—were the pigpens. And her older sister—and there in all of these barns where the—also other out buildings where they kept all of this heavy machinery, which is just rusting away. And that heavy machinery was wonderful to play in—really; it was fantastic.

But she and I appropriated the pigpen because her sister took the upstairs of this little—the chickens were upstairs and the pigpen was in the lower part of it. So she and I, we really scrubbed the pigpen out and really cleaned it all up and made ourselves a front porch with the weeds. And we played house. But we didn't have much stuff to play house with, but we had to use our imagination, because in that—the area was called Milbrook.

NORA HALPERN: The area of Greenwich?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: This area that—where this farm was next to, actually.

NORA HALPERN: Okay, Milbrook.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I'll digress a moment?

NORA HALPERN: Yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That is eventually [where] Truman Capote lived.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, really.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And I got to know Truman when he was—

NORA HALPERN: Oh, great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Anyway.

NORA HALPERN: I'll put him down.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: What it was, [Milbrook], was this working-class neighborhood right next to this very fancy development, if you can picture it.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But on our end of that fancy development was just woods because it was a buffer between the working people and these lovely, lovely houses. —but what was so important about the Milbrook area or that a lot of things that—they had lakes and we could skate on the lakes and that kind of thing, but the best thing it has was a dump.

NORA HALPERN: Huh? Oh, for you to find treasures.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It was a dump. And it was not a dump—you know, I was thinking about that recently. I don't know what—I know in our neighborhood everybody [burned] their garbage and then brought stuff to the town dump.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: We had a town dump. But in Milbrook, I guess the gardeners might have buried the garbage. I don't know whether Greenwich had a garbage pick-up those days. But in the dump were broken chairs and furniture and—

NORA HALPERN: Plates—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —lamps and broken dishes and pots and pans and funny spoons that were broken. We used to rummage through the dump—

NORA HALPERN: Fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —and that's - oh, we really got the greatest things to play house with. We would drag in something that was our table and something that was our chair and something that was our candlestick. I mean, talk about using your imagination. I mean, to this day—you know, one nice thing about the [Martha's] Vineyard is we have a dump. I love to go to the dump, and so—and so I often remember, but—my first experience playing house. So I think we used that until I was about seven or eight years old.

NORA HALPERN: Wow, fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So that's where I learned to do it.

NORA HALPERN: Well, and I think that that kind of stuff really does make an impact. It really does, whether you realize it or not.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yeah, that's right.

NORA HALPERN: So if we got back to your life story: You're 25 years old; you're the mother of three sons and your husband is your high school English teacher. So he went back to teaching—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He always taught.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, he always taught. And then at a certain point you separated or you—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No, well, we—well, we—

NORA HALPERN: But you don't—if you're not comfortable talking about—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It's all right. The problem with our marriage was that he really was an alcoholic—

NORA HALPERN: Oh, that's a problem.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —and a womanizer, and he broke my heart, because I adored him. And I don't want to go into that personal part—

NORA HALPERN: Which you don't have to.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But I had three sons and I had no skills. And I wanted to leave him—I did leave him, though, shortly after we were married, but then I went back, foolishly, and I became pregnant when I went back. And then I stayed, and then I had three children and I knew I could not survive by myself without any skills.

NORA HALPERN: But your parents were nearby and—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: My parents were nearby and I didn't want to go live with my parents—

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —and so I stayed and I made up my mind—I was married 10 years when I realized I was going to leave him when the children were in high school—college actually. I had made up my mind. And then what happened was I had to supplement our income because when I was married our combined income was \$1,750 a year. He got \$1,500 a year for teaching and I [received \$15 per week at my Franklin Simon job]. And it was very hard to survive in Greenwich on a schoolteacher's salary.

But what you have to remember is that in those days the school—today, school teachers go to school in blue jeans and they don't, you know—John Cunningham had to go to school in a business suit. He always had to have pressed white shirts, and it was hard. And so I—I did—thank God we had a great thrift shop in Greenwich and I bought all my clothes and—but I didn't feel the least bit denied; I always felt very well dressed. And I bought as many things as I could for my husband. I'd buy him a suit every now and then.

And I can remember once years ago, because I learned to sew and made a lot of my own clothes, and he had this wonderful suit that he finally wore the hole in the knee and—but the material was so nice. I remember ripping that suit—the jacket and the pants—all apart very carefully and using the reverse side of it—because the front was already shiny, and I made myself a cardigan suit.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, my goodness.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I can't believe it. I've always felt very sorry I got rid of it because it represented—

NORA HALPERN: A lot of work.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But we had a great thrift shop, and we not only bought clothes and shoes and everything—I always had long hair those days, very long hair. I had to look older; my husband was 13 years older than I and I wanted to look older so I let my hair grow. I was like the original washer-woman hairdo. So at the thrift shop I began collecting hairpins for hats and hair combs.

NORA HALPERN: So you wore your hair in a bun?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I wore my hair in a bun, and it was very long. [At the thrift shop] I also collected hats. I have the greatest beaded flapper dress.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, wow. And that I hope you've saved.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So I've got some goodies—and shoes. Oh, yes I still have it; I still have them both. But I've also picked up odd pieces of furniture there and little pieces of sculpture, [like a [Auguste] Rodin head of a young boy]. It was amazing.

After I married—I remember when I married Joe Hirshhorn I said, well, do I have to stop going to the thrift shops? He said, you do whatever you want anyway, which I did. [I didn't go there] as much as I used to but I would pop in every now and then. And I came home holding [a piece of sculpture] and I said, "Who is

[Alexandre] Falguière?" And he said, oh, a French artist. He said, I have his paintings. I said, this is a sculpture. I paid \$450 for it.

NORA HALPERN: Fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So it was a great thrift shop because of the kinds [of stuff that was offered]—so I learned a lot there. And, like, my houses originally had odd prints that I bought at the thrift shop, like Currier & Ives prints and things like that. And so it was a really good—a really good experience.

NORA HALPERN: Now tell me about the businesses that you started in Greenwich.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, yes. Well, there I was; my only skill was that I was a long distance swimmer, and I used to enter all the meets and win them all. Whatever had to do with the water, whether it was a 50-yard dash or fetching something in the bottom of the pool, I had great stamina and drive and I used to come home with all these medals. I still have them somewhere. And so I decided to pick up children in the car and take them to the beach, teach them how to swim, and return them. And my three children were included, so that ate up some of the profits because you only get so many kids in the car.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And you wouldn't believe—I mean, it's no wonder [I wasn't arrested!]

NORA HALPERN: Oh, in the front. Yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —they're all tiny, in the front seat, and someone sitting on their laps, like three kids in the back seat with someone sitting in their lap and someone [standing]—they were squeezed in like cigars or sardines. And I took them to the beach that we had in Old Greenwich and I taught them how to swim. And the parents loved it because I picked them up, the first one about nine, and dropped the first one off about noon.

NORA HALPERN: So they had the morning.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And then I had the whole day to myself. And my children went to the beach every day, and I didn't have to [pay someone to care for them].

I had a problem with what to do when it rained. And so I would pick the children up anyway and take them to the Bruce Museum, or to a farm where we would go horseback riding or something, or just look at the animals in the farm.

And then what happened was September came around and parents wanted me to continue with the idea of picking up their children. And I thought I would start [a nursery school] but when I actually started it I only had one child and my son because the other two were in school all day. I remember picking up this Johnnie Douge, and he was only two-and-a-half or three, and the mother says, where are the other children? And I said, well, your child is the first one picked up and he'll be the last one dropped off. He was the only kid in the car and he—

NORA HALPERN: How funny.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —he couldn't say he was the only one in the car. But it grew very quickly. I had the tiger by the tail in no time because of word-of-mouth. Before too long I had a carload of children. We were living out in the country and it was a real do-it-yourself kind of house, farm house. We had bought this Fieldstone farmhouse, and four acres of beautiful apple orchard in Greenwich.

NORA HALPERN: In Greenwich?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, out on North Street. [It was an old eleven room Victorian house built in 1900 set in four acres of apple orchards. After remodeling, we ended up with a large living room, dining room and a small kitchen downstairs. The second floor had a large bedroom, library and a sitting room. Four bedrooms were on the third floor. There was a bathroom on the second and third floors.

When I decided to start a "play group," I turned the second floor space into child activities. I ended up with a "play group" in the winter and a "learn to swim group" in the summer.]

NORA HALPERN: That's great for your own kids.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —and my children were with me.

NORA HALPERN: That's nice.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And after a while I got tired of taking care of children because what would happen would be that the parents would hand me their child and rubbers, and they wouldn't put them on; I would have to put them on.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And often the rubbers just barely fit—

NORA HALPERN: Exactly.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —because they belonged to [another sibling]. I got tired of clothes and icy streets were I would have to stop my station wagon, sometimes in the middle of a hill with a car full of kids, to put chains on.

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I mean, I learned to put chains on the car, you know, anyway.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I decided to start a babysitting service. I called all these people that I had known that had used me for learning to swim and camp and all that stuff. They said that they'd be willing to subscribe to it. I was going to do it in the fall. Fall came and it was so nice, the kids were all in school and I was free for the first time. I got a call from a friend of mine who said, are you going to start that babysitting service? I said, I don't know, Kay. I said, you know, it's so nice not having to deal with children anymore. She said, Olga, it's a great idea, and if you don't start it someone else will. That was Kay Langan. She really needed a babysitter. She was taking a [New York] Junior League course and she needed to know that she could—every Wednesday—

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, have the kids somewhere.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —be able to—anyway. So she was one of my first customers. And I called it Services Unlimited. And I think for something like \$6 a month I would send you a babysitter. You'd pay the babysitter.

NORA HALPERN: Right. So you just arranged—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, I just arranged it. You paid the babysitter \$1.25 an hour. That's how far back I go.

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Anyway, and so it was agreed. And then by word-of-mouth that too grew. And what happened was after I was in operation about a month and a half someone called and said, I need a cleaning woman. Do you have a cleaning woman? And I said, yes. I didn't have cleaning women; all I had were all these babysitters.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And, you know, having been born in Greenwich, I knew all these people—I was very active in Greenwich so I knew, I mean, people who would work for me.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And then because I had all these other friends from the businesses I started, they would call me for help—both sides. So I called a babysitter and said, you're getting a \$1.25 an hour. Yes, she said. And I said, I have someone who will give you \$2.50 an hour to clean their house. Are you interested? And she said, yes. So suddenly I had cleaning women, you know, coming out of my ears.

But then someone called and said—very shortly after—within three months I had the [second] tiger by the tail - someone called and said, I need a baby nurse. In Greenwich a lot of wealthy people [needed] baby nurses when they came home. Now I [have] cleaning women and babysitters.

And so I put this—well, first what I did, I called the Department of Labor in Hartford to say I was starting an agency and what did I need. Did I have to have a license? I was not charging anything to the employee; I was just charging the employer. And they said, no, because you're not charging the employee—

NORA HALPERN: That's right, you're not paying them. That's smart.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So I didn't need anything.

NORA HALPERN: So this would have been late '50s?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: This was in the late '50s, I guess. And I was doing all this from—all this from home.

NORA HALPERN: That's fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: All this from home. I didn't have a baby nurse so I put an ad in the paper. And that's another I didn't [normally] pay for advertising. [It was all word of mouth.]

NORA HALPERN: You didn't need to. Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [I put an ad in the newspaper describing the baby nurse position. Many baby nurses applied because the ad said, "No fee to the employee." I placed a nurse in the position and put an ad in the newspaper saying "Baby nurses available."]

NORA HALPERN: Smart.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [In less than a year, I built a terrific business working from home. I never saw any of the employers or employees.

I finally hired someone to help and purchased one of the first answering machines – a big clumsy bit of machinery. Because I was working from home, clients called me earlier and earlier in the morning and later and later at night.

I remember a call late at night. "This is Mr.— calling from California. I just called home and discovered my wife ill with the Chinese Flu (this is what it was called that year). Two of my children are sick and one has to get off to school. My wife needs help tomorrow morning." After calls like that, I realized I had to develop respectable hours.

Shortly after, someone called for a cook. "Of course I have cooks," I said. I really didn't. I had babysitters, cleaning women and baby nurses. Therefore, again I put an ad in the newspaper – no fee to the employee – and I received many answers from disgruntled cooks.

After I placed a cook in the position, I put an ad in the paper advertising cooks for sale. Meanwhile, I was driving the regular employment agencies crazy!]

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I [have] saved a lot of the material from that office—still saved some of the letters I [received] from the parents and everything. And that's eventually how I met Joe Hirshhorn.

NORA HALPERN: Now, I want to hear that story, but before we get to that story, in terms—did you—because you grew up and went to a local high school, did you—were there—was there lots of mixing between socioeconomic —

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No.

NORA HALPERN: So when—in high school you sort of stuck with your group and then sort of those—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, no, no.

NORA HALPERN: —wealthy Greenwich kids would stick with their group?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No, not in high school.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: In high school I was not with a special clique. I was a very popular person—I mean, I was—I was head of the "General Organization." By the time I was graduated I was head of the General Organization, head of the—president of the girls' athletic club, and I was president of the Spanish Club, editor of the school newspaper—

NORA HALPERN: So in that sense you got to know the larger Greenwich society, too.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, the larger group. I knew the Greenwich—I knew—no, I was never in a clique. I had friends from the wealthy parts of town and I had friends, of course, that were in my own neighborhood. It was a —it was a varied kind of friendships and I've kept them even to this day, some of them.

NORA HALPERN: That's fantastic. So Kay is still a friend, Kay Langon?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, I have to tell you about Kay; why she's so important.

NORA HALPERN: Yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: We have to fast-forward many years—many years.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Now I'm married to Hirshhorn. It's 1972 and Kay calls and says, would you decorate a tree for the Festival of Trees at the Catholic Church? And I said, oh, Kay, you've asked me to decorate a Christmas tree on the very day I've decided to embrace Judaism.

NORA HALPERN: [Laughs.]

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And she said, it will be your swan song.

NORA HALPERN: How great. How great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So I made this wonderful tree. I knew enough about art that as long as [I have the diagram and the idea, I could give it to someone to make]—

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —because I can't weld. I said to Kay, okay, Kay, I'll do it but I'm not going to decorate an artificial tree—I'm going to make a sculptural tree. I work best under pressure, and it got to be November and she said, where's your—

NORA HALPERN: Where's your tree?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I haven't made it yet. But I'm going to do it, Kay; don't worry about it. I called my brother, who was in the plumbing business but he also was involved with a company that made outdoor furniture. I have this idea for a Christmas tree that I have to make and I wonder if that company you're involved with might [make it for me]. He said, sure. So he came with me, introduced me to the guys [at Lewis Street Metals, where my brother had been part owner at one time]. I showed them the drawing of what I wanted. It's made of cold rolled steel. It's wider—a little thinner than a pencil. [When I was a child, I drew a Christmas tree with graduating triangles like this].

NORA HALPERN: With lots of [graduating] triangles.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It's just a triangle - [actually four triangles above one another].

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [I had the men make four triangles 35 and 24 inches, 18 inches, and 12 inches. Then, I had them make four smaller triangles - 24, 18, 12, 8 and a half inches - and asked them to hang them lose at right angles within the larger triangles by welding a small rod at the apex of the larger triangle. It stands six feet high.]

NORA HALPERN: So it goes this way.

It's a three-dimensional piece instead of flat.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So it's three-dimensional.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: One [triangle] is going this way and one is going that way. It's fantastic. It's about six feet. They get it off the bench and I say, I don't want you to put a square base; make it sort of rectangular, make it more interesting than just square. Anyway, we get it off the table; it's six feet high, and I push it and it goes [this way - back and forth] —and they say, oh, we can still—don't, I said, it's a kinetic Christmas tree.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, that's great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And it's so great. And so what happened when I presented it to the girls, they loved it and they took a photograph of it and—oh, you know what happened—they told *The New York Times*, and *The New York Times* appeared and they took a photograph of it in front of our fireplace in Greenwich. They swept aside [a half dozen archaic pieces and] there was my tree in this art-filled house—

NORA HALPERN: How great. How great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —and I still have it. The article, about half page article in *The New York Times*—

NORA HALPERN: Oh, I'd love to see it.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —"Collector's Wife Turns Sculptor." Anyway, but—so then I thought, oh, someone's going to buy it. I really loved it when I got through, so I put a price of \$750 on it but—

NORA HALPERN: Thinking no one would buy it.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [Feeling guilty about the high price I put on my piece, I decided to contribute something else.

"Take me to a plumbers shop," I asked my brother. "I want to look at the stuff they have." He took me to a shop of welding supplies where I saw all those cubby holes of rods, some of which are used for welding. These 36 foot rods were sold by the pound. I bought about a pound of each brass, stainless steel, regular steel and aluminum.

I wrapped my left hand around one end of the rods and my right hand around the other end and stood them up. I let go with my right hand and held them with my left hand resting on the table. To my delight and surprised I watched as they fanned out in a perfect circle. "I've made a Bertoia," I laughed.

We went back to the factory where I browsed about looking for somewhere to place these rods. Finally, I found the perfect spot – the bottom of a round steel outdoor table, which had a hole in the middle. It was perfect. I called it *Hannukah Bush* and they sold then for \$150 each.

I kept one. All year, it stands as a piece of sculpture but at Christmas I remove the hangars from colored Christmas tree hanging balls and poke the hole over the top ends of the rods and they sway back and forth.

I also made smaller versions. I discovered how to use a jig and with copper tubing I made what I called my Easter Bunny Christmas tree because they could move up and down. They sold them for \$15. I made other things too. I still have samples of everything I made.]

NORA HALPERN: Oh, that's fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [They] sold the Hanukkah bush. Then I [took] some copper tubing and [found] a jig and I attached one end of the copper tubing to this jig, and you wind it around and around and around and you get this cone-shaped thing because it starts like this, you know, and then you go—you [have] a Christmas tree.

NORA HALPERN: Fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: You [have] a Christmas tree. [They] charged \$25 for those and I put some—a row of like a jingle bells down the middle. And then I even—I was even, with [airplane] snippers, cutting copper sheet metal—

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I got so involved my mind was—I couldn't put it down until really Joe got mad.

NORA HALPERN: Because you were just so busy with these sculptures—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I was spending hours in this dirty place, coming home filthy, dirty, and I could see Joe was annoyed but I—it was like eating peanuts. I really could understand why an artist could just want to do everything but—I suddenly knew what it was to be an artist. [Here I was in this big place where they made all sorts of ironwork and there were all sorts of interesting lengths and shapes of metal.]

NORA HALPERN: Well, then it's not surprising that one of your sons became a sculptor. He probably—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [Laughs.]

NORA HALPERN: —got that from you.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [When I married Joe Hirshhorn, one son was about to enter college, one was in his second year and my eldest son just graduated.]

NORA HALPERN: After.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —kids were gone. Anyway, so luckily no one paid \$750 for my Christmas tree.

NORA HALPERN: So you got to keep it.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes. Joe was Jewish and so our first Christmas came along and I said, can we—no, we don't have a Christmas tree, and I said, well, can we have a wreath on at least the backdoor, because we had Christian help. Joe said, no, we never had anything. Joe sent out maybe 35 or 40 poinsettia plants to our friends. We never had a poinsettia at home because he felt it was too Christian-looking. Though I know his children had Christmas trees when they got married—and he said to me, you can have a little Christmas tree in your bedroom if you want. For a little while my maid would decorate this nice Christmas tree in front of the bay window and so it always looked very nice. But when I made [the sculptural] tree, suddenly Joe didn't [complain]. I would put presents under it, and I would put two little [balls] on it and he didn't mind because it was a [work of art].

NORA HALPERN: Right, the artwork.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's right. We had that tree all those years and it sat in [the house with all the art works]. I always had it and then when Joe died I kept it and I decorate it at Christmas.

NORA HALPERN: Is it in Florida?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It's in Florida. And then I met Bob—Bob liked to send me things.

NORA HALPERN: Bob Heggstad, yes?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, Bob likes to send me things. About three years ago he sent me a dozen [antique] Easter eggs tied with ribbon.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, that would be pretty.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So I thought what am I going to do with these ribbons? So I just put them on my Christmas tree [and it became an Easter Egg tree].

NORA HALPERN: How nice.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: My birthday is right about Easter, and so my birthday cards go on my Christmas tree, [which then becomes a birthday tree].

NORA HALPERN: That's great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So that Christmas tree—

NORA HALPERN: Has many lives.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, it has got many lives, and it still is—but it's funny. The day that it was pictured in *The New York Times* [in November of 1972], we had a luncheon date with Albers, and we—

NORA HALPERN: Josef Albers?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Josef Albers. We saw a lot of Josef Albers. And when we [arrived] he's got the paper already looking at this picture of me with my—he said, I love it, it's lovely—great idea. You can do—I said—I know Josef, I know. I could see—these are triangles but you didn't have to have triangles, you could have all different kinds of shapes. And I could see where I could go in a lot of directions with that. [We both discussed all the possibilities.]

NORA HALPERN: If Joe had let you.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: If Joe had let me.

NORA HALPERN: So, I'm just going to spell Robert Heggstad: H-E-G-G—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: G-E-S-T-A-D.

NORA HALPERN: And Robert Heggstad is a lawyer who lives in Washington, D.C.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's right. [Joe died in 1981. Four years later, I married Robert W. Dudley who died four months later. I lost a husband, but I gain six lovely, warm stepchildren.]

NORA HALPERN: So let's go back to 1961, when you get a phone call from your—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, that's right.

NORA HALPERN: —Services Unlimited business. And so you have all these people calling you because they need all kinds of [help in their homes].

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It was a great business because each time the phone rang it was a different request, and I said yes to everything. I would put the phone down or the girls would put the phone down, come in to me and say, well, how do we do this? And we would figure it out. So it was a really wonderful business.

One day as I was going—I had my office, nice little office in a separate room with a bay window right in town at an intersection, so I could see cars going four directions— I was on the corner. I had the outer office and I had two girls doing domestic work and a girl doing work.

NORA HALPERN: Now, for those who know Greenwich—where your—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Putnam Avenue.

NORA HALPERN: Putnam Ave.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: The corner of [Mason Street] and Putnam Avenue. P-U-T-N-A-M. M-A-S-O-N—Mason Street.

[As] I was passing a girl's desk when the phone rang, and I picked it up and I said—mine— because, as I say, each request is different. And I remember Joe's words were, my name is Mr. Hirshhorn. I've just bought the Sinclair-Robinson house in Greenwich and I'm looking for a chauffeur. I'm calling from my New York office. This is my number, and let me know if you have [someone] and [impatiently] down goes the phone.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, he slams it down. He says this is what he needs—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But that's all he had to say.

NORA HALPERN: And the name of the house was Sinclair.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And he referred to it as [the Sinclair Robinson House]—because it was a big, unusual house in Greenwich and he assumed I would know the house by the name. I remember when they built that house as a child. That's another story. I thought, hmm, the nerve of that guy. He's just calling all the other agencies now, and I'll show him how good we are. So I went through my files and looked up a reference and looked up my chauffeurs and checked a reference and [received] a good reference on this man. I called Mr. Hirshhorn and said, "Mr. Hirshon"—[he replied], "my name isn't Hirshon; my name is Hirshhorn." I said, I've got someone [who] will see you tomorrow morning at nine. And at quarter-after-nine Mr. Hirshhorn calls me and says, Mrs. [Cunningham], how dare you send me someone who arrives drunk. And I said, I'm not aware that he had a problem; I did check his reference. I apologized—the man popped in my office and said, "oh I would love that job." And I said, "Mr. Hirshhorn is not interested in you." I said, "you've been drinking." He said, "well, I had a cold and I took something for my cold." I said, "he smelled liquor on your breath; you know, he's not interested."

And that's how Mr. Hirshhorn and I got started. And then he began calling me every day. First it was every day and then he began calling me several times a day—four or five, six times.

NORA HALPERN: And this was for business reasons or because he drove by—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: This was [for] business reasons. He would call me to say, I'm in my office. He would call me at nine right away. I'm in my office, let me know what you have. And then he would call and he would say, I'm going out to lunch and I'll be back at a certain hour. Then he would call back, I'm back. And we had many conversations. He learned that I owned the business.

About a week later I picked up the phone and we first chatted about the chauffeur that he was looking for and he said, how old are you, Mrs. [Cunningham]?

And I said, I'm 41. How old are you? And he said 62. And I said, that's nice. I couldn't think of anything smart to say. Time went on. He kept calling me more and more and finally, at the end of another conversation about a week later, he said, how tall are you, Mrs. Cunningham? And I said, I'm five feet. I did not ask how tall he was because I figured he was short.

NORA HALPERN: Now, why would you figure that?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, if he were tall it wouldn't matter how tall I was.

NORA HALPERN: [Laughs.]

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And I figured he was short. And if I said I'm five-foot-eight, he might have lost interest.

NORA HALPERN: I see.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And I said I'm five feet. I didn't ask him [how tall he was]. He was five-feet-four [I found out later]. And I had just assumed that he had called all the other agencies and I was just one. He told me later he didn't. He asked the real estate person whom to call and, you know—I really thought I had a very good agency when I started.

NORA HALPERN: You must have.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It was great. But then what happened after a couple of years operating just charging the employer, I changed my regulations and charged the employee, too.

Anyway, so that's how I met Joe. But I didn't meet him [in person]. This was in the spring, and then he had a house in Cap d'Antibes on the French Riviera that he went to [during the summer months. He was also looking for an upstairs maid. At that time I changed my fee structure and began charging the employer and the employee.]

And then it was September 18—I remember because it was my son's birthday, and—

NORA HALPERN: September 18, 1961?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, 1961. The chauffeur called me in the morning to say I have a date with Mr. Hirshhorn, and I cannot get my car started. I said, call him and change it and make a new date. He said, I don't have his phone number. My office is in town [and Mr. Hirshhorn was eight miles in the opposite direction]. It was a hot day; I'll go to the beach and I'll stop and get the phone number [to call Mr. Hirshhorn]. So that's exactly what I did. I went down to town, I was going to maybe visit mother and daddy and then go to the beach. I called Mr. Hirshhorn and he said, well, why don't you come to see me instead? And I smiled because I knew he was interested, and so I went to see him.

And I knew exactly where it was, and the butler led me through the house, out into the garden, and there was Mr. Hirshhorn in swim trunks, it turned out, sitting on a stool, and Laura Ziegler, the artist, was doing a bust of him. I had never seen anything like this. She had an armature and she had clay and she was putting clay on and taking it off.

The butler brought me a chair and I sat and chatted with the [two] of them, and after a while Mr. Hirshhorn said, would you like to see my house? And I said, yes. He gave me a tour of this big house. I can remember saying something real dumb like, my, you have a lot of statues. And he said, let me tell you something; it's not statues; I have sculptures. That was my first lesson.

Incidentally, just to fill you in, the second big lesson I learned from Mr. Hirshhorn was—because I knew nothing about art, let alone contemporary art, and I can remember looking and saying, well, I don't really don't like that one. And he said, let me tell you something. "You're not supposed to say you don't like it. You must say you don't understand it." And, boy, does that cover a multitude of sins. I use that for everything.

NORA HALPERN: Well now I know. Next time you say, hmm, I don't understand it, I'll I know what you mean!

OLGA HIRSHHORN: You can use it with lots of different—anyway, so here we are in the garden under the tree. I've gone through the house and the—we did not in those days have portable phones. The phone would ring and the butler would come and say, "Mr. Hirshhorn, you're wanted on the phone." And he had plug-in phones on the terrace, so he would leave us. I said to Laura—and I'm still friendly with Laura all these years. We have lunch every year. She comes—she lives in Lucca, Italy, and every year they come to Florida and I see her. I adore her.

NORA HALPERN: That's nice. She was there at the very beginning.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Right at the very beginning. We often talk about that. And I remember saying to Laura, "who is this Mr. Hirshhorn anyway?" And she said—"Aline Saarinen has just written a book called the *Proud Possessors* [*Proud Possesors: The Lives, Times, and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors*. New York: Random House, 1958], and there's a whole chapter about Mr. Hirshhorn in it." She said [I should get it out of the library]—but before I got it out of the library, Mr. Hirshhorn gave me one that particular day and so I did read it. It was a very hot day and Mr. Hirshhorn said, "what [were] you going to do today?" I said I was headed for the beach. Well, we ended up in his pool. He had a little—he had a bathhouse just below the pool area. I was in the pool all by myself. And being a country girl I—there was a little frog in the pool, a tiny little frog, and I was playing with the frog. I was putting it in [the palm of] my hand and it would jump and I would

swim to it and it would jump, and I was playing with this frog.

Mr. Hirshhorn gets in the water and he [swims] up to me, breaststroke, and he says, hi. And I said, hi. I put the frog on his head. [Halpern laughs.] He was furious. He got very angry, got out of the pool. He was looking at me with fire in his eyes. He told me later he thought I was anti-Semitic and that's why I did it. I said, you obviously didn't know the story about the prince and the frog.

NORA HALPERN: Right. Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Anyway, he's angry and I'm in the water thinking, oh God, I blew it. So I figured I would take my long hair down and pretend it was [wet]. I thought he would fall madly in love with me. I took my long hair down and he said, my God, I've never seen such long hair. I've had three wives and three mothers-in-law, and he had like eight sisters but they all had short hair.

NORA HALPERN: Eight sisters, wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: They all had short hair. I guess it looked kind [of strange. So I pinned it] back up again and and we chatted—I'll never forget. We had a very nice, long, very intimate conversation, mostly about who I was and my background and my parents and the kind of life I'd had up until that particular time.

NORA HALPERN: And he had how many kids?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He had—well, he had six children; four with his first wife, two that he adopted with Lily Harmon, and none with his third; his third had a daughter, Susan, of her own, which he never—

NORA HALPERN: Adopted.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I had my three. We chatted and chatted and finally he said, well, come on in, we'll have a drink. We went into the library. I got my clothes back on and he got dressed, obviously. And Laura was there and the butler was serving hors d'oeuvres and it was really very nice and very cozy. It got to be seven o'clock. I couldn't believe it. And the butler came in and said, dinner is served. Oh, I thought, oh, waiting for Joe to invite me for dinner. We were having such a good time chatting. I learned later that Joe doesn't do that last minute thing, mostly out of consideration to the help.

You'd never hear him say, put on another plate, he would never do that. But I hated to leave; we were having such a good time. We kept on chatting, the butler came back in and said, dinner is served. And then I really knew he's not going to invite me for dinner and it was time to leave.

[Mr. Hirshhorn led me to the front door and said goodbye. I walked to the car.] I got in and drove around past the library, [with] big bay windows, I looked in and there was Joe waving bye-bye. And I thought, oh, isn't that sweet?

But before I left, he had said to me, I would like to see you again; if you're ever in the area, please stop by. I knew where he was all the time. This was Sunday, so I waited till the following Friday because I knew he was home—I talked to him every day, many times during the day—I called him up around ten o'clock in the morning. I said, Mr. Hirshhorn, I'm going to be in your area. Fine, well, what time? And I already figured out if I said 11 o'clock he would give me coffee, if I said four o'clock he would give me tea. And I said five o'clock. He said, fine; come and have a drink, which is exactly what [I thought he would say]. Anyway, and at that time we continued our conversation. [Coughs.] I'm going to get a glass of water.

NORA HALPERN: You know what, I'm going to take this opportunity to switch things again.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Okay, great.

[END OF TRACK AAA_hirshh06_4469.]

NORA HALPERN: I'll start by saying today is May 19, 2006. This is the third cassette in an interview with Olga Hirshhorn, which is taking place in her home in Washington, D.C. This is Nora Halpern, the interviewer, and I am conducting this interview on behalf of the Archives of American Art, which is part of the Smithsonian Institution.

So we are busy recording; I see it going. And we spent two hours a few days ago and got as far as the beginning of your second date with Joe Hirshhorn.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, my second date with Joe Hirshhorn.

NORA HALPERN: So the first date ended—you had a swim date. And then he said, if you're in the neighborhood

—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, right.

NORA HALPERN: If you're in the neighborhood, please let me know and come back. So you called and said—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, yes, I called and said I was going to be in his neighborhood. And as I said before, I'd figured out if I had said 11 o'clock, he'd offer me coffee, four o'clock, he'd offer me tea. I'll be there at five o'clock—[laughs]—thinking he'd do just exactly what he did—he said, sure, come by and have a drink which is exactly what I did.

And that was a very interesting time because we talked about a lot of things; about the fact that he really, really wanted to turn the house into a museum. I kept telling him he wouldn't be able to because of the zoning laws, which were so strict. They would never allow a [public] museum to develop there. He said he was really looking for someone to help him out with the house, someone to be there if people came from all over the United States at that point—or maybe in Europe—to see his collection. And also he needed help paying his help because he wanted to divorce that house from his New York office. Well, I needed another job like I needed a hole in [my head]—my office was running very well. [And I had three women working for me. I offered to help him Saturday mornings.]

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He said fine. "When do you want me to start?" I asked. He said, tomorrow. I appeared the next morning at 9:00. I worked [a] day. We figured out what [room] I could turn into an office. And then he said, stay for lunch. [Laughs.] And then, come back for dinner. And then, what are you doing tomorrow? Then the whole thing started very, very quickly.

NORA HALPERN: That's great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: The first thing I actually did of any consequence for him was, very soon after, a large van—flatbed truck—was coming [with] sculpture that had been on loan in Canada. And so he wanted me to explain to the movers, once they took the sculpture off the truck, where in the garden to put [them].

NORA HALPERN: Right. And did he show you where or did he leave it up to you?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He pointed [out] where he wanted [them to go], but I didn't know one artist from another.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I can remember where he told me to place the Barbara Hepworth *Porthmeor* [*Sea Form*, 1958] piece. It looked like an ear. He told me where to put that. So I remember putting that. Henry Moore *King and Queen* [1952-53], and that was easy; you know, a man and woman sitting on a bench, so I knew where to go with that. And then he had a [Jacques] Lipschitz abstract form that had sort of two holes in the top of it [*Figure*, 1926-30 (?)]. It was about seven feet tall, and he called it, "goo-goo eyes." I didn't know Lipschitz, but I knew "goo-goo eyes." And "goo-goo eyes" went over there. He had Jacob Epstein's—a woman with a long braid down her back, and it's a very figurative piece [*The Visitation*, 1926 (?)]. That went in this little bay in the garden, and so forth. And he had a David Smith cutout, and it looked like a drawing cutout?

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, like his Running Girls. Yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Right. And he said that should go—I drew a kind of a plan of the garden. And the way he described this sculpture—I didn't know what they were. He had the [Giacomo] Manzu *Cardinal* [*Standing Cardinal*, 1954]. You know what a cardinal [looks like?] —yes, I know what a cardinal looks like, [I said and it goes there in the garden]—in the garden—you know.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I think there were about 12 things that were placed that particular day.

NORA HALPERN: That's fantastic. And did you enjoy it? What did you think of all the—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, I was fascinated. I knew nothing about the art.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Nothing about the importance. Didn't know one artist from another. I had no idea where they fit in the lifespan of this whole group of [sculpture he was talking about.]—

NORA HALPERN: The art history.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I knew nothing about art history.

NORA HALPERN: But you had a great sense of style and composition.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, no, Mr. Hirshhorn decided where they went. I had no part of that. I had no idea what they looked like. I had no idea how big they were. Mr. Hirshhorn decided where he wanted to place them. They turned out to be great placements. When he did get home and when the men were actually working there, they might have been changed [placement] a little bit but not significantly. Once he decided where they should go before they arrived, they pretty much stayed there.

NORA HALPERN: That's great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That was the main thing I did. And—but the fascinating thing about working for Mr. Hirshhorn—then, of course, I saw a lot of him because it was more than just Saturday mornings.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He began to stay home a lot more. And he would invite me for dinner and that kind of thing. And I was there almost every weekend—breakfast, lunch, and dinner. He [entertained often] on Sundays.

NORA HALPERN: So he had company over on Sunday? And at this point—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He did have as many houseguests at the beginning, as we had friends coming from New York. Either our chauffeur would pick them up in New York or they would take a train and our chauffeur would pick them up in Greenwich Station.

NORA HALPERN: Right. Now, was Al Lerner at this point the curator?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: At that point Al was the head curator. Joe had an art office and Al was in charge of that.

NORA HALPERN: And Al's name—is it Abram Lerner?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yeah, Abram Lerner.

NORA HALPERN: Abram Lerner. A-B-R-A-M L-E-R-N-E-R, who was the founding director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and began his career—or began his career with Joe Hirshhorn as his curator.

[OLGA HIRSHHORN shows NORA HALPERN a piece of art.]

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yeah, well. This is one of his pieces.

NORA HALPERN: Oh yes, yes. He is also a great painter.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He signed it Al Lerner.

NORA HALPERN: Al, yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It's New York. Brooklyn Bridge, I guess. Or the Midtown bridge—

NORA HALPERN: Very reminiscent of Sheeler, Charles Sheeler.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, that's right. "To Joe Hirshhorn on his birthday." And you see, I asked Joe to give this to me because I knew—I knew that—Al did this September of '69 and gave it to Joe on his birthday, his 80th, on his birthday, and then I had Joe give it to me because I knew it would be lost at the Hirshhorn, once the Hirshhorn got going.

NORA HALPERN: Right. It's beautiful. So this is a little cityscape, oil on panel.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's right.

NORA HALPERN: So—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I spent a lot of time with him, and we started dating shortly after I got to know him, actually. And we would have married much sooner than we did, but when I met Joe there was no woman in the picture at all. He'd had a legal separation from his third wife.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And they had figured out all the alimony and everything.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And they agreed apparently that when either one of them would get married, the other one would approve it.

NORA HALPERN: I see.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But when that happened, she didn't want it. Joe went to Mexico and got a Mexican divorce. We were married in '64. [May 27 of '64].

NORA HALPERN: May 27 is your wedding anniversary?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes.

NORA HALPERN: And what did your boys think of Joe Hirshhorn? Was he interested in them? They were older.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: They were out of there. By that point two were in college and my youngest son was in his last year at high school. When we were married, he was graduated and spent the summer working as a gardener, as he always did every summer, for the town of Greenwich, he then went on to college and was just only home occasionally after that.

NORA HALPERN: And in the meantime was Cunningham still teaching at the high school?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Cunningham was still teaching. When I met Hirshhorn in September, I'd already been talking to my lawyer about a divorce.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And I finally got my divorce in February—Valentine's Day—February 15 or something the following year, four months [after I met Mr. Hirshhorn.]

NORA HALPERN: So did the boys go to the same high school where he taught?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes they did. And my boys had teachers that I had.

NORA HALPERN: Wow, that's great. So, now when you first joined the Hirshhorn family, then, did you feel a need to learn more about the art, or how did you go about learning? Was it just like spending time going to galleries?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, well. When I—especially after I married Joe Hirshhorn, it was a total immersion in art. Our friends were artists and dealers and collectors and art historians. And one particular story in today's New York Times, reading an article Grace Glueck wrote. And my goodness, Grace is one of these early, early art historians that I met, and I'm still in touch with her, and Joe died 25 years ago.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, she's a great writer.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: As a matter of fact, I've always kept in touch with her. Every now and then I'd read something and then I'd write her. And so we finally got together in Florida.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, good.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: She was vacationing in Boca [Raton, FL]. And on her way home, she had to fly out of Fort Meyers, which isn't too far from where I live. She and her husband—she's married now—came for brunch, actually. And I promised to call friends of theirs who live here in Washington who were supposed to be with them and were very disappointed that they couldn't make it, but I want to follow through with that.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, Grace is an old friend—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: She's wonderful.

NORA HALPERN: She's fantastic. And I think when she came to D.C. once she was staying with those friends.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, really, that's right.

NORA HALPERN: And that's what brought them down here, and then she—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [Her friends are] close by. I think it's 2201 Connecticut Avenue. I came across it the other day. And I really feel before I spend too much time not planning for it I really got to call her.

But anyway, and so, you know, and I did, very shortly after meeting Joe, have to be at the house when people when came.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I had to give them a tour of the house.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I had to know what certain things were. I learned very quickly. Then when I felt I really had arrived, when I could recognize a work of art only because of the style, you know—

NORA HALPERN: Right, right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —and the paint and the colors and the palette, you know. And even with the sculpture.

NORA HALPERN: And in those days he was buying pretty voraciously.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He bought every day. He would always—he was in his office at least four days a week.

NORA HALPERN: And where was his office?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It was on lower Park Avenue. Our [apartment] is on 820 Park Avenue. He would go for lunch every day and go to a gallery and always find something.

NORA HALPERN: And which were—in those days what was his favorite—what was his regular route of galleries?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He went to them all. And there weren't that many. You could get—in the '60s they were all uptown, basically. It wasn't until Paula Cooper went downtown that they started following her. But in the early days they were mostly on Madison Avenue and 57th Street. And so he had his favorite galleries. Of course, we went to all the auctions. That was fun, going to the auctions. And we got to know the artists, some of them better than others. A lot of them would come for dinner. Joe would call and say, I'm bringing someone for dinner, and where is this painting? And I'd say, it's up in the guest bedroom, you know. And Joe would say, bring it down and put it over the fireplace in the library. [Laughs.] So we'd bring it down and put it over the [fireplace, where it stayed until we sold the house in Greenwich].

NORA HALPERN: It was right there. That's funny.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I can remember one time when Louise Nevelson came to visit. Suddenly I realized as I was taking her through the garden, oh my God, we don't have a Louise Nevelson here, [I thought]. We're walking her through, and she said, this is great, but you don't have a Louise Nevelson here. I said, Louise, you know that Joe has a lot of your things and they're in the warehouse. I remember what she said, which was, no artist is satisfied with her things sitting in the warehouse.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I called Al Lerner. And he sent up - by then there was hardly any room in the garden for a big one, but he sent up one that we had on our grand piano in the living room. But I've always felt she never really forgave us for not having one [displayed]—

NORA HALPERN: She - I mean, I think it was good of her to be very honest about it.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Of course. And I can remember when—this kind of funny feud that [Naum] Gabo and Albers had, you know. And it was funny. We had a huge Gabo—it's at the Hirshhorn; I saw it the other day.

NORA HALPERN: Yes. Beautiful.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I remember Albers coming in and saying, well, now who is that? [Laughs.] He knew right well who it was but he didn't want to—

NORA HALPERN: So he wasn't a fan of Gabo?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No. They had this funny, strange relationship.

NORA HALPERN: Yes, I remember that—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Which we were all aware of.

NORA HALPERN: —Fred Weisman was very close to Barnett Newman and also Clyfford Still. But they didn't get along very well.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I know.

NORA HALPERN: So when—he would always situate the chairs that they would sit in with their backs opposite—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's funny.

NORA HALPERN: —opposite each other's paintings.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's funny.

NORA HALPERN: So he felt that would at least make it [easier for them].

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Funny about Barnett Newman because I remember when Barnett Newman came for lunch one day. I took him through the garden—[where] we had a kidney-shaped pool. It had just been painted white, before it was filled for the summer. He looked at [the pool] and he said, oh, that's the biggest [Hans] Arp I've ever seen. I thought that was so funny.

NORA HALPERN: He was apparently a very sweet guy.

I have a whole list of artist names that I know that you know and I know that you've spent time with, so I was hoping we could go through—some [of these] great personalities from history. We talked a little bit about Louise Nevelson, but I know that you spent a lot of time with [Pablo] Picasso—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh yes, we spent a lot of time. I spent a lot of time with Picasso.

NORA HALPERN: And this would have been in the early, mid-sixties then?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: We met Picasso in—actually in '69. I've given the Hirshhorn the famous photograph of the day—Joe had a house on the Riviera since the '50s. He had bought it with his third wife. But he'd never met Picasso. Every lead that he had led to nothing. Then what happened was that we had Edward Steichen and his wife Joanna [stay with us] for a week. They had just come from Liechtenstein where he was honored. He just published the book [*Family of Man*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955], you know, the something of man—what did they call?

NORA HALPERN: [*Family of Man*.]

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It had just been published, and he was honored. They came and spent a week with us. Apparently Steichen and Picasso had been good friends since the turn of the century [when Steichen had brought a collection of Picasso drawings to the American Place Gallery owned by Alfred Stieglitz. He was anxious to meet Picasso again.] I can remember sitting on the terrace just talking with Steichen, and he said, oh, I would love to see Picasso again. He said, I haven't seen him for 60 years. [I thought, Wow, imagine being able to say you haven't seen him in 60 years!] I don't think that's funny anymore because I now run across people I haven't seen – at 86 years old!

Each time we called, I would say, "Monsieur, Madame," and "no parla," you know. Finally we gave up, and we called almost every day. And then we decided we'd go to Monte Carlo and have lunch and show them the casino. We came back and about three o'clock and our maid said, oh, Madame, Picasso called and he wants to see you tonight at five o'clock. It was almost like a command performance. [Picasso has responded to a telegraph we had sent in the morning.]

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [Joanna wrote and spoke French fluently, she composed the telegram. That's how Picasso finally did call us. So we arrived at the gate, and Joanna got out to explain who we were so that we could get in. We drove in. On subsequent visits I had to be able to do that, and it was hard because my French wasn't all that good.]

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [We drove in] and Picasso and Jacqueline come out the door as they head our car approaching. And it [was] very interesting—very tall Steichen—you know, Captain Steichen was about six feet four.

NORA HALPERN: Right. Very tall.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Had this great, big beard, very handsome, very—

NORA HALPERN: Aquiline kind of features.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [Picasso on the other hand was about five feet four. They embrace and they step back from one another. Picasso asked Steichen why he never photographed him.] I never heard what Steichen said. So on the way home I said, why didn't you photograph him, you know?

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And he said, well, I was a good friend of Gertrude Stein. And she used to tell me what a terrible person he was. And at that time, too, you must remember that Steichen was very important—like Picasso was—before he met him he could pick and choose who he wanted to photograph.

Before we left that day, pictures were taken of Joe and Picasso and Steichen, which the Hirshhorn [now] has. [There are many reasons why] those pictures are important. It made me realize how much like Picasso Joe looked. They had the same [shaped head, thick fingers, piercing eyes, same height].

NORA HALPERN: Same size, yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Same size, same, kind of, fierce look in their eyes—I mean very determined look about them. And—and almost the same shaped head. The first thing Picasso did after they embraced and spoke with Steichen, was to admire Joe's jacket and then his bow tie. Joe always wore an already-tied bow tie. He could tie a bow tie, as we did whenever we had to do a black tie thing, but it took too much time.

They were all, you know, prefabricated bow ties. And Picasso loved the bow tie and loved the blue jacket Joe had on. Joe was the kind of person, if you liked what he had on, like a tie, especially, he'd give it to you. Well, for Picasso, he took the whole jacket [and the tie] off. I have photographs of him putting the bow tie on Picasso.

NORA HALPERN: I saw that picture.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [As Picasso is] putting the jacket on, he pulls out Joe's little money clip and some money and credit cards and the whole bit. It was a wonderful evening. That was our introduction to Picasso. After that we went back time and time again.

NORA HALPERN: Now at that point he probably had already had bought some works by Picasso.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Pardon me?

NORA HALPERN: Joe Hirshhorn would've already had works by Picasso in his collection?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, yes. [This was '69.] I don't know what year he had started buying. When I met Joe he already had a sizeable collection. When I met him, which was in September of '61, he was looking forward to the Guggenheim [Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY] that was having a show of his sculpture in 1962.

And the interesting thing about that was that that's the first time the Guggenheim had shown sculpture because of the way the ramp was designed. You know it was the ramp—

NORA HALPERN: Everything was tilted.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I think they showed 450 sculptures. Each of which had to be on specially designed pedestals.

NORA HALPERN: How was Jacqueline Picasso to be with?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: She was fascinating. She and Picasso had been married then, I think, for about three or four years. I never met [François'] children because there was always a hard feeling between Picasso and [their mother], so the children weren't around that much. I never saw them while we were there. And we would see the Picassos a great deal. We'd always be invited to come [at 5 o'clock].

The fun part about it was that every time we arrived from being in the United States, we always brought a gift. Everyone would arrive with a gift for Picasso. I can remember the first time I got there and there were all sorts of flowers, and someone gave him a white dove—a real white dove that was in a cage! All sorts of gifts would arrive, you know. And on his sofa that was in the room he entertained [in, it had] a lot of books and rolled up

posters, and Gary Cooper's hat.

NORA HALPERN: Gary Cooper's hat?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Gary Cooper's hat was always on the [sofa]. [There was always a] tennis racket. You never sat on the couch [because] there was too much stuff on it. There were chairs about the room that we did use. So, talking about gifts, so what do you buy Picasso? I mean, we would think of all sorts of ideas. And I bought Jacqueline serious things. I remember once buying her—when they first came out with portable phones. So that—because she always went to the market in the morning, but [Picasso] was always anxious for her to get back. And he had to know where she was every minute of the day. So I remember that being one of our gifts. First you learn that you almost spend more time on the gift-wrapping than you do on the gift, because he never just tore a gift open.

NORA HALPERN: So the gift-wrapping was as important as the gift.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, yes, it was very important. I always chose the paper with great care and put very little Scotch tape on it because Picasso would have the piece in front of him at the table. And he'd very carefully take out his little pen knife and really clip it and [straighten out] the paper, put the gift aside, spread the paper and say, *assez, assez, très jolie*—go like this, you know, at the paper. And I can remember when that happened once. [He put aside our box and went and retrieved an identical box, a gift from someone else. It was a kinetic toy with six stainless steel balls that went back and forth.] They started the movement, you know.

NORA HALPERN: Like a perpetual motion toy.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That was what we had in this little box [that he had put aside].

NORA HALPERN: How funny.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And I thought, oh, my God. He finally opened it he said—oh, now I have two. And he puts them side by side. He said, I'm going to show you something. He left the room and he came back with a book of Picasso's [early] drawings. He turned the pages until he came to the page where he had a drawing of almost exactly the same kind of thing.

NORA HALPERN: How funny. How funny.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I'll never forget [that].

NORA HALPERN: Did he reciprocate—did he give you things?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, several times—let me finish the gift giving.

NORA HALPERN: Yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Because then I'll forget. You know, another thing we gave him was Olin Orr, an artist who solidified little paper peanut bags.

NORA HALPERN: Hmm.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And cigarette packs—the packs of Chesterfields and Lucky Strike and all those things. And we had a whole collection of all those things. Picasso used to be a heavy smoker. He never smoked [by the time] we met him. But I said to Joe, let's give him one of these cigarette [works of art]. He loved it. I remember when he opened that. We even brought him an African mask because he collected African masks.

Jacqueline and I decided to make and exchange long skirts for one another – I wore a long skirt all the time those days, all day long, it was great—easy, comfortable. And Jacqueline did too. I made one for her—mine was simple. It just had an elastic waist and nice material. She made me a two piece outfit—I have it here, actually—and it's kind of a French material with a ruffle on the bottom of the skirt—two rows of ruffles—and rick-racking, and Picasso was fascinated with it. And she made a top for it. I have a top for it. Picasso was so intrigued, he signed the tape that I had sewed on—I have a real—I mean, I have a Picasso dress.

NORA HALPERN: That's fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It's interesting about the Picasso dress because for years I've given slide talks about my life with Joe. And when I get to the part about our knowing Picasso I come to that slide and I say, well, now you know why I'm wearing this dress, you know.

NORA HALPERN: Now, when you would give these talks, who would you give them to?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, I'd give—well, my collection traveled all around the United States under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution travel service, SITES [Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service]. I would be invited to give a talk. They started just a couple of months before Joe died. But I wasn't asked to speak at the beginning. But then, when Joe died I was asked to speak, and it was the best thing for me because I went all around the country. The Hirshhorn Museum doesn't realize this; they know nothing about it. I went all around the country talking about the Hirshhorn Museum and Joe Hirshhorn—

I'd get letters saying they finally went to Washington, went to the museum. And it was good for me because it was so hard to lose a guy like Joe Hirshhorn. He was so vital and so alive, and we had a good life. You asked about what we got from Picasso.

NORA HALPERN: Yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, you know, there's a little drawing up there signed "For Olga, my friend. Picasso." Whenever books were published—and there were many.

NORA HALPERN: Yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: We'd bring them over for him to sign, but he wouldn't just sign his name; he'd draw a little picture, you know.

NORA HALPERN: Nice.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So I have a lot of those. And then one particular time—when you were with Picasso there were always other people there. And, you know, it's almost like he's holding [court], and every now he'd say, oh, let's go upstairs. And I remember once he took us to this room, about four times bigger than this room, with bins. And it was his collection.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Not his collection of his things.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: His own collection of other artists. And it was marvelous to go through and pull out wonderful masterpieces of—

NORA HALPERN: Fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —of his collection. And then once he decided to show us where he was working on his lithographs. And we'd go upstairs to a room where he's drawing. But that room is about as big as this. The other table—and it's very neat—and this is where he was doing some of the lithographs. And one day we were there—we had lunch with them there in their house. And after lunch, the Crommelynck brothers [Aldo and Piero] arrived for him to sign lithographs. 50 I think there were, actually. He never had huge editions. I remember he cleared off the table. I've seen a lot of lithographs, and I've seen the artists' names on lithographs. And what I visualized was someone putting it down in front of the artist and the artist scribbling and then someone picking it up.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: A very hastily kind of thing. Not Picasso. It was fascinating. The Crommelynck brothers set it down in front of him. And he kind of looked at it, and he really—with his hand he kind of really went over—went over the whole thing.

NORA HALPERN: Making sure he liked the print, yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Liked the print and then he signed it. It took forever.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It just took forever. It was just amazing.

And one time when we were there—you asked about gifts too—one of the Crommelynck brothers had a wife who did a lot of stitchery kind of thing. And she made sort of an hourglass pillow out of felt. Well, it was beautiful. It was all little figures and colors—and not so big. She made one for him and one for Jacqueline. And we were all standing around looking at it, and we all agreed it was just so lovely. It got to me, and I said, it's just so lovely. And she said, well, you keep; you take it. I still have it.

NORA HALPERN: That's nice.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It was [odd]

NORA HALPERN: So what would a typical evening have been?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Pardon me?

NORA HALPERN: What would a typical social evening have been at the house of Picasso?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Mostly he just drank [tea].

NORA HALPERN: Really?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He didn't drink alcohol at that point. And he didn't smoke. And they were very interesting people.

NORA HALPERN: And how was the food? Who did the cooking? Did he have—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, well, there we just had a little maybe cheese and crackers. It wasn't like a big—a lot of food kind of thing. There might be, occasionally, a little dish of nuts. But there was just alcohol. Wine, you could drink wine or have alcohol. But he didn't have any alcohol. I remember once, too, he decided—we were all standing around, sitting around—to go downstairs and look at his sculpture that he had in his basement area something that he had just completed, you know. So we'd go downstairs and look through that. I remember one time, too, he brought us where he worked on his Madura Gallery stuff.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And I—that's another thing that I learned about those reproductions and editions.

NORA HALPERN: Right, of the ceramics.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: It's easy to visualize how you do an edition of prints.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Okay. But how do you make an edition of plates? You know, especially ones that are—well, Picasso—they'd make a plate—

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —and they'd give it to Picasso and he'd paint on it. He gives it back to them, and they—the guy sits there with that plate and copies it. That's how they did it. I could never figure it out.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: They may copy four or five or 10 of—

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And they would have a limited edition of those, but Picasso has got the original.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He always had the original. I can remember we bought a lot—I still have a lot of those plates.

NORA HALPERN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] They're nice. Those plates are nice.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: They were very nice. I mean I have some that we [bought] just to give as wedding presents, you know, they're really nice.

NORA HALPERN: They're really nice. That's a nice wedding present.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, it is.

NORA HALPERN: So how long did you have the house on the Riviera—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Joe had bought it in the '50s and finally I got so that I—the Riviera began getting so

crowded. And it was impossible, if we went to Cannes, for instance, and Cap d'Antibes is very close—it's right next door to Cannes—but the traffic would be so bad it would take us over an hour to get to Cannes. And getting to Nice.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Or Monte Carlo or—we'd visit Matisse quite often, you know.

NORA HALPERN: This is Pierre Matisse, the son of—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Pierre, yes. We visited Pierre. And, oh, the traffic, it was really very bad. And then I said to Joe, well, we're spending all our summer here; why don't we go to Europe every year and just rent a place?

Because what we were doing—we had a winter house in California which we had bought.

NORA HALPERN: And that's in La Quinta.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: La Quinta. We had that. We had an apartment in New York. Joe had an office in Toronto. We stayed in a hotel when we went up to Toronto. We had the big house in Greenwich and the house on the Riviera. So we'd leave our California house, and we'd leave our Greenwich house. We'd spend the summers, you know, on the Riviera. But our Greenwich house was the perfect summerhouse, and we were never there because, you know, we were already there in the spring and fall—this great big house. And we had a tennis court and a swimming pool, and it was just wonderful. And I said to Joe if we sell the house—and the house—I never really felt the house was all that great anyway.

NORA HALPERN: The Riviera house.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, the Riviera house. We had a couple that was there all the time. And we were right on the water.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, that's nice.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, so we did have that.

NORA HALPERN: In Cap d'Antibes

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Cap d'Antibes, yes. Walking distance from that famous Hotel du Cap. So we put it on the market. And it didn't sell, and it didn't sell, didn't sell. It didn't sell for several years. And I'd originally thought we'd go back to France, but we'd rent a place. Or go to Italy and rent a place. We used to go to Saché to visit [Alexander] Calder. And Calder used to say come here. And we used to say, oh, we'll do that, which we never did because we just would get settled—we visited the Riviera after we sold it. And we always visited Picasso. David Douglas Duncan and Sheila were our good friends. And so we would visit our friends for a week or two, and that was enough. And then we would go somewhere else.

But we never actually rented a house anywhere. We couldn't sell the house. Joe was a good friend of Frank Lloyd of the Marlborough Gallery. Finally he traded the house to Frank Lloyd for seven Clyfford Still paintings.

NORA HALPERN: Fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes. And I think Joe got the better deal out of that.

NORA HALPERN: I'll say. Yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: You know.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, that's nice, you have—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But don't forget but you're talking about the—when was he did that in the [early 1970s]?

NORA HALPERN: Yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Early '70s, so I don't know how [important] Clyfford Still was then.

NORA HALPERN: Right, right. Now other artists' names that I have on my list include [Marc] Chagall.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Chagall, yes. While we were there, of course, we met Chagall and Vava, his wife. And they lived up in the hills near the—what was the name of the—I can't remember the name of that museum [Maeght Foundation, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France]. The famous—

NORA HALPERN: [Maeght Foundation].

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yeah, the [Maeght's Foundation].

OLGA HIRSHHORN: We went to the opening of that.

NORA HALPERN: Really?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, that was a wonderful opening. And Chagall had built a house very close to that.

NORA HALPERN: And what do you remember about the Maeght [Foundation] opening?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I remember lots of things about it, especially the food. And what they had done was to have persuaded all these great chefs to have come down from Paris, and each chef had a little area where he presented something special as you went around. I remember I was fascinated by one of them who made birds' nests. I mean, live, roasted bird in a nest that looked as though it was made out of potato chips or something, you know—real thing. And you were supposed to eat the whole thing. And this live, roasted little bird in there.

NORA HALPERN: I think they're called ortolan.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I guess so, something like that. And that's where I first saw a lot of Merce Cunningham. I can remember when I first saw Merce Cunningham dance I thought, oh, they made a mistake. Their sound system is off kilter—it's awful. Then I realized that that's Merce Cunningham [and later I understood what he was all about].

NORA HALPERN: Right. So it was John Cage music and Merce Cunningham dancing.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I think it was.

NORA HALPERN: And so he performed at the opening then?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I can't remember whether he actually performed at the opening, but his group performed there. I mean, that's where [I first saw his group].

NORA HALPERN: That's fantastic. Now, Giacometti was another artist that you were close to.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yeah, we saw Giacometti.

NORA HALPERN: And was it Alberto and Diego, or did you just know Alberto?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: We got to know both of them. But Alberto was the only one who ever came down to the Riviera. But when we were in Paris we would visit them in the studio that he had there. And we'd always have lunch or dinner. And the fun thing to do was to meet these artists and sit, you know, on the sidewalk and have long conversations with them. And often Man Ray would join us; Man Ray lived in the same area.

NORA HALPERN: Then they were part of the same circle.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So we would often see both at the same time. We spent a lot of time with Man Ray.

NORA HALPERN: And Juliet, is it?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [I used to see Julie long after Man died. We would discuss what would happen to that tiny house. According to Man, originally it was a carport in the alley. Gradually it grew as occupants added sides, roof and a front door. Living areas were divided with what looked like white sheets. A ladder led to a narrow balcony that ran the width of the room. It served as storage for paintings, photographs and assorted art works. Cooking utensils hung from interesting shapes in the kitchen area. Between the front door and the kitchen stood a glass fronted bookcase Man referred to as his cemetery. It held all sorts of valueless stuff picked off the streets or from souvenir shops, gifts from visitors.]

[Audio break.]

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [He had a pair of socks threaded on the divided toilet seat because the place was coal-warmed by an oil space heater.]

We always left with a present. He gave me something called *To Olga This Vertical*. It was a real, ready-made. It was a toilet paper holder, which I gave to the Corcoran [Gallery of Art].

NORA HALPERN: How nice. How was he as an American-in-Paris kind of thing? Did he still have his kind of

American-ness?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: You felt he was an American, but completely assimilated.

NORA HALPERN: Did you know Miro?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, yes, Miro. That beautiful face, you know, chubby little round little face. We only were with Miro when we were on the Riviera when we were at the Maeght Museum for all the things that [went on] there. We'd end up having dinner with him. He had such wonderful pieces there that overlooked all of Venice. They were some very big early pieces. We really just saw him—he was always one of the group. He always came to the openings—the big openings.

NORA HALPERN: And how about Georgia O'Keeffe?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh we saw a lot of Georgia O'Keeffe. Her birthday is November 15 and we would either go there or she would come here.

NORA HALPERN: And how did you first meet her?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Actually it was in the '60s—I think mid-'60s—when we were living in the desert. And as we flew into the desert to spend the winter we always spent a week in Los Angeles going to all the galleries and Joe buying like crazy. He was at the gallery—forgotten the name, I've got it written down somewhere—and Georgia O'Keeffe's *Cloud* [*Above the Clouds* series, 1962-63] picture was for sale. And Joe was seriously interested in getting the *Cloud*. He talked with the dealer about it, and then it was agreed that we would visit Georgia O'Keeffe. Joe was chairman of the board of Callahan Mining, Callahan Mining was having a meeting of all the directors at that particular time in La Quinta, where we lived. One of the directors had his own plane, who offered to fly us.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, to New Mexico.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: To New Mexico—to Abiquiu, which by plane is no distance. I eventually drove Joe out there after that. But the first time we flew in. And it was agreed—this was a little four-seater plane, but there were three of us. It was agreed that we would meet Georgia O'Keeffe at the airport—at this strip of landing in the desert very close to where she lived. She had this white Cadillac [convertible]. And so there we were [searching], looking for this white Cadillac, and finally we spotted it and landed. Georgia O'Keeffe met us and drove us from there to Abiquiu. And we had a wonderful time. [I do not think Joe bought the painting].

That started our going back on her birthday year in and year out. And the next time I drove out through—from the desert, through Yuma—it was a wonderful drive. And she gave me a painting—that one.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, beautiful.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I've told you about that painting.

NORA HALPERN: No, but tell me the story because I don't think I know the story. This is a painting of peonies, tulips—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: The interesting thing about that is that it's an original O'Keeffe frame. As a matter of fact, once I was asked to loan the frame [to an exhibition of artists' frames]. They wanted to take it out off the frame and loan the frame.

NORA HALPERN: So it's an O'Keeffe, and it's in an original frame.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I said no, I didn't want to do that. And what happened—that was when Doris Bry was on the scene.

NORA HALPERN: And who was that?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well you didn't know Doris Bry?

NORA HALPERN: No.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, Doris Bry had—

NORA HALPERN: So this painting is called *Flowers*, 1941, by Georgia O'Keeffe. [On the back it says, "Okayed by Alfred Stieglitz," which is very rare that he signed a work in such a way, and *An American Place*, the name of his gallery]. Oil on canvas, 13 and three quarters by 8 and a half—"gift of the artist" it says on the back. And it's an

image with a pink peony, white tulip, and some other white flowers. Beautiful.

NORA HALPERN: And who is Doris Bry?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Doris Bry was Georgia O'Keeffe's long-time secretary and had been with her then for many years.

[Side conversation.]

[And Doris still lives in New York and had spent a lot of time in Abiquiu or Ghost Ranch, until Juan Hamilton came onto the scene].

[END OF TRACK AAA_hirshh06_4470.]

NORA HALPERN: This is disc number four. Session two. An interview with Olga Hirshhorn at her home in Washington, D.C. on May 19, 2006 conducted by Nora Halpern on behalf of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

So we just left off on the last tape talking about Doris Bry, secretary of Georgia O'Keeffe.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So Doris Bry was a long-time secretary. And Georgia would either come here for her birthday, November 15, or we'd go there.

NORA HALPERN: To La Quinta.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No, no to where Georgia O'Keeffe lived in Abiquiu, New Mexico. So we'd fly to Albuquerque and Doris would pick us up. And we'd go through Santa Fe where we'd pick up groceries and stuff and then get out to Abiquiu or Ghost Ranch. Ghost Ranch was further on down the road. I have to guess I think maybe 15 or 20 miles down the road. We'd arrive one day, spend the next day, and go back the third day. And those were wonderful times. I had long hair those days. And Georgia O'Keeffe used to brush it and brush it and brush it and make me promised I'd brush my hair—[laughs]—100 times. I never did. I had barely time to wash it once a week.

Once when she was here, staying at the Stanhope, and we had stopped in to see her. She had to do something, and we had to go on to the Guggenheim Museum to an opening. We stopped in to see her—this was not her birthday or anything—and I had big, wonderful clip that held my hair together. And Georgia also had long hair. I said, you need a clip like mine, you know, Georgia because I put it on her hair, and she said, okay. And I said, but you have to give it back to me because I'm going to an opening. You're not going to get it back, Olga, she said, I want it—I need, I want it. So I went to the Guggenheim Museum with my long hair flowing over my shoulders. I don't know what my friends thought—[laughs]—because it was not me.

NORA HALPERN: It was not you but it must have been gorgeous.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: She would come to New York or Washington, and we'd always go to a Chinese restaurant. She loved Chinese food. And this happened for years until I remember Doris Bry calling, we were in our New York apartment, saying that Georgia wanted us to stop in to the [Stanhope Hotel] to see the work of a young sculptor she got to know out there. We go, and there's this piece that's about as big as a big pumpkin, maybe, you know. And it's round—it looked like a rock, actually. [It was a ceramic piece]. The name [of the artist] was Juan Hamilton—which meant nothing to us. Joe bought it for maybe \$300 or something like that and forgot about it. [Later Juan, at Georgia O'Keefe's suggestion, borrowed the piece back to cast it in bronze.] Then the next year when we came down to visit Georgia O'Keeffe, Doris who met us said that there's a new man - Juan has appeared on the scene and spending a lot of time. We saw what happened little by little. Juan used to pick us up at the airport, and Doris was not in evidence. But—

NORA HALPERN: So he maybe eased her out of it—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh he did ease her out of it, which was kind of sad in a way. But I did offer to testify for him on his behalf when the will was contested. And the reason I did that was that Doris Bry was very good to [O'Keefe]. There's no question about that. And she was caring. But Juan Hamilton brought a different dimension to her life.

NORA HALPERN: Yes, yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And he made her giggle. I can remember we'd be walking along as we always did after lunch or dinner in the desert, and he would say, Georgia, stand up straight, you're walking like an old lady. She was 80-something at that particular time. Or at dinner he'd say, oh, you've slopped yourself again, Georgia. Careful with your spoon, you know. And she would give—she just loved it. She loved him. And my feeling about

that was she had no children; she had sisters that she saw—and one was Mrs. Robert Young [(married to a railroad magnate)] who had a big collection of Georgia O'Keeffe's work; she lived in a [beautiful big modern house in] Palm Beach. After she died one of the many things that happened was that she has a nephew that has gone around the country now talking about Georgia O'Keeffe. He spoke in Florida a couple of years ago. And I invited him—we had lunch afterwards because it was obvious that I knew more about Georgia O'Keeffe than he did. Because we really [spent time with her].

NORA HALPERN: Now in all the years, did she ever take your picture or did she ever—I mean, because she also took beautiful photographs.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: She did, but she never had a camera in her hand that I'm aware of.

NORA HALPERN: Because with your long hair.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Doris Bry took a lot of photographs.

NORA HALPERN: Oh.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yeah, Doris Bry did take a lot of photographs, but once when we were there for dinner early, with Doris Bry, after dinner we were sitting in the living room—and everything was very sparse and simple in her house there. The dining room table was a piece of plywood that had a nice patina to it; it had been there for 30 years on horses. But you'd have homemade bread and watercresses they picked in the fields.

NORA HALPERN: And was she the cook, or did she have a cook?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No she always had a cook. But when she was young I'm sure she was a—she had her own recipes, you know.

NORA HALPERN: Oh she did.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: She had this great chicken soup. I might have the recipe for that.

NORA HALPERN: Oh I'd love the recipe for Georgia O'Keeffe's chicken soup.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yeah, but you know, it's something like 12 eggs, you know. It's almost like a custard.

NORA HALPERN: That's great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: We'd had dinner. We were sitting in the living room. And she [asked] Doris, go in and get the painting that's on my bed. Doris comes back with that painting—this painting And Georgia O'Keeffe holds it, and she said "I was thinking of giving this to Olga." So it went to Joe, and to me, and I looked at it. But she said I was thinking of giving this to Olga. So naturally I handed it back to her. I got to bed and I said, did you hear what she said—yeah. But she was thinking—she didn't say, here, Olga. Anyway, anyway—and so we were in the car the next morning; I was driving back to California—that's why I can date this. We were about to say goodbye, and I'm thinking I'm not going to get the painting. She sends her houseman back, Julio, go back and get the package that's on my bed. And so I did get it.

Now, another interesting thing about it is what it says on the back. And it says "*Flowers, 1944, by Georgia O'Keeffe, okayed by Alfred Stieglitz, The American Place,*" you know, "509 Madison Avenue." Well I had that for years and wondered about the handwriting because, knowing Georgia as well as I knew her, I can't imagine her allowing anyone to say "okayed by Alfred Stieglitz."

NORA HALPERN: Well, it's probably Stieglitz's handwriting.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: What?

NORA HALPERN: I would imagine it's Stieglitz's handwriting.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, I didn't know. I didn't know. So last year I called Doris. I said, Doris, you remember—she remembered this painting. I said, do you remember what was on the back of it. And she said no. I read it to her. She said, oh, really? She said send me a photograph of it. So I sent her a photograph of it, and then she called me back to say that's not Georgia—I always thought it was Georgia O'Keeffe's handwriting. But it wasn't. She said it's Alfred Stieglitz. And she said it's very rare because he never did this.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, that's great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Isn't that interesting?

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, that's great. OLGA HIRSHHORN: [Our times with Georgia O'Keefe involved many discussions about Joe Hirshhorn buying a group of O'Keefe paintings for the Hirshhorn Museum. O'Keefe was personally involved and was to select this group of works which would go to the museum. We would go to her storage in New York and look at work that she wanted us to consider. It was her choice. Included were pieces that were in Mrs. Robert Young's possession. Discussions went on for several years. Finally a contract was written and presented to Joe – somewhere now in the deep archives of the museum this document exists. This was in the mid-'70s. As I understand it, the Hirshhorn board refused her offer. Also, as I understand it, it was due to the contract which stated that Doris Bry was forever to be involved with the hanging of any O'Keefe exhibit. I remember Al Lerner saying that the museum could not agree to that kind of outside interference.]

So what is Doris Bry doing—what has she done since—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well Doris Bry—as you know, Juan Hamilton became the definitive source and person that knows Georgia O'Keeffe's work. I think it's Doris Bry. I think it's Doris who really understands Georgia's work. And so she's working on a book.

NORA HALPERN: Oh she is, good. That's great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Now what happened was there was a suit when she lost her job and everything. And it was agreed that they wouldn't divulge into the details of the suit. But now I think Doris Bry feels there are so many books written about Georgia. And I keep urging her to do it, because I think it would be the best book about it. Now, Juan went on. He had a wife and he built a house, had an airplane and fancy cars. He did very, very well. And I remember being at his house, seeing Georgia O'Keeffe in a rocker holding that baby—his baby in her [arms]. It was the most beautiful picture. You never thought of Georgia with a baby. So unlike her. Juan has always promised me that photograph, and I haven't ever received it. But I often talk to him about it.

But, you know, I remember going through his house and he had a [Georges] Braque watercolor that she had given him. She also had a big collection of Indian jewelry—I don't know whether he got it. She had a big library of books. He did very well by his—[how it all started] was she was in Ghost Ranch, and he [had] a job as a dishwasher in the kind of the resort that was part of Ghost Ranch—out in the middle of nowhere, mind you. She was over here in the [ranch house] maybe about a mile away or a half a mile away. He knocked on her door one day and [asked if there was anything he could do for her]. And she said no. One thing you know is that Georgia isn't someone that you knock on [her] door, you wouldn't interrupt her privacy. She said no. And then he started walking away. And then she said, just a minute; can you make a crate? She says I have to have a painting sent to [New York]. Well he never left after that it was like one thing after another.

NORA HALPERN: That's great. Now tell me about Alexander Calder.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh Alexander Calder lived in Connecticut, and we saw him—I think it was Litchfield—Litchfield or Richfield—I think it was Litchfield. And so we would go up there, visit with him there, and I can remember there he had a little, really tiny workshop that he worked [in]. I remember going in there, and it had all these little things that were put together with, you know, like elastic bands and paper clips and string, you know—[laughs]—and all that stuff—these little, tiny, like cats. And then when we started visiting him in France, we'd fly to Paris and then we'd get on a train. And we'd come down to Saché where I'd rent a car, and I would drive to [where he and Louisa] lived. We stayed at a hotel, and we were there—usually whenever we visited we always stayed three or four days. And we saw him every day for lunch and dinner; we'd take him out for lunch and dinner. The interesting thing about that is that we used to sit down and have lunch and dinner, and the French people just eat the crust of bread. But he would take out [the soft bread]—and he'd mold it and mold it. And he'd make all these little figures. And for the longest time I had these little figures.

NORA HALPERN: Made out of bread.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Out of bread.

NORA HALPERN: How fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Until they finally fell apart. We'd go to bed; he would go home and work. He would go home and produce watercolors. The next morning when we arrived and he was showing us all the stuff he had—watercolors that he had done the night before—after we left him having dinner, we went to bed, and he went to work, you know. And when they first went out to Saché, one of the things they had was a wonderful house—an old mill—built over a stream.

NORA HALPERN: Now, where was this; how far outside of Paris?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Saché.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah. Was it far from Paris?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, we had to take a train. And he's there because of Davidson. You know the artist Davidson? Who did—he was a sculptor. He was a very important sculptor, you know, at the turn of the century I guess, in the early part. He did that wonderful one of—who was that collector, the big, fat collector? Gertrude Stein. You know that famous one of Gertrude Stein?

NORA HALPERN: Yes, yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's Davidson, Jo Davidson. J-O.

NORA HALPERN: J-O Davidson.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And so Calder knew Davidson.

NORA HALPERN: And he was an American, Davidson?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I think he was. But he had two sons. One of his sons eventually married one of Calder's daughters.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes. So Calder and his wife first had a house built over a dam, this stream that they had. That proved very damp. So nearby they bought a farm, and they turned this barn—this big barn—into their house. I loved it. If I ever did a barn it would be like that because you walk in this big barn, straight ahead was the kitchen, one of those things you hang the wine bottles on with a big sort of kitchen area—fireplace and big kitchen table. To the right there was a big fireplace and chairs and stuff. And then on the right there was another fireplace. And it was wonderful. Then they actually bought a bigger piece of property more towards Jo Davidson's, and they built a house [like the old barn]. And they had a lot of big pieces of sculpture out there then. In the old house that they had, the old barn - not the mill, but the old barn—I can remember one of the outhouses—it looked like it had maybe been a chicken coop or something, cleaned out—and that's where he did his watercolors. It was his studio. He would make his little maquettes. His son-in-law would come, and he was the one who used to help him in the foundry room where they'd take a little thing and make them enormous.

NORA HALPERN: And so at that point would Sandy, the son, would have been around or?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [Sandy had no sons.]

NORA HALPERN: Yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No. They were—

NORA HALPERN: He's probably, no he's probably more my age.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: His son—his grandchildren did not live with him. But I can remember—I can't remember his wife's name [Louisa]. How awful.

NORA HALPERN: And I will have to look that up because I don't think I know.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I did know her, and she used to have a great big basket of wool. She always made hook rugs out of designs her grandchildren made.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, that's nice.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, she would make these rugs.

NORA HALPERN: From the circus video [*Calder's Circus*, 1961] it seemed that everything was a party.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, it was always a [party!]

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, that's fantastic. Now how about [Willem] de Kooning?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, de Kooning. de Kooning. de Kooning—well I don't know where to start. The first day I met him was at Mr. Hirshhorn's house. He invited [Hester] and Harold Diamond, who was a dealer and friend—and he used to sell Joe a lot of de Koonings. I couldn't come for dinner because I had to do something with one of my sons. I arrived at dessert time. Mr. Hirshhorn had left a place for me at the dining room table. I sat down, and Mr. Hirshhorn introduced me. He always said, which I could never understand, but he'd say, look at her. You wouldn't believe because I'm only five feet—I was thin those days, too. And he'd say look at her, you'd

never believe she has three sons six feet one, six feet two, you know. And I would just sort of smile, and I just felt—didn't know what to say. De Kooning says, well what's so great about having tall children? I said, I don't know. And he said, well I'll tell you something, Franz Kline and I had a pact at some time that we would forever hate tall people.

NORA HALPERN: And he's a tall person, isn't he— de Kooning?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No. de Kooning wasn't that tall. No he wasn't. [Laughs.] And we would hate tall—and I think that—it was early in our marriage. And I—I mean, I hardly knew who Franz Kline was, let alone to know that he and de Kooning hated tall people. I had heard all these stories about how when de Kooning drinks how wild and unreasonable he could become. They couldn't stop him he just kept tearing in to me because I had the nerve to have tall children.

NORA HALPERN: My goodness.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Finally it was decided they'd go into the living room and have coffee. And I said to Mr. Hirshhorn, I'll go into the library, which I did. I just left them alone, got out of the way, out of sight. I waited for about ten minutes in the library; they were all having coffee and chatting in the living room. I joined them. And by then Bill had gotten over the fact that I was mean enough to have three tall children. We began to see a lot of him. He was then building a studio out on Long Island. We'd go out to visit him regularly maybe at least once or twice a month during the summer. And Mr. Hirshhorn would buy a lot of things.

[At a board meeting, yesterday. You know, Olga [Viso] talked about the fact that they had about 87 de Koonings. He didn't buy them all at once. We saw a lot of de Kooning drawings which Mr. Hirshhorn always bought.]

NORA HALPERN: Yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And isn't it great that we had 87 de Koonings?

NORA HALPERN: Yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: While Mr. Hirshhorn and Bill would be dickering about the price of something, I'd go around the floor because he used a lot of linseed oil, or something, in his paintings. I always thought it was linseed oil because that was what I was told [and I saw all these containers of linseed oil]. See those two paintings? He would put paper toweling up against it and mop it up so it would dry quickly. He put those on the floor, on the table, and then paint over them. As you can see the ones—can't you just see the back of a woman there?

NORA HALPERN: Absolutely.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: A woman in a crouched position. They'd just leave them on the—the floor, it was covered with these [art works of] all different sizes.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I would go while he and Joe would be talking about something, I'd pick these up. Bill would say, do you want it? I'd said, oh yes. So he signed it, "to Olga, with love." I have a lot of "to Olga's, with love."

NORA HALPERN: That's nice, that's nice.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I actually have four here. These two and two up there. And I have two very important drawings here.

NORA HALPERN: Now tell me a little bit about—because there's a lot of, sort of, myth about how Joe Hirshhorn would buy art. What I have heard is that he would go into a gallery and say, okay, I'll buy everything.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Okay. A lot of that is true. But he just didn't walk in and just, oh, I'll buy that and that. He'd walk in and he'd look and he'd look and he'd look. Often went to the openings beforehand.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [Many collectors had private tours before the opening.] He'd go into a gallery, and he'd really look and look. And it's true. He'd say, well let's see, I'll take that, that, that one up there, and I'll take that, and throw that little one in for Olga—that little one in for Olga. And then he'd say—he'd quote a price.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Then he'd say, but now, I'll take that one—not that—I'll take that one. And he would drive them crazy. But he did go right through like that. And I can remember going to Paris and going into the gallery, and I think he bought everything—these little, little [four by eight inch paintings that I finally gave to the museum in Florida for them to have a sale]. But—or he'd go—he'd say, I'll take that, that, that, that, that, and end up with that. And when Joe was all through buying I would say, I'll take that little thing, how much is it?

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And then Joe would write a check, I would pay the dealer [on time]—because I was Joe's wife I had very good credit.

NORA HALPERN: Sure.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I'd pay the dealer \$100 a month. That's how my collection grew.

NORA HALPERN: So talk to me about—about your collection because I know I read somewhere that the first work of art that you bought was a Josef Albers.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's right.

NORA HALPERN: So tell me that story and why you decided that you wanted—what was it about art that made you want to—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well we'd been married about four years, and by then Joe had given me things, artists had given me things, dealers had given me things. When we were married Pierre Matisse gave us a little Giacometti—I have it upstairs. And we decided that wedding presents of art would come to me—[laughs]—because Joe had so much. That's a wedding—that was a wedding painting. But that was not from—this came from—not Ken Noland, though. Ken Noland had given it to Larry Rubin when Larry Rubin was married. And then about four years, three years later he had divorced that woman, or they were no longer married. So Larry gave it to Joe and me as a wedding present.

NORA HALPERN: Wow, it's beautiful.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [Yes, and I love it and then I found the Korean ancestor painting.]

NORA HALPERN: They're fantastic together.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, they go together.

NORA HALPERN: Oh, so we were talking about your collection.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, my collection.

NORA HALPERN: And the first work you bought was a Josef Albers

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Josef Albers—why did we get off on that?

NORA HALPERN: Because you said—you were talking about—you were given things by people, and then the things that you got through your wedding became yours.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I can remember one of the first exposures that I was to contemporary art—I can remember saying to Joe, you know, I really like that. And Joe—I learned two things about Joe: You don't call them statues; you call them sculptures.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And also, you never say you don't like anything; you say you don't understand it.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And so that [sentence] covers multitude of things. Well one of [the artists] I never understood was Josef Albers because it was just so simple. Anyone could—any child could have done that, I used to think. But I was exposed—it was four years later—and I had seen several Albers shows, and we got to see a lot of Albers. We'd drive up to—first to New Haven, when he lived in New Haven. Then they moved to [some place] called Orange, [Connecticut]. And I remember his wife saying—Josef was always so happy about being in a place they call Orange because he's about—he was a color—

NORA HALPERN: Right, he was into color!

OLGA HIRSHHORN: So finally one day I said to Mr. Hirshhorn, I'm going to buy a work of art. Joe said, don't you have enough? Haven't I given you enough? I said, no. I just never had the benefit of choice.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: All I have is what the artist gave me or what you gave me. I'm very grateful for that, but I want to use my own experience and my own money. He said, what are you going to buy? And I said, I don't know, but I'll think you'll be happy—I sort of knew. And—because we saw a lot of Albers, and I saw a lot of his things in galleries and everything, I decided I would buy an Albers. We called him up. Joe said I wanted to buy one of his paintings. And we went [to visit. Josef] and Annie were sitting upstairs. We went downstairs to his studio. He lined up these 18 by 18 squares—a whole row of them. I picked one that had sort of a yellow.

NORA HALPERN: *Homage to the Square.*

OLGA HIRSHHORN: 18-inch square. And I paid \$2,000. Took it home with me. And I can remember driving [home]. I said to Mr. Hirshhorn, you know, if anyone [had] said four years ago I predict that in four years you're going to pay \$2,000 for this I would have said, ridiculous, any child would have [done this].

NORA HALPERN: Right, right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But then I really fell in love with Albers. And I really wanted to have an Albers room because I'd go to an opening, I'd say look, all these Albers around together, just Albers. I eventually did have an Albers room in Florida before I left it because what happened was—one of our days that we were with Annie and Josef—we usually went to a German restaurant where we'd always have potato pancakes. Or he would come to our house and we would have potato pancakes. As we were driving to the restaurant Annie—and she was [complaining]—she called him Shubie [sp]—like Shubie, Shubie. She was complaining, you shouldn't let Norman Ives sell your things. And he said, oh, he's making a little extra money. Well Norman Ives was a lithographer and an artist who worked for [Albers]. I said, what's he doing? And Annie said, oh, Josef lets him run a few more [prints and sell them for very little. Annie said it is the same paper, same ink, it just was not signed.]

NORA HALPERN: Oh, wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: When I heard that and I thought, oh, that's interesting. The next day I called Norman Ives, [whose own work was in my collection].. I said, I understand you sell unsigned—I understand you are allowed to sell these—absolutely. I said, what do you get for them? Ten or 15 dollars. So I think I bought 50.

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I bought many. In Florida, after Joe died, actually, I had an Albers room. Oh it was wonderful.

NORA HALPERN: Now do you think that you chose Albers because you knew him as a person and liked him? Did you ever find or did Joe Hirshhorn—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No it was both. It was a combination of two things because I saw a lot of his work.

NORA HALPERN: Right. Would you ever let—for instance, if you had been deciding about whether or not to buy a de Kooning and he had been so unpleasant to you, would that ever have colored your wanting to own the work, do you think?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No because there were other times when—I can remember once when we were with Bill de Kooning, and we were all heading to a restaurant. And it was decided that I drive Bill. Mr. Hirshhorn and the other people went in another car. And Bill had been drinking. [He sat beside me in the front seat.] When I arrive at the restaurant—I remember—I was just trembling. And Joe said, what's wrong? I said, I've been so scared to death because Bill is so drunk I didn't know whether he was going to hit me, kiss me, or throw himself out of the car.

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's how irrational he was. But it had nothing to do with his painting.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, he was a fabulous, fabulous artist. We have half an hour left on the tapes, and I have no others after. So these are the things that I also wanted to ask you about: people like Truman Capote or Art Buchwald, people who are not necessarily artists, but who have been part of your world, who are really rich, that we should make note of.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well, Truman— Truman was a few years younger than I and was in high school and had my

teachers, among others, my husband, as a teacher.

NORA HALPERN: So he was—he grew up in your—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No,[it was the late '30s.] He spent about a year in Greenwich, and he lived in a place called Milbrook, which is a, like a housing area of just [lovely] houses and beautiful gardens and yards. It was a big area. And where I lived bordered this area. But most of the homes were built in the center of the area—now they're like built to the edge [of the development]. In the beginning there was a buffer, there was a buffer [of lovely woods and a big lake]. But that buffer was wonderful—it was our woods. And that's a whole other story.

But that's where Truman lived for about a year. And when I met him he had joined the [high school] newspaper staff. My husband was a faculty advisor. I was also editor – you know that story.

Anyway, and so every now and then my husband would invite the staff home and I've give them all a spaghetti dinner. So I got to know Truman, but those days he wore knee-highs and short pants. I remember tweed pants, and, you know, he looked adorable, I must say. But I didn't see him after that. Don't forget that was in the—that was in the, maybe, '40s. And then [I] never saw him again until many years later in the '60s. Libby Holman—the torch singer—would you have known of Libby?

NORA HALPERN: I know the name, yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: She lived in Stanford and we became very good friends. We invited her and her husband to spend a week with us in our house in the desert. And they arrived, and one of the things she said was that I'd like to see Truman. He's here [in Palm Springs]. I said, really? I'd love to see Truman. First we were invited to have cocktails and dinner in Palm Springs. He was one of the guests—we knew that. And that's when I first met him after all those years. I can remember he was at the other end of the pool, and he walked up to me and he said, oh, Olga, it's so nice—he had a little lisp—it's so nice to see you, I haven't seen you in so long.

So Libby leaves, and we now have re-met Truman. And Joe and I decided we'd invite Truman for dinner. And we were going to invite Frank Capra who lived next door.

NORA HALPERN: Fantastic director, wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Come for dinner, we're having Truman Capote. But when I called Truman, Truman said, I'm bringing a friend. It turned out to be a friend he lives with—and his name is Rod McKuen. So I said to Lou Capra [(Mrs. Capra)], who is Rod McKuen? And she said, I don't know. Well, I'll call the studio. So Frank called the studio—Rod McKuen is a poet. So they sent me—they sent Frank down loads of stuff, and they called me. Lou and I were reading Rod McKuen's poem in preparation of [his] coming for dinner. When it came it wasn't Rod McKuen, the poet, it was Rod McKuen the air condition repairman [who Truman lived with]. I found this out after reading that book, you know, on—called *Truman* by Jerry—whatever his name—[Truman would give his friends the names of interesting well known people]—Gerald [Gerald Clarke. *Capote: A Biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988.]

And I would think, oh, my God. He'd had this long time living arrangement with this guy. He just chose the name out of the hat. Well, it's so funny because maybe about a year later, Frank Capra calls to say, guess what I finally met Rod McKuen, we were on one of those late night shows together. And then—and Joe himself met Rod because Joe was on another kind of a program that Rod was on, and I met him, too. And one of the nicest things I have in my files is a birthday card I got from Rod McKuen.

NORA HALPERN: The poet, Rod McKuen.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: The poet.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Which says—it was a Valentine card. It's just a little heart. And you open it, and it says, it doesn't matter whom you love or how you love but that you love. And I thought that was so sweet.

NORA HALPERN: That's nice, that's nice.

Now, do you want to talk about your relationship with Art Buchwald?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, well, Art Buchwald I met late in life when I moved to the Vineyard 20 years ago. We both belonged to the same club. One of a social atmosphere. And Art and Mike Wallace and their wives are really very involved in the community and take part in many things that are happening. The main thing that Art does is have the Art Buchwald auction. [One] always offered something you [couldn't] buy. That's the object of the whole thing. And so I always offer a tour of my Mouse House, a tour of the Hirshhorn, go behind the

[scenes], kind of thing, and then lunch at the [Smithsonian Institution] Castle before they stopped the lunch, so I now I take them to one of my clubs. And that's where I got to see Art Buchwald. That's when, too—and his wife used to invite 10 or 12, 15 of us—three mornings a week, and we did exercises. She'd give us coffee first, we'd have exercises—Jane Fonda [on tape. Later, one morning a week we learned tap dancing.]

[Audio break.]

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And then Ann Buchwald decided we should have someone to direct it so then she always had a therapist that would come and actually see that we're stretching in the right direction.

NORA HALPERN: Do them right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: We had mats that were hanging in the garage. [At one point, Ann decided that we should learn to tap dance. She ordered shoes for everyone and hired an instructor.] It was sad when Ann died. Their marriage kind of broke up a little bit—it broke up more than just a little bit—

NORA HALPERN: Right. Now, the one artist that I didn't ask you about who I think you had a relationship with was David Smith.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, David Smith. Oh, but Larry Rivers too.

NORA HALPERN: And Larry, yeah. Tell me who—tell me some of the holes that—I mean, I made my own notes but we have about 20 minutes to go over artist stories that you think are important.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, well, I can't remember all of them. But David Smith unfortunately died too soon. David Smith had come for dinner and lunch and I have wonderful pictures of him, which I've given to the Hirshhorn—great photographs of David, one where he's washing the dirt out of a Rodin *Walking Man*.

NORA HALPERN: And are these photos that you would have taken?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: No, those photographs were taken by an Italian, Hugo Molas. These are professional. They were wonderful, wonderful photographs. I've taken a lot of photographs but not of David Smith. And I was very fond of David and I know he was fond of me, and then he died shortly after Joe and I were married. We were married in May and then he died I think the following September.

NORA HALPERN: So tell me—now, how about Henry Moore, some—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: One thing about David Smith is that my [eldest] son at one point worked during his summer college vacation—worked on the sculpture in Mr. Hirshhorn's garden. This is before we were married. And that was his summer job, where he'd wash and wax and polish. And at one point we had a David Smith sculpture called *Auburn Queen* [1959] that needed some restoration because it had [been damaged] in transit.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [The sculpture fit in the bed of our station wagon. My son John delivered it to David Smith in Bolton Landing and he mended it while John waited. He returned with it four days later.]

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —and it was a great experience for him.

NORA HALPERN: And this is the son that became a sculptor?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes, he became a sculptor.

NORA HALPERN: That's fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He [is a sculptor. I remember when he came back, he said, Mother, I had such a good time, I saw all this pile of junk that he was welding and polishing. [It was fascinating.]

NORA HALPERN: That's fantastic. Well, that's actually a question that I had. You've got a son that became a sculptor.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes.

NORA HALPERN: And you have a granddaughter who started an arts high school and now works for the National Endowment for the Arts.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes.

NORA HALPERN: And I wonder how you feel as a mom and as a grandmother, because clearly you must have some—that influence of your enthusiasm and devotion to art must have trickled down, and certainly not every kid has an opportunity to spend four days working with David Smith.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I think those grandchildren, my granddaughter, who is at the National Endowment, is the daughter of the son who is the sculptor—

NORA HALPERN: And that's Sarah Cunningham.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's Sarah, [who had been academic dean at Oxbow, an art school in Napa Valley, California. Then she traveled the country accrediting charter schools.]

NORA HALPERN: And she grew up surrounded by it—an artist's work.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: She grew up with a father who was -he taught sculpture at Skidmore—

NORA HALPERN: Yes.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —all those years. And then of course she knew how I lived—she would come and visit me. But I just feel they came by it naturally, through their own efforts.

NORA HALPERN: Right. So Chip's full name is John Cunningham.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Her name is Sarah Bainter Cunningham. Anyway. I have five grandchildren now.

NORA HALPERN: And are other of them art inclined?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [My son Denis is very creative. In his retirement he built a well-equipped woodworking shop. My other granddaughter, Jessica Cunningham, is about 26 and has just graduated with honors from Fordham Law School. She received the "Order of the Coif."]

NORA HALPERN: That's great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [My grandson Graham served in the Marines for three years and went back to college after the Marines and his brother Joseph signed up for six years in the Navy.]

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: He [has] a year and a half [more] to serve, but [he's] going back to college. It's interesting because my middle boy was not a student, was drafted and sent to Vietnam. Those days if your marks fell below a level, you were drafted. When you think about it it's kind of mean. The dumb kids fought the war and the smart kids stayed out of it. Anyway, but he went to Vietnam and was determined to go back to college after Vietnam, and did very well [doing graduate work at Yale.]

NORA HALPERN: That's great.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And so I find my two younger grandchildren doing the same thing.

NORA HALPERN: Now, you've obviously seen the art market go from the '60s—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh yes, yes.

NORA HALPERN: —when there weren't a lot of collectors, '70s, '80s and then the crazy '90s and now where we are today. And you developed quite a group of friends who are also collectors—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes.

NORA HALPERN: And I wonder if you have some sense of—I don't know, how you feel watching the sort of collecting of contemporary art go from a very small group of people who are very committed to a very unusual field—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: What I find is so interesting that—as I understand it—Joe Hirshhorn [had] the first private sculpture garden. I don't remember anyone—I don't know of anyone, private person, who had a sculpture garden and really a lot of sculpture in his garden.

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Joe started that. Now there are a lot of private sculpture gardens. There are a lot of them.

And so that's one thing that I've noticed with great pleasure. It's a whole different thing. I get the Sotheby magazines and I'm forever reading about a famous collection of someone I knew [who] lived in the desert when we went there. They had great things, you know, and, oh dear, they've both died and their collection [was auctioned off at Sotheby's.]

NORA HALPERN: And how do you feel—because this happens often: these great collections that were started in the '40s, '50s, and '60s, and then the children don't have the interest; they don't have the passion for it that their parents do, and they dissipate it and sell it off. How do you feel as a collector who chose to give it to the public?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well—Well, that—you're talking about—that [was Mr. Hirshhorn's decision. Often children have to sell because of taxes. Two of Joe Hirshhorn's children collected art.] But I've given mine, too.

NORA HALPERN: Yes you have; you've been very generous.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I've given mine, and now I'm faced with [my] collection [in Washington] because I just have a few major things in Florida. And I have a lot of major little things here, and I don't know what to do.

NORA HALPERN: We have about less than 10 minutes left. And one of the things I was wondering—if there was one thing—I mean, you had this incredible life before you met Joe, this incredibly rich life and raised great kids and grandkids. If there was one thing you wanted to be remembered for, what do you think it would be?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: All my houses.

NORA HALPERN: All of your houses. So—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I feel my real creation has been my houses that I've done with my meager background and training. I have a great house in Florida. And I love this little house. This is featured in *Architectural Digest*. And I've got two houses on Martha's Vineyard. I'm adding to one of the houses right now.

NORA HALPERN: So tell us about Sweet Spot Cottage. You went from a house that was [10,000] square feet to —

OLGA HIRSHHORN: 10,000 [to a little over 2,800].

NORA HALPERN: Ten thousand.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: From 10,000 square feet to about 2,800 square feet.

NORA HALPERN: And this is in Naples, Florida.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Naples, Florida. And I bought a house, tore it down and rebuilt it, sold my big house, moved out of the big house—all in a year and a half.

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And I had an awful lot of stuff to deal with. But it was neat because of the layout of this house, and I had to use the footprint. Turned out to be the most perfect layout imaginable. And my houses have a common denominator.

NORA HALPERN: And what are they?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: They all have oriental rugs—some good quality, some kind of funky quality, you know—but all good color. And they all have—some of them good furniture and some a mixture of things—but they all have a lot of art. [Laughs.] They all have a lot of art, especially Florida where I can't put art over the doors and—

NORA HALPERN: Right.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: —practically hanging over the—

NORA HALPERN: So you have a high—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: And it's interesting because I had called Kerry Brougner to tell him I had a Helen Lundeberg painting that I couldn't fit in my house and could he find someone who would like it. He said the Hirshhorn didn't [need] it.

NORA HALPERN: Because they had too many.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: They didn't have this one. I put it in storage. And I gave a big collection of things [at the Naples Museum]—last March they had an auction in Florida—I gave a big collection of art and silver, believe it or not. They made over [\$150,000] with it.

NORA HALPERN: Fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: But I, at the last minute, decided not to give them the Helen Ludenberg because I suddenly looked at it, and I thought, oh, maybe I have just the right spot. It needed restoring, so I had it restored. And I hung it about a month ago, and I just love it. It's in a great spot.

NORA HALPERN: Yeah, she was a brilliant, brilliant artist.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yeah, so.

NORA HALPERN: So then this—so the style of the houses on the Vineyard is a traditional cottage style?

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Well no. My—when I went to the Vineyard I was looking for—I said I'd like to redo a barn. I'd remodeled a lot for houses but never a barn. And I would like to be walking distance from the ferry, [the movie house, and Mad Martha's Ice Cream]. He said, I have one, which is a surprise to find a barn near town, you know. Actually, it was a barn that a man had built to house—he was in the tree business; he needed a barn to house all of his trucks and things. Anyway, so I looked at the barn, loved the barn, but I didn't like the house next door. And I wouldn't like the people who—[laughs]—bought the house and lived next door. So I bought both. And I had to wipe the house off the map it was so ugly. So I started on that; that took a year. I moved in. And then I started on the barn as though I was going to live in it.

NORA HALPERN: Wow.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Same thing, art—

NORA HALPERN: Did you keep sending—did you keep Alexander Calder's barn in mind as—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: [Laughs.] I did. But I couldn't do the fireplaces because of the layout of the place. I just built one fireplace. Actually, I built a fireplace in that barn—it's two fireplaces; they're back to back. Because I built—I also build big decks and the terraces, and so it has a big deck and a big fireplace on the outside so that when people come we can light a fire and sit around the fire.

NORA HALPERN: Fantastic.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I grew up as a child lighting a fire after dinner with the kids on the block and sitting and throwing potatoes in the fire and raking them out. And so having an outdoor fireplace is the nearest thing I can do to that. [Laughs.]

NORA HALPERN: Yes. That's [great].

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's a good way to end it. [Laughs.]

NORA HALPERN: Yes, it's [fantastic]. We have—I'll let it—it'll run itself out, but it may beep any second now.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Oh, no, it's okay. It's all right.

NORA HALPERN: So this has been fantastic, Olga. We could be talking for four more hours.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: I know.

NORA HALPERN: It's an incredible—

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Yes.

NORA HALPERN: The first half of your life was incredibly rich, and that was even before you had art in it.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: That's right. That's right. It is.

NORA HALPERN: So it's really a fantastic story.

OLGA HIRSHHORN: Combination of two things. So we're all set.

NORA HALPERN: We are. So let me turn this off.

[END OF TRACK AAA_hirshh06_4471.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]