



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with William Ronald,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with William Ronald on April 18, and June 2, 1963. The interview took place in New York City, NY and was conducted by Richard Brown Baker for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

Tape #1. Side 1: April 18, 1963. Side 1 is taped in Mr. Baker's apartment in New York City.

Side 2: June 2, 1963

Richard Brown: This is Richard Brown Baker, April 19, 1963. I'm just going to talk to the Canadian-born American painter William Ronald. Bill, in 1957 in The New Yorker Robert Coates classifying you offhandedly, as he said, as an abstract expressionist wrote, "Ronald differs from the majority of the American exponents of the style in that his interest in design clearly comes first and is usually anchored firmly to the subject matter while the color is generally secondary, an adjunct rather than a compositional element in itself." That's the end of what Coates said. In the same year in the May issue of Arts a different reviewer commenting on that same first New York show of yours declared, "The strength of his abstractions in oil lies primarily in his sense of color. The forms themselves however lack similar authoritativeness." Now it's rather obvious that these two gentlemen didn't see your work in quite the same way and if you can go back to '57 when you had that first show -

William Ronald: Was that my first show?

RB: In New York I think it was, yes. Would you care to comment on the two observations?

WR: Well, it may come as a surprised to some people, but I think that Coates has been more helpful to me as a critic than anybody else so far. I find very few critics of any assistance at all. It's simply a method of publicizing us.

RB: You told me once you almost never read criticism.

WR: No, I do read my own criticism but I don't read much other criticism. I don't subscribe to any magazines or anything of that nature. I do have some art magazines at home, they're usually three or four years old before I get around to reading them. I like looking at the pictures because I'm primarily a visual person. As far as what Coates said about my show in '57 and about the color being secondary - is that what he said? -

RB: Yes.

WR: I think that when I lived in New York it was possible that was true because there's something about New York that makes a painter, at least it did at that time anyway, work sort of with black and white. There's something black and white about New York. Now that I live in the country I use black very rarely. But part of that is a conscious thing too. I got to the point where I thought black was becoming a crutch. And now I say I use it very rarely. But I do believe what Coates said was true because when I came to New York in 1954 or '55 I thought I was really something because in Canada I had sort of a name and was considered a radical. Here I found there were about 10,000 other painters like me. I was sort of painting in the all-over manner, using the full area of the canvas for my composition in a rather fragmented way, rather like Tomlin perhaps, and it struck me that I had to arrive at something else.

RB: You refer to Tomlin. This was an influence before you got here you mean?

WR: Well, I was here in '52.

RB: And he was still living, wasn't he?

WR: Yes. I think he died the first year I moved here.

RB: You saw his show and so on?

WR: I don't think I ever did see a show of his. I saw reproductions and then I did see, I think, the one in the Museum of Modern Art at one time or other.

RB: I'm catching you up on this because I'm surprised; I don't really see the relation between your painting and Tomlin's.

WR: Not now. You haven't seen the canvases that I did. Some day I'll show them to you. There are only six or eight.

RB: These were done before the show, were they not?

WR: Yes, yes. Then I felt that in order to really have anything of any validity of my own I just had to force myself to come up with some-thing that was more individual, I suppose. And it was then that I first started to do the central image pictures that you know of.

RB: Well, the central image pictures were certainly the ones in the first two shows perhaps at Kootz. I don't know, but certainly the show which Coates was writing about and this other man, were central image pictures.

WR: And that's how that came about; that's all. Now as far as the other critic is concerned, I don't know; I think color is one of my strong points.

RB: Well, that's what the other man said, that your strength was primarily in the sense of color. Quite the opposite.

WR: Not in that show. I wouldn't agree. It's hard to say - I don't know.

RB: Well, I'm not so interested in that particular show but it's just to begin our conversation. You were brought on the New York scene as what was generally considered an abstract expressionist.

WR: Well, I never considered myself an abstract expressionist. I don't quite know what that is.

RB: It's a difficult term but in the year 1957 that was the dominant mood of painting. Almost every abstract painter became, for the general phraseology, an abstract expressionist.

You object to the term?

WR: Well, I don't object; I don't care. But look at what you really call abstract expressionism. Not the leaders necessarily but the people that followed. I've got maybe one or two pictures that I would be able to classify as abstract expressionism. Perhaps they should be called "action painting" because there was movement in the paint quality. But I always think of abstract expressionism more or less as de Kooning. He's the man that sort of made it popular, I think. It's a fragmented manner of painting and breaking up of space usually using the whole canvas... that is, working out to the four sides like Pollock worked out to the four sides, you see. But I never did. I always had a focal point and a solid, or more or less solid, almost flat image to begin with, and then there was some movement in the paint. I don't deny the influence because, goodness knows, I was definitely influenced by them and respected them a great deal and still do. But I just don't feel that it was.

RB: Well, I would say that you are confining the phrase too narrowly when you say primarily de Kooning or exclusively de Kooning. Certainly Mark Rothko and other painters who have denied they're abstract expressionists are quite right to do so.

WR: Oh, definitely.

RB: They are not in the least expressionists.

WR: Yes.

RB: But what I always felt at that time anyway that (the phrase "abstract expressionist" meant a non-objective painting) no specific subject matter but painted with a kind of vigor and emotional intensity that related to expressionism in the sense that the Germans are known as expressionists. And therefore I would think that the paintings you showed in that exhibit in 1957 came within the phrase "abstract expressionism."

WR: Well now, we won't talk about this too long because I think you can get caught up in this sort of thing, but you use the term "non-objective" and "abstract expressionism" and all these terms. This is the irony of the whole term "abstract expressionism." You see, to me abstraction is when you start with a three-dimensional object and then work from it. I think that's the dictionary meaning. You work with forms and shapes and tensions that are created by the three-dimensional object such as a bottle or a figure or something of that nature in that space. Now de Kooning with the figure did do that. Therefore, that could be called abstraction and expressionism

together, but then when he moved into the non-objective, if his were indeed non-objective - they may be considered landscapes, some day, you know. In fact more and more I can see the landscape painter. But - what was I going to say? - gosh sakes, where was I?

RB: Well, you were attempting to analyze abstraction.

WR: Oh, yes. Then you mentioned "non-objective." Well, you see, mine were non-objective and expressionistic so maybe they should have been called "non-objective expressionism." Because there's a difference. But anyway, I'd rather not go into that any further. With regard to the other critic about color, when I was in college I had difficulty drawing in black and white. I used to like to draw in three colors just from the marble busts we used to have to draw from. I would draw in three colors, so I sort of do see things in color and I think color is one of my strong points.

RB: Well, I think that this point we might go into the history of your life more or less chronologically.

WR: Okay.

RB: I like to ask painters when I talk to them to say their name in case they have had other names. Would you just pronounce it?

WR: William Ronald.

RB: Bill, I have the impression that this is a name that is only part of your actual name.

WR: Well, why don't we start - do you want to start there? Or do you want to start where I was born and lead up to that?

RB: Well, may I ask the name of your father then?

WR: My father's name is Stanley Smith.

RB: What's your mother's maiden name?

WR: Her maiden name now has been anglicized. It's Plant and I found out by looking through an old family bible that it was actually La Plante so that she was French on that side. And then I checked that out and found out that the other side was also French, it had been anglicized to Morrison and it was, I think, Moriset or something. So that I'm half French and half English. My father was born in England.

RB: What part of England?

WR: Liverpool I think.

RB: And did he emigrate to Canada as a boy with his parents?

WR: Yes, with his parents.

RB: What was your grandfather's name?

WR: William Smith. And he was a blacksmith which I think is sort of related. And my other grandfather was a carpenter, which is sort of - all this didn't strike me until about a year ago that they both did things that were kind of related to the arts.

RB: Was this a family tradition among the Smiths, do you think?

WR: I don't know. I do know that my uncle, my father's youngest brother was quite good at cartooning and my own father was very good at black and white sketches and precision sort of things, like schooners and that sort of thing. And then his sister, my aunt Gladys, was a professional -

RB: Gladys Smith?

WR: well, it's Gladys de Laine now. She was a professional musician. On my mother's side they're all real characters, extroverted people and they were all amateur musicians.

RB: I think of actual interest though is to find out what people connected with the fine arts there might be in the ancestry of a painter. When you spoke of your father being very competent at sketching I gather that he did this as a hobby.

WR: That's right. And then he used to be a draftsman and more or less still is. He's called a layout man in an

aircraft plant.

RB: Your grandfather was a blacksmith and I think it will be simpler for me if we go back to that point. Your grandfather came to Canada. Was he living during your childhood?

WR: Oh, yes.

RB: What was he doing then? Retired?

WR: No; he could have retired but he worked. He died at a fairly early age, I mean sixty-nine but he was a very powerfully-built man.

RB: He was working as a blacksmith?

WR: But not a great deal. He owned property by this time and all that sort of thing and he did it just the way Hofman still paints, you know. He liked to live in a very small village in Northern Ontario and he also had always a couple of race horses as a hobby. And this leads into something else. My grandfather used to send us copies of a magazine called The Ring, which is still in existence, it's a magazine about boxing. And in this magazine were pencil sketches of boxers and I used to copy these drawings at a very early age. So this led to two things. It sort of started me drawing, although I probably would have anyway, and then also a very strange - well, it seems sort of strong now - interest in boxing which I can't shake. I have a thorough knowledge of the history of the sport and it really almost makes me sick and yet I know so much about it now that I'm fascinated and very much interested in the sport.

RB: Very interesting. You said you did the copying of these drawings at a very early age. How early?

WR: Seven or eight. And I did it continuously. And then at the age of eleven I decided to be an artist.

RB: Well, we are getting a little ahead. Just while we're on this though, when you said you copied these, did you do it very freely? Or did you do it very precisely?

WR: Probably. Academic. I tried to copy them as closely to the way the other artist did them as I could.

RB: Was it because you were interested in boxing mostly that you did it?

WR: No, I don't think so. I must have been interested in drawing because I have no recollection of reading the magazine at that time. No, the sketches must have interested me.

RB: Your father was brought up in Northern Ontario?

WR: North west sort of. It was a little village called Drayton, Ontario.

RB: And he took up what sort of career initially as a young man?

WR: He at a very early age went to the western part of Canada which was very popular for people to do at that time, and around sixteen or something sort of left school. And he did very well in school I understand too.

RB: He was a bright pupil but was not scholastically inclined?

WR: Well, he was, but things were so different then and people maybe weren't as interested in education. I think he went to about grade ten, which was probably a fairly decent education for somebody living in a village of about 400 people in Northern Ontario. But now I would say my father has the education of a man certainly at least with a B.A. which isn't anything - what we call a B.A. in Canada. He's very good at mathematics, he reads a great deal. But I don't really know what he did out West. Probably farmed or something. And then he came back and he was married around the age of twenty-six in 1924. They had a child that died. And then I was born in 1926. Those were fairly good times. I was born in Stratford, Ontario, on August 13, 1926. We lived there I think about a year. And then we moved around quite a bit; I don't remember but I think we lived in the city of Guelph.

RB: What was your father doing at the time of the war?

WR: I think he was working in a factory - no, he may have been a salesman at that point. He was young and I guess he was sort of jumping around.

RB: During your conscious period of childhood what was your father's circumstance?

WR: Well, let me do it this way: in 1926 I was born and we lived in Stratford, moved to Guelph, then we moved

to the village of Fergus. Now this maybe was an unfortunate move in some ways. This village was more or less, as far as I can remember, owned and controlled by one family, one of those things; about three thousand people, which was comparatively large -

RB: A factory village?

WR: Yes. Called Beatty's; and they made washing machines and so on. As I look back it was really a fairly happy childhood. We had some difficult times during the Depression as many people did have. Now my father's interests, as it turned out, really was in market gardening and flowers, horticulture and that sort of thing. That's what he really wanted to do. Well then the Depression came along. He was working in this factory and he was sort of an individualist, too, I guess and he didn't like something and he said something to the foreman and they fired him. And this was the beginning of many bad years for our family. Because to be fired during the Depression in that town was like the end of your life sort of.

RB: No alternative openings at all?

WR: None. And then my mother's health got very bad and I think that was probably mostly just nerves or whatever they call it, you know just general worry and so on. We always had a decent place to live. My grandfather owned houses and that sort of thing.

RB: Your father's father?

WR: Yes. My father's father. He lived in a town about 25 miles away, a village called Drayton.

RB: And you stayed after your father lost this job - you stayed there?

WR: We stayed. There was no place to go. In the Depression you didn't go anywhere. It's all you can do to get down the street. And then he somehow started up, built a greenhouse of his own. And we had sort of a living until about 1939 this way. He was very good at it but he always needed a few thousand dollars to get really started at it, and he never could get it. My grandfather could have given it to him and never would. It was sort of a strange thing. And so those years were pretty grim in a way. My mother's health was bad and we were pretty badly off, as many people were expect for the people that were with this Beatty concern. It was a very interesting village. It was a Scotch village and we had an awful lot of activity, when I look back, a tremendous amount of community spirit, which is very popular these days but I don't think so in those days. We had a lot of different sports and athletics and I played just about everything, including cricket and soccer and games you hardly hear of down there. That was good. And it was not too bad except I wouldn't want to re-live it. I went to public school in this town, and we left there when the second World War started. My father the got a job in an aircraft plant in Malton in 1939 and we moved to the village of Brampton.

RB: What do you remember of that first childhood home in the way of art? What sort of visual impressions did you have indoors in influences in your earliest life?

WR: In that respect really nothing. There were a few sketches my father did of schooners and ships, The Bluenose, do you remember Lipton's -

RB: You mean the Cup defender?

WR: Yes. Things like that. But then perhaps other things, such as the flowers, you know, the garden. We had fantastic flowers, beautiful flowers. And then I think the problems, the emotional problems that we had because of not having enough money probably helped, you see, in a sense. I mean years later they bothered me, of course, but in a sense I think that the general instability of things was good.

RB: Of course, being an artist you probably were a very sensitive individual. Did you feel inferior in your station, shall we say, in your clothing and other aspects of living than the average boy and girl that you were playing with at school?

WR: Well, would you say that I dress in a rather individual way?

RB: I would agree, yes.

WR: And I dress well and I'm interested in clothes and deigns of clothes, I'm interested in the design of everything and I'm interested in textures and color and everything even to clothes. And this was brought about by my mother because we always - and this will sound corny - but we always did look very well, I must say. This was always instilled in me. I mean most painters today really don't dress too well. But in the twenties in Duchamp's time... and look at Picasso today. He'll still put on the most terrific pair of slacks or shirt or something from Spain. They used to dress very well.

RB: Well, there's no dandyism particularly in the tradition of the New York School.

WR: No. They look more like Madison Avenue to me. They even cut their hair that way. But anyway, my mother really did instill this. She sewed and we always looked very well. I didn't feel much of this inferiority. I felt inferior in another way. I had sort of two lives because I was a small kid, physically small until I was about thirteen or fourteen, and then I grew ten inches in about a year and four months and I was suddenly bigger than most other kids. So I was sort of kicked around physically for the first thirteen years and then suddenly other kids were afraid of me. This was a strange thing. This was from my father's side. Then I grew after I was twenty-six, which is also directly in keeping with one uncle who did exactly the same thing. It's just a weird sidelight but it is interesting to know the two different sides of the human contact, you know. Because there is a difference between being small and being big. And I was really self-conscious about being small. I was about four feet ten and the other kids always seemed to be about four or five inches taller.

RB: Well, you were interested in boxing and you have a lot of aggressive temperament so I gather that you might have got into a lot of fights when you were pretty small and got beaten up?

WR: Well, I was careful. You see if you're a good boxer you don't get hit too often. But, boy, there were some fights in that town. I've often thought if the village of Fergus was suddenly dropped in the

middle of New York City today we'd be on the front page of the Daily News all the time. We didn't kill anybody, we didn't have knives or anything like that but we used to have fights with the rocks, you know.

RB: In gangs, you mean?

WR: In gangs. And it was all good fun, you see, and somebody always went home with a bloody head and I thought this was just par for the course. We'd climb trees and attack the other group. We had a ball. And thank God we weren't living here because people get so shook up over these things today. But we didn't use any switchblades or this type of thing, you see. And although our economic status was not the highest in that town we were all very much integrated. One of the Beatty boys I remember we used to play with.

RB: The factory owner's children, you mean?

WR: Yes. We moved to the town of Brampton where there was much more class distinction and we were then I guess what would be considered middle class income people. There was much more class distinction there than there was in this village of Fergus. It was a much healthier scene when I really look back on it.

RB: Fergus was not racially mixed, was it? No Negroes?

WR: There are very few Negroes in Canada anyway that I was ever aware of. If we ever saw a Negro we really thought it was something. I mean we rarely saw a Negro. There was, to my recollection, one Jew in Fergus and he had a store and he seemed to be accepted, but I don't know, I really don't know. It was predominantly Scotch and the Scotch are just about as weird as any race you can ever get. And you know I have since realized that the predominant accent - certainly in Ontario - is Scotch. That's what our accent seems to be; we say "oot" and "aboot" and clip our words.

RB: Well, I gathered earlier though that you were English rather than Scotch. So you were then slightly different in background composition.

WR: Well, I say Scotch because it just seemed that way. There are an awful lot of English in Canada too, in that area.

RB: I would have thought your mother would have been rather upset over all these fights when the budget was low and replacing torn garments -

WR: I took very good care of myself and I didn't get hit very much. I was so small that probably they wouldn't me as often, you see. There would be certain families and they constantly fought and the word would get around town that there was going to be a fight and the two guys would plan the fight for hours ahead and then maybe 20 or 30 kids would gather and we'd get in a ring - isn't this strange when you think of it? - we'd get in a ring around these two guys who would be about fourteen, and they would beat one another to a bloody pulp and all the time we'd be standing there screaming "Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight!" And then the whole thing would be over. Most of the fighting was done by the bigger boys. I left there at the age of eleven so I really didn't get involved in that. And to my knowledge none of these kids ended up in any trouble of any kind. Which is not true of the kids I later met in Brampton.

RB: What sort of a school was there?

WR: We had one public school and a Catholic school. And the public school - now that I have a child of my own I

can see was a very good school. And I was a very good student. I skipped grades and I got honors and all that stuff. I got along very well.

RB: Were you very quick at learning to read?

WR: I had no trouble in public school whatsoever. I was a very good student all the way through. I didn't have any trouble with anything except art until I was eleven.

RB: What art instruction did you receive in public school?

WR: You know, the old type of public school art education where they would have you draw a pear and draw a leaf and that sort of thing.

RB: Was this part of the regular curriculum that all students had?

WR: Right.

RB: Did you have a woman teacher who specialized in teaching art?

WR: I had a woman teacher and I think she's still alive. No, she taught everything.

RB: She was your regular grade teacher?

WR: It happened that she was. As a matter of fact, I guess that's the way it was set up, although I do have a feeling that maybe she taught art to other students too. But in grade seven she was my teacher and also my art teacher. Her name was Miss Stait and I think she's still alive. Myrtle Stait. And at that time there were two other guys in school, Bruno Parasoto, I remember, an Italian, and Jim Milligan, an Irishman.

RB: Well, not so purely Scotch.

WR: I know. But I'll bet they have Scotch accents by now. But they were very good at art. And I at that age decided that I wanted to be -

RB: I thought you said earlier that you wanted to become an artist when you were eleven.

WR: Yes. When I was eleven.

RB: But I presume you had instruction at the age of six, seven, eight, and so on.

WR: Oh, yes. The same kind. By the other grade teachers.

RB: Oh. Miss Stait came later?

WR: Yes. But I think she must have had some importance because she stands out in my mind and I don't know why. She seemed a little strict at the time but I think she was fine.

RB: What did you she have you do?

WR: As I say, just very dry, dull things.

RB: Still lifes. You used crayons and things like that?

WR: That's right. And I didn't show any promise until the eighth grade. Then I moved from a mark of 20 out of 100 to about the second top mark in the whole school.

RB: Have you more than one brother?

WR: No, I don't have.

RB: How much younger is he than you?

WR: He was born in 1933. He's seven years younger.

RB: He wouldn't figure very much in your life in Fergus then?

WR: Oh, a little; a little. My sister and I had a very close relationship.

RB: How old was she at that time?

WR: She is three years younger than I.

RB: So there were three children.

WR: Yes, and we had a lot of fun.

RB: Your mother's background you said was French but I didn't quite clarify in my mind whether her family had been in Canada for some generations.

WR: I gather they probably had. I must find out. I'd be interested to find out.

RB: Did you know her parents?

WR: I knew her father; her mother died, I was one or two years old.

RB: But your grandfather was named --?

WR: Walter Plant, or La Plante. He was a carpenter.

RB: In what town was he?

WR: Oh, more or less the same area, little villages called Drayton, Moorefield, Arthur, Fergus, all around this little area. And I found out - I must go into this more fully - my mother was born in a log cabin.

RB: Was she really?

WR: Yes. And you see it's unbelievable even now, you get one hundred miles from Toronto and it's amazing how much more rugged it is than the so-called farms of New Jersey it's just -

RB: Well, what does the word "rugged" refer to? - the weather or the landscape?

WR: The weather, the landscape; and I think the people are more rugged. They look more rugged. Of course, I've only seen northeastern United States people. But I think Canadians sort of look more rugged. I may be wrong.

RB: Well, I think country people from small towns are apt to be more physically robust; they have more physical endeavors to perform in their daily lives.

WR: And in a large city, even a city like Toronto which is large for Canada, perhaps almost two million people by now, you can distinguish between a farmer and a city person. Whereas I can't here hardly. I live in a little village called Kingston in New Jersey and the so-called farmers come into the stores and they drive big station wagons and they were denim - jeans - and so does another artist out there I don't know, there's no particular costume, there's no accent really. The farmers up there have a definite way of talking.

RB: You were then living as a child in a really rural environment quite remote in its probable daily contacts from urban centers.

WR: Yes.

RB: -- whereas anyone in this New Jersey area near Princeton and New York City and so on are part of a metropolitan complex.

WR: But even twenty-five miles from Toronto in Brampton, which is a little more cosmopolitan, you can still see these farmers. And Saturday night is a big night and they all come into town and stand around on the street corners and it's pretty spooky. It's spooky for a lot of reasons. Drinking laws and all this sort of thing I think make it kind of spooky. We didn't even have any night clubs in Toronto until eight or nine years ago. And I don't drink. This is perhaps why. Everybody asks me why I don't drink. I don't really know why. I had an uncle that died of alcoholism at the age of thirty-two. I was very fond of him. My mother's brother. But really what I think it is now - when I was up in Canada on a recent visit - you see, they have what they call beverage rooms up there, men's beverage rooms and ladies' beverage rooms.

RB: That's a wonderful phrase.

WR: And they're horrible. They're like washrooms with beer, you know. And if you're not with a lady then you have to go to the men's beverage room, and it's not so nice. But if you're with a lady you can go to the women's, which is a little posh. Then they used to have - maybe still have - a twelve o'clock curfew. And so at twelve o'clock everybody loads up and drinks, you see. And so the whole idea of drinking in Canada is to get drunk. I had never seen people drink the way they drink in New York. Some people drink to get drunk here but most

people drink just the way they take a cigarette, you know. And some people can drink a lot of liquor but I rarely see people walking along the street the way you do in those towns up there; and cities. And up there not too long ago, for instance, I saw a young man about twenty-two, well-dressed and so on, on a Friday or Saturday night - it's the big night - and white shirt, I remember, and all this; and there he was on the sort of Fifth Avenue of Toronto completely plastered, stoned, as they say, out cold on the sidewalk, being sick, and his two friends trying to drag him into the car. And this was a very common sight. This is the way always I was brought up - this is the way drinking was.

RB: You saw intoxication.

WR: Of course, I'm perhaps more hypersensitive to everything around me. And then too a number of my friends were killed in car accidents right around this town of Brampton. Because Brampton is what they call "dry." This means they have no liquor so they go to this little hotel six miles away and they drink up all they can before midnight, and then they come roaring home in their cars. And four or five of them have been killed and a couple of them crippled because of this nonsense. I think this is why I don't drink.

RB: Why do you think this happens so much there? Boredom?

WR: No, I think it's because of the ridiculous drinking laws. You see until a few years ago - and we still have them - our liquor stores looked like hospitals. They're government-owned. And you have to have a permit to buy liquor.

RB: But that whole idea is to try and restrict liquor consumption.

WR: It just does the opposite.

RB: Yes, but it must have started at a time when there was too much drinking.

WR: Probably - maybe too much Presbyterianism or something of that nature, too, you see. I doubt that Canadians drank any more than anybody else.

RB: Well, northern climate people drink more heavily usually.

WR: I don't get the feeling they actually drink any more heavily than a New Yorker, maybe not as heavy, except that they don't know how to drink.

RB: Can you remember any specific instances in your childhood in Fergus that you can present dramatically of your recollection of intoxication?

WR: Yes, and not in my own family because we never had any liquor. My uncle was - you see it was a definite sickness and he wasn't - I didn't regard him like these other people somehow. No, I never saw him like this. The time that I really got close to him was near the end of his life when he was really ill. But I do remember living in Fergus there was a village called Elora three miles away. And Fergus again was dry. And so they would have to go to Elora to get their beer. It was the same thing, people getting killed in their cars. The father of a young friend of mine was killed I remember, a horrible story. And this Elora in my mind was like a monster, you know, this is where everybody went to get this strange business, whatever it was that made them a certain way. So I grew up with this, and not from my parents really putting it down that much. My parents were strict with me until I was about sixteen or fifteen and then I had complete freedom; maybe more freedom than I even give my own child now. But they were very strict with me until that time.

RB: What form of strictness was it?

WR: Well, I had to be home at a certain time. And I was home at that time. If I didn't do what I was told I would be whipped.

RB: Who whipped you?

WR: My father. And this didn't do any good I'll tell you.

RB: Did this create antagonism?

WR: I think so.

RB: -- of a fairly permanent nature I mean?

WR: I shouldn't be saying these things. I hope it's never printed. No, we discussed this, to put it mildly, with my father. You see I think that my father was so upset about, you know, the Depression and all these times, and

then my mother's illness, the whole thing. When I look back I can see why he was -

RB: His temper was ruffled in general.

WR: That's right. And he was just in such a state that -

RB: You may have been rather a difficult child?

WR: No. I was not. I could not have been better. No, really, I was not. And I had such a sense of doing only the right always that I - and I think I still have such a guilt complex, you know, from trying to live up to this that it's horrible. But I don't believe in whippings. I've never touched my child, never shall. Because when I was sixteen and got bigger he tried it and one good swing or push and he was on the other side of the room. So that was the last time that ever happened I'm sorry to say. And yet, I have a great relationship with my father and a very close relationship with both my father and my mother. And they have never ever given me any opposition in what I chose to do. They thought I was going to be an illustrator, you see, not a painter. And they stood behind me one hundred percent always and helped me when I was going to college with money they didn't really have. They were great to me.

RB: Did either your mother or father teach you any particular thing as child?

WR: Yes. My father used to help me with my homework. And he was a perfectionist and when we would study notes, for instance, like geography notes, history notes, I would memorize every word including the "ands" the "thes," the "to's" prepositions, everything, I knew every single word. I had a terrific memory which is part of being a painter, you know. This probably has helped me a great deal because powers of observation are very, very important. It was one of the few good courses we had in the college I later went to.

RB: Could you go into that a little more fully? I mean there are several varieties of memory. Memory for words and phrases and powers of observation I don't think are identical.

WR: I have a fantastic memory in almost every way I can think of. I can remember dates, dates of death, of birth, all sorts of dates and I can remember things past. I have a great memory.

RB: You remember numbers? Do you remember people's names?

WR: I can remember people's names if I want to, yes. You know, you meet so many people now. At an opening or something you meet a great many but that isn't really meeting people. But I do make a habit of - I always ask them their name twice and then I'll remember it if I'm interested.

RB: Do you remember, for instance, books well that you read?

WR: Yes. This is going to be a joke later on because sure as heck something else is going to come up in this conversation and I'm going to say "I don't remember."

RB: But tell me more fully why that is helpful for a painter? I can see great powers of observation being very useful for an artist.

WR: Right. Memory of past experiences could be very helpful, you see.

RB: That is true, but now suppose you had been brought up as a child continuously visiting the Louvre or the National Gallery with your parents and your memory of hundreds of paintings was always with you. Might not that in some sense handicap your --?

WR: Then it would be very handy because it would be a good reminder of what to forget. At any rate, I don't think it's bad. No. if you were mentally ill or something I suppose this could even cause emotional instability, which later I did develop.

RB: Well, I presume that you are well able to remember injustices, slights, and rudenesses among other things?

WR: Yes.

RB: Well, this has nothing to do with powers of memory so that might be a matter of temperament.

WR: Do you mean professional rudeness?

RB: No, say, for instance, if some little boy at the age of ten was terribly mean to you do you still remember it -

WR: I have just maybe half a dozen little things like that that I can still remember. I have a memory of

something I did once. It's a very good memory to have, in a way.

RB: Well, I have the view that memory is selective. Now I don't have total recall. I don't have anywhere near as good a memory as you probably have.

WR: Well, I think that you're very clever if you have a selective memory. I think it's in many ways much healthier.

RB: I think all memories are selective though. Even yours would be. That's what I was trying to find out a little more fully what sort of things you recall. The kinds of things about people or facts -

WR: It varies with the people.

RB: It does vary greatly. Now I for instance have a very bad memory for numbers. You apparently have a good memory for numbers.

WR: I was very good at mathematics, too, you see. And as far as numbers - you mean dates and so on?

RB: Dates, telephone numbers, that sort of thing.

WR: Yes. I can do that. I categorize it in my mind. First of all my father being English and my mother of French descent - and they definitely are very French, my mother's side, they're real extroverted, nervous kind of shook up group but in a very constructive way - and then my father's side was very disciplined. And he being very strong in mathematics and so on, I think it was a very good combination, you see. Because I did have a sense of organization and yet I had enough emotional instability that I could express myself. And that's a happy combination. Many artists in all fields have the ability to express themselves but lack control. That is, not in their work necessarily but just in many things that can harm your work, can take from your work. And I think it's more or less lucky combination... I guess it was instilled in me when my father helped me with my homework. He was such a perfectionist with me. He was never like this with the other children. I don't know why. Maybe he just got tired of it. I don't know how he had the patience to do what he did with me. But it used to almost drive me insane I know that. And my uncle lived with us for a while, the older uncle that is now dead. My father's brother. And he was much more of a perfectionist than my father. I have some very bad memories of him. Just, you know, like continuously making me shut doors and all this sort of thing. But I'm making it sound like I had an unhappy childhood. And I didn't. I really had a very happy childhood when I look back.

RB: Well, all children should be disciplined to some extent.

WR: Yes. Well, I think I was a little - of course, we were living in a rough town, I guess. I didn't realize it at the time. They would say, "Be home at eight o'clock." And I'd be home at eight o'clock. That's all. And other kids wouldn't. I guess I respected them.

RB: What sort of reading did you do in those early years?

WR: Oh, I read - the most outstanding book I can remember - I don't even remember who wrote it - was called The Taken Child. A novel about a young boy, he was an orphan. And about his trials and tribulations. And it was kind of a shaker. And then I read pretty much all the other things - Tom Sawyer. I didn't read such things as Winnie the Pooh, though, until I was about twenty-five. I guess that was too sophisticated for the Fergus area. I read a fair amount, but not a great deal. My father reads a great deal.

RB: You didn't sit at home all afternoon reading?

WR: No, I mostly drew.

RB: You did a lot of sketching and drawing?

WR: Yes. Now this is not in keeping with many artists. They don't start until late. Pianists seem to start at the age of three or five but painters don't always. In fact I think I'm actually almost an exception. I don't know if you've found that, Dick, but that's sort of the way I have found it. But at the age of eleven I wanted to be either a priest, a lawyer, a pilot, or an artist.

RB: What was your family's religious affiliation?

WR: We were Protestants; Christian that means I guess. And we went to all sorts of churches. We went to Presbyterian church. I went to a church called in Canada the United Church. Now I forget what that is. But it's Presbyterian -

RB: Your parents were quite religious?

WR: No, not really. They didn't go to church.

RB: Did they send you to Sunday School?

WR: Right. I went to Sunday School. And then I went to what we call the Anglican Church; you call it the Episcopalian church. And then a gang of us used to go to a home, a very beautiful home of a man. He had an organization called the Plymouth Brethren. And this was a riotous place. And to this Plymouth Brethren organization used to go kids from the upper echelon of society right down to the bottom. We were all in the same gang, as I said before.

RB: now are we still in Fergus?

WR: In Fergus. And it was really most interesting. He was not like an evangelist and he was not a fool. He was sort of an executive at Beatty's and this was kind of a hobby with him I guess. Maybe that's not right. But he was a character. He had this mansion actually. And every Sunday morning - he was in the same neighborhood as we were at one point - he would stick his head out an upstairs window and sing hymns to the people. My God, it is weird when I think of it!

RB: You mean they'd gather round to hear him?

WR: No, he'd just stick his bald head out and sing. I don't think he was nuts. He was a character. He was English. Well, he might have been nuts - no. then at two o'clock in the afternoon he would have these Sunday School classes so he wouldn't conflict with regular Sunday School classes. And all the people that let their children go were from all different classes, as I say, and nobody objected. And they always used to give us great candy and so on. I remember we used to love that. I remember one of the greatest lessons - I don't know what it means exactly - but he had this large tin, like a coffee tin or something, with a lid on it. And he said that anyone of us could have it if we wanted it. Nobody would take it. I don't know what it really means. But then some kid did take it and inside was a large red apple. I don't know what it means but it seemed very significant.

RB: You were all suspicious in the beginning?

WR: Yes. Basically. I remember some good things about this man. His name was Mr. Gurley. The names in this town were great. All the kids had funny names. We had nicknames like mad.

RB: Had you a nickname?

WR: No. they just called me Will. All my very close friends up there do. And I find that certain types of people call me that. Even here.

RB: Will? Not Willie?

WR: No, not Willie. Will. And I didn't have a nickname. And it was also in Fergus that I started to play hockey, which I like very much.

RB: Was this sort of informally after school?

WR: No, we did play on a team but I didn't have enough money to buy skates so it was a problem. But later when I moved to Brampton I played organized hockey and was very good at it.

RB: What position did you play?

WR: I played goal. I stopped playing hockey when I was about to get into, I guess, maybe the juvenile league, and then you go to the junior league, and then you go to the professional league if you've got it. I stopped at that point because it was during World War II, and they would check out every other row of lights in the arena. And I was playing goal, which is a rather rough position, and this puck, which is black, maybe would be elevated by the opposing player to, say, a height of six or eight feet, and it would disappear from your line of vision, and maybe it would hit you on the head. I got cut a couple of times and decided to quit. And they weren't looking after us, you see. People make remarks about these Little League baseball teams, the way people push them too much, parents, you know; there is such a thing as parents because so caught up in it. They want their kids to be big athletes and so on. But, on the other hand, I like contact sports very much. I think it's good for you. And also I think it's good to make sure that the adults do look after the kids. Because I had one very bad cut over my right eye. It required a lot of stitches and I still have a scar. And I remember somebody drove me to the hospital and I lay there for two hours with this very large gash over my eye and without a doctor attending me. And my poor mother! - I remember my pads arriving home, and then my skates came home, and then my stick came home; and then I came home. But that's why I quit.

RB: At what age did you quit?

WR: At about fifteen.

RB: Oh, you were really quite young then when you were playing it?

WR: Yes, but you see that's not young. I mean fifteen in Canada you learn to skate and do all these things. This is our sport, you see. Today a hockey player is finished usually at the age of thirty. So fifteen is the beginning of your career kind of. At seventeen or eighteen you can be with what they call the junior league which is the next step to the professionals.

RB: Had you ambitions to be a sort of national hero?

WR: I thought of it - no, not a national hero but - oh, maybe I did. We did live with a man who was a professional hockey player by the name of Buckle McDonald. And he was very good in his day.

RB: He was in Brampton?

WR: Fergus still. And it was very impressive - I remember it was during the Depression and he was playing with the Detroit Red Wings. And I remember the first year he was with them he sent his mother one hundred dollars for Christmas. And, my golly, that was like ten thousand today. But later when I got a little older and started to think about what I wanted to do, by this time I had been drawing a great deal at home, and I really stopped to look at things. I'm much more analytical maybe than many painters; maybe more mercenary, too. But out of necessity perhaps. The money that was paid to hockey players, it just seemed to me that it wasn't all worth it, you see. Top money at the time was about \$12,000 a year. And then you're finished at the age of thirty, thirty-one, or thirty-two.

RB: It wasn't a real career to satisfy you?

WR: No.

RB: Before we move out of Fergus to Brampton - did you live in one house all the time in Fergus?

WR: No, we lived in - I can remember - one, two, three, four, five - five houses.

RB: Five different houses! What occasioned the changes?

WR: I don't know.

RB: Did they upset you?

WR: Yes, the moves upset me. I can remember six, seven houses no. yes. I have no idea why we moved so many times.

RB: Did they go downhill --?

WR: No. they were all nice houses.

RB: I take it they were rented homes?

WR: Yes. One house we lived in was my grandfather's house, my father's father's house. And we should have actually stayed in that house. But there was always a problem with my grandmother. She was a sort of difficult person. Miserable is the word. Always very kind to me. She picked me as a favorite, which always made me kind of sheepish. She would give me things; and treat me to things.

RB: Did she spoil you?

WR: Yes. But even at a very early age I didn't like it, because I could see she wasn't doing it with other people. But anyway, I don't want to get into that. I don't really know why we moved so much. I know we moved out of that house because of disagreement with my grandfather. And we moved perhaps to another place when my brother was born. And that was not a satisfactory place, I remember that. It could have just been the bad times and everything, I don't know. It was rough then. If you didn't have any money problems it's hard to understand. The rent I remember was \$27 a month or something which when you're making 25 cents a week is more than you can pay. But we always seemed to live - you see it was a nice village. I don't recall any bad sections. And the Beatty people I mentioned in many ways were good people, too. I remember one of them, Bill Beatty, I think, used to come to the lacrosse games, which is another sport in Canada, a very rough sport. It was started by the Indians. But we played it indoors and it's just the crudest sport you can imagine. And he would come quite frequently to the games. And all the kids, again from all classes and walks of life in Fergus, would be standing outside the door, about twenty or thirty of us, and Beatty would put down three or four dollars and we would all

get in. he'd pay our way in. of course, he owned the rink. He owned the team. But he still did do this thing, you know. But it wasn't a healthy situation.

RB: You didn't feel any kind of social inferiority to the Beattys?

WR: Oh, no, because everybody was doing it.

RB: In other words, they were sort of grand duke of the neighborhood?

WR: Well, they were. But I didn't have this sense, you see. I mean I was just too young. But, as I say, in Brampton later I was much more aware of it and the people weren't nearly as well off.

RB: Well, we're about to end this tape so I'll wait till the next one to ask what the circumstances leading to your departure to Brampton -

[END OF SIDE 1]

SIDE 2 June 2, 1963

RB: This is Richard Brown Baker, June 2, 1963. On the previous reel I was talking to William Ronald in my apartment in New York. At the present time I'm in his studio in Kingston, New Jersey. How long have you lived in Kingston? What year did you come here?

WR: The latter part of 1957.

RB: Well, I thought, Bill, although I want to go on back to talking about your youth that we have an up to the minute talk for a bit. You mentioned that you were in a sort of transitional state in the interim, you'd just been in a kind of tension and you'd been working in a slightly new angle. And since we are at the moment now why don't you tell me a little about what you've been doing and the state of your mind and activity and the tendencies you see at the moment for yourself in this recent period.

WR: Well, I'm doing some figurative painting at this point. I'm superimposing figures or torsos, female nudes over the abstract backgrounds, backgrounds similar to my most recent pictures.

RB: Bill, let me interrupt here. I want to bring out more fully that this is a considerable change of approach to you. We, of course have only been discussing your boyhood so it hasn't come out in the discussion, but all your painting career, at least publicly known painting career, has been abstract with various different things. And I think I've seen very little of your work involving the figure. So I'd like you to tell if you know at the moment what makes you feel that you want to work on the figure. You mentioned to me yesterday that you're not using life models, that you're using photographs as the basis for these figures. I thought it would be interesting at this initial stage before you've really developed this approach more fully to hear what you're thinking about it now.

WR: Yes, that would be interesting because I really don't know how far I will go with it. Well, I really started to work conscientiously on this about three years ago. I just started with sketches, pencil sketches. And then I did a few tiny oils that didn't satisfy me because I thought they were too expressionistic. I didn't want that. I wanted something flatter. And these earliest figures I just drew from memory, you see. And then somebody left a group of these pinup type magazines like Playboy and - better than that - the ones that sort of imitate Playboy are even better as far as material for this sort of thing. And I took some of these and I cut off various limbs and the heads and so on and I found that some of the most ordinary pinup poses would turn into very interesting poses. And then I arranged some of these things in little collages on eight by ten colored paper.

RB: When were you arranging them on collages? This winter? Or earlier?

WR: Oh, no, I think a little earlier than that. It was about a year or a year and a half ago, I guess. Yes, about a year and a half ago because this friend left the magazines at that time. And I've been doing it over this past year and a half. Well then, I did that last painting called *Ginza* with the -

RB: Well, by 'last painting' let's go into it a little more fully.

WR: Well, the last painting for my show.

RB: The show you're referring to took place in 1963 in January?

WR: That's right. In New York.

RB: And that painting would have been done here in this studio last summer perhaps?

WR: About last autumn, yes.

RB: And that has no figure in it at all?

WR: No figure. It's built up on a three by four grid sort of thing. It has nine panels in it, each section is eighteen by twenty-four, and each one is sort of a different little abstract painting.

RB: Immediately prior to that you had been considerably simplifying your painting so that none of the ones of a month or two prior to that have been as complex.

WR: Well, what happened was that *Ginza* was about the end of that series, almost the end. And by the time I arrived at *Ginza* I had painted about forty-three pictures.

RB: These have been called somewhat hard-edge painting? You don't like that term but that has been applied to them, hasn't it?

WR: Yes, that's right. And so the beginning ones of this series were extremely simple in palette, like one color and black-and-white - I guess they call that two colors. Well then, the way I arrived at *Ginza* I did a number of 18 x 24 and 16 x 20 canvases that were very simple, like the early big ones. And they were lying on the floor of the studio here drying and they just haphazardly got shoved together. I thought it looked sort of interesting and so that that's how I arrived at *Ginza*, you see.

RB: You put them temporarily together? You liked the effect and then you took a larger canvas?

WR: That's right. I planned it then.

RB: In effect you copied certain of these smaller things but rearranged the whole thing to make a very effective and very handsome painting. If I'm not mistaken that painting has been acquired by a Canadian museum?

WR: The Art Gallery of Toronto. A novelist friend of mine tells me *Ginza's* the name of the main street of Tokyo. And he named it.

RB: I think at the time I saw it here last autumn it had not got a name.

WR: Well, then I did a picture, a painting very similar to that, but a horizontal picture; about 50 x 85 for James Michener. He had acquired a large number of paintings in the last two or three years. And the house that he built for himself years ago really wasn't built to accommodate the paintings. It's more for books and so on. The ceilings aren't that high, you see. And so he just had this particular space. It was quite long, I don't know, almost eight feet but only fifty inches high or something. So he commissioned me, more or less, to do sort of a mural, you might say, but on canvas - a painting similar to *Ginza* if I felt like it. And I did it. And I think it's just as good as *Ginza*. And maybe better.

RB: I haven't seen this painting. But you told me last night it is presently taking part in some international exhibition.

WR: That's right. It's going to be at the Tate Gallery in London, they say.

RB: in 1963 will it be? This year?

WR: I don't know.

RB: Anyway, I gather it's one of your more - at least your dealer probably thinks it's one of your better paintings? Or some critic chose it?

WR: Alfred Barr I believe, and a couple of other people I don't know. But I did two or three pictures for Michener. This one and I did a couple of others. The second one I did I think I called Epic. And instead of having twelve rectangular little canvases drawn on it, as the Michener pictures had, which I called Akira, it had only six. In other words, the rectangles were twice as big. And then I superimposed a large sort of floating abstract image on top of all these. I really think it's a very interesting one. And this is really the one that kind of was the key to doing the present torsal pictures, you see. Because I found this big image worked on top of all these brilliantly colored, brilliantly painted rectangles.

RB: The painting that I once saw here in the studio and that Michener was attracted by - you had this abstract image in paper -

WR: That's right. That's right.

RB: It was a kind of cutout which you were holding up and we discussed it before he came here and you held it up and we were all interested in it. It lay across some of the squares, did it, in that painting?

WR: That's very true. I forgot about that.

RB: Well, what you're saying now, is that you are now substituting the female nude torso in the same relation to these rectangles for what was at that stage a cutout device, I don't know what you'd call that shape.

WR: It's almost a pattern. Yes. And you know I did another painting besides that. I'd forgotten but I did do a third one. I forgot that you had seen that one. And also that's the picture that Michener did see. Then I did another one. I can't remember what I called that one. It's just a little broader in feeling but is the same idea as Epic. And it worked also. So then I spent the next two or three months -

RB: What months were these?

WR: Well, this was January, February, March, April, May, good heavens! All those months. After doing fifty pictures in twelve months - now this just shows you what happens. People say, "How long does it take you to do a painting?" I did fifty paintings in a year - large ones and small ones. That's not counting watercolors or these metal things I work on, metal relief things with the sculpt metal. And then from January until June I think I've done six paintings. But January, February and March were pretty well taken up with an opening in New York and then one in Princeton which required a certain amount of preparation - that little retrospective they had for me at the museum there.

RB: Princeton University.

WR: Yes. And then my show in Canada which took a great deal of time and took a great deal out of me. It's taken me all this time just to get back at it. Now these two figurative paintings that are almost -

RB: Could I interrupt you here. I hate to do it but I think it's very interesting in view of your kind of work, which changes so frequently, this kind of state you might be said to get into where after this very prodigious amount of work in one style, this simplified style where you produce fifty paintings in a year you've come to a kind of period of constipation, I take it? You just felt you'd exhausted the possibilities of that particular approach? Or what would you imagine is turning you against that particular style?

WR: I don't really know. I doubt that I probably have exhausted all the possibilities. I just happen to be that kind of a personality, I guess. I seem to get bored after - well, fifty paintings is an awful lot of painting, you see.

RB: And emotional exhaustion perhaps accompanies this output?

WR: Yes, I was exhausted. And then my trip to Canada really put the finishing touches on it. These trips to Canada always do. I got involved in a great deal of publicity and up there they make a big thing of personality kind of publicity with painters, you see. Similar to the kind of thing they give to actors here. They don't give it to all the painters, but I'm one of the painters who has made some kind of an international mark, I guess. And I'm outspoken. And so this time this young dealer, Isaacs - we've been friends for years - had this exhibition at a great deal of expense to him and I said I would do anything that he lined up for me in the way of publicity. And I sure learned a lot. And a lot of things I won't do again. For instance, the newspapers send around what they call public relations - no, I don't know what they call them exactly. But they're not art critics. Or they're not art people at all. They're just interested in what you had for breakfast and all that kind of stuff.

RB: Writers of feature Sunday supplement kind of articles.

WR: Well, it was not exactly that - it was like an entertainment page. I was on the same page as Tallulah Bankhead and Danny Kaye. Nothing wrong with Tallulah Bankhead and Danny Kaye but it seems a funny place for a painter. And then one left out a few words on a couple of quotes and this started one of the other papers off on a completely different tangent. And then a lady wrote a very stupid piece about me. She'd never met me, to my knowledge - certainly she'd never interviewed me. It was a Dorothy Kilgallen type of thing, you see. This sort of thing people say you're not supposed to pay any attention to but it does upset me. I don't like it. You know, they called me a fraud and all these different implications. And I did some radio and television. I don't mind that so much because at least it's you. You're responsible for what you're saying. Or you're supposed to be. And unless they cut the tape if you say something wrong that's your own fault. I'm willing to stand on that. But the newspaper thing I don't like at all. And this all upset me and threw me off stride, I guess. So it took me about - good heavens - I came back from Canada about March 28th and as I recall I don't think I even stretched a canvas until April 28th. Every day I would come in here and try to get going and I just couldn't.

RB: You didn't even do watercolors? You didn't do work in sculpture?

WR: Yes, I did do watercolors, but I couldn't get working in metal. I did a great number of them and then I just got so sick of doing the watercolors, you see.

RB: Well, it sounds from the way you're now speaking that you weren't so much diverted from your former line by having used it up as you were by being sort of emotionally upset by the kind of publicity you received in Canada combined with having worked so hard, and so on. Anyway you came to a dead stop, I gather?

WR: Yes.

RB: And now you picked up in a slightly different direction.

WR: Yes. That's right. Well, I'm telling you all this other stuff which seems kind of extraneous, I suppose -

RB: No, this helps to give an understanding of what happens to a person.

WR: Yes. The Canadian trip in my mind, you see, has left a very bad taste in my mouth I guess. But actually it was a very good trip. It's funny how these bad things outweigh all the good things. And many good things happened. For instance, Dr. Wacks, a new young collector up there was extremely kind to me and threw a wonderful party. I mention this because this had never been done with me before up there. He had a great number of people.

RB: Was this in Toronto?

WR: Yes. Wacks has a very nice collection. And they are very nice people. And the next day they invited my wife and my child and myself down for a very quiet day to get out of the mess. And then another couple, a lady who had been taking photographs of me had a big party for me. And I discovered a whole group in Toronto that did not exist eight years ago, that is, people who were with it, you know - the same kind of people I know in New York and Princeton. And then as far as sales go I had the biggest sale I've ever had in Canada. So you see really it was a most successful trip.

RB: We mentioned earlier that *Ginza* was sold to the Museum. This was not your first sale of a painting to a Canadian museum?

WR: No, the interesting thing is that the Art Gallery of Toronto - they call their museums 'galleries' - that was the first museum to purchase me anywhere.

RB: When was that?

WR: About 1954. Martin Baldwin was responsible for this. It was an action painting and I think one of the best I ever did. It was called *In Dawn the Heart*. I remember, I think, I got \$650 for it. I was living in New York by myself. Helen was still in Canada and I needed \$600 to put up a bond for Helen.

RB: To enter this country?

WR: That's right. And I had six dollars left when I got the letter and a check for \$650. I went out and spent the six dollars on an LP record because, as you know, I play music all the time. So I spent my last six dollars in New York on a Duke Ellington record and sent \$600 to Helen and kept \$50. She came down in about ten days.

RB: You're very grateful to this man at the Museum, I can well believe.

WR: Well, yes. Baldwin wasn't too hip on this type of painting, you know. It was interesting how he got interested in mine. He had been an architect. He's a fine man. He could see a certain amount of construction or something, some kind of grid thing. Well, when he first came upon my work it was rather like, as I said before, Tomlin. Little calligraphic things. But they were built up on grids if you look behind the calligraphy. And he got interested in analyzing the different periods or different stages that the painting went through, you see. He could sort of look at it and see all these things. And I think it fascinated him. So I believe that my painting *In Dawn the Heart* was about the first, certainly one of the first major in size non-objective paintings that the Museum purchased, if I'm not mistaken. Now they have a number. Mr. Baldwin has since been retired which is ridiculous and unfortunate because he's just at his peak and it just seems so silly. There's a very nice young fellow who has taken his place, but it's just a shame that Baldwin has been relieved of his duties at this point.

RB: So *Ginza* was purchased through the initiative of a different director?

WR: Yes. The Director they have now is William Withrow, a very nice young man. They have three oils now of mine. They have another one done around 1959 or 1960 Baldwin chose that one, I believe. But Withrow and the committee chose *Ginza*.

RB: So in effect the exhibit this year in Canada was a success.

WR: In almost every way really. And even from the standpoint of the publicity most other people, I mean my friends thought it went very well. But it's different when it's happening to you, you know. If you read these nonsensical - you see, they asked me a question something to the effect, "do you think non-objective painting is the only painting making a statement in today's world?" or something to that effect. And I said, no, I didn't think it was because I think you'd be a fool to say such a thing, you see. I can't remember now the details but they left out two or three words in that question. And it turned out that it sounded like - and this is the irony of the whole thing - it sounded like I was going back on my whole career, my whole way of thinking in saying that non-objective painting wasn't really any good or, you know, this was the implication. And then this conservative newspaper took up that stand and implied that I was painting to fashion. That was another thing they did. What really then got me was that the art critic of this particular paper, who I have no use for, Paul Duval, I'll use his name, as a critic I have no use for him. But then he even took up this woman's comments and used them in his column, you see. And this woman hadn't even interviewed me - she just lifted this business from another interview. Not it all sounds like a lot of nonsense. But it's really ridiculous to think they'd do this to a painter. It's ridiculous to do it to anybody. I don't know how these other people ever stand it, really and truly. But a painter who makes so little money - actors at least are making money - to have to go through this! And then my parents have to go through it, you know. They're very ordinary, pleasant people. They live in this little town and they've had to get an unlisted phone because they get idiots phoning them. My mother has a heart condition and it's not funny that these people do this. They get dirty looks on the street because of comments I've made on television and radio that are just the kinds of comments that can be made down here in the States, at least in the northeastern states, without people getting shook up. Why they get so upset, I don't know.

RB: Could you give an example of a statement that you made publicly on Canadian radio or television that produced unfavorable responses?

WR: Yes. Well, I think the worst was I was in the studio of A. Y. Jackson who is one of the original Group of Seven landscape painters, with Harold Towne. And Riopelle was supposed to be there. Harold Towne is a Canadian painter also. And Riopelle was supposed to be there and the three of us were going to do this show. They were originally going to do it remote with Riopelle from Paris, Towne from Toronto, and me from Kingston, New Jersey. It was to be about three Canadian painters making a living each in a different country, you see. Well then, Riopelle happened to be in New York so he said that he would come to Toronto. Apparently, Riopelle is a very good-natured, normal guy but he has one eccentricity at least, and that is he breaks appointments. His Canadian dealer had warned us a month ahead of time that he would break this appointment. And at midnight that night I was already in Toronto and we got a telegram from Riopelle saying that he had just left for Paris. So they had to get a replacement. Well, they got as a replacement a very academic painter that really had no right being on this program, you see. Because they had sent me a questionnaire and an outline of the whole thing. And I thought about it and it didn't pertain to this other painter at all. Well, this infuriated me, but I had to go on with the thing anyway; it would have been kind of bad to walk out on the show at that point. Well then, they filmed this television show. And the difference between film and tape, as I understand it, is in film they can edit, they can change it around. In tape they can only edit tape, they can cut it out, but they can't change the - what would you say? - the stage of the procedure, the continuity. But they can with film, they can juggle it all over the place. Well, they filmed an hour. It was a half-hour show. And they told us to just relax and say anything we wanted to say. I've done a great deal of radio and some television, and I know enough not to use profanity and so on. But they were saying, come on, let's really wing it, and if you use any profane words we'll cut them out. So on a couple of occasions I did, not real bad ones, and then I said also that it's time we stood up in this country and said that we all stink a little bit - and I used the word "stink" - because we're anti-British, we're anti-American, we're anti-everything - this is paraphrasing it - and we don't really have any identity and we're provincial. This is more or less it. But they left all of it in. they left in a few little profanity things. Then also I saw the film after and at one point they had me laughing at something Towne had said, when actually I did not laugh at what he said at all there. He had made a joke about my clothes and I laughed at myself. But they had him saying something else and me laughing at him. Which in effect is doing the same thing a newspaper can do to you, you see. They can change the whole look of the thing. Well, this got a great deal of play. And a man wrote an article. A seven-page article, seven full pages for seven days against abstraction and all this. And I was one of the people they chose to attack. But that seems to be the image they have of me now. A kind of angry young man, that sort of jazz you know.

RB: So that despite the success artistically and commercially of the show, you returned here in a bad frame of mind, not happy about having been in Canada again.

WR: Yes.

RB: And now let's get back to this and as it has affected what the present situation in your painting is. As you were saying, you decided to use figure as reflected, as coming out of sort of Playboy-type magazines and putting these as inserts - overlays?

WR: A kind of collage.

RB: Fixing them in to compositions consisting of, in many cases, rectangles. And you've just done two paintings of this so far?

WR: Right. And I have the idea for two more at this point. I've just been questioning whether I should go on with it.

RB: Why do you question it?

WR: Well, when you hit on something or start something like this - well, it is so new and it contradicts everything I had more or less been taught to believe, you know, in classic relationships and all that especially in the way I'm treating the figure - giving it sort of a semi-form, almost molding it a little bit. And then there is on the first painting the possibility, I suppose, that it could be referred to as Pop art. And I don't particularly care for that to happen. Not that I'm against the Pop artists. I get a kick out of them.

RB: What you, I think, are afraid of at the moment is being characterized as a follower -

WR: Yes.

RB: -- or somebody who's trying to get in on the band wagon sort of think?

WR: Yes. Which is the very thing, you see, they said about me in Canada. But they said this sort of thing about me and about all of us. The ridiculous thing about a remark like that, just to go back for a second, is they imply, these people, frequently that a bunch of people, dealers or somebody sit in a smoke-filled room on Madison Avenue, because that's the phrase they always use, and think up what we're going to paint this year. They really do. If I had the article here I could read it to you. And they imply that these people, five or six of the top people, sit there and they think: well, this year we'll paint balloons or something and that's going to be it. Well, you and I know that this is complete nonsense. But the fact that they said that I was part of, that I was following or something, and the fact that I'm doing this and things like Pop art, I'm not concerned about that. Because I could not be a follower and be with a gallery like the Kootz Gallery for six years. I don't say I'm any Pollock, you know, I'm not at that point yet. But I'm not a follower. I know my work has an individuality, a personality of its own, as has many of the other young, good painters around. I am very self-critical of my work anyway at all times. And what is most upsetting about it is that I've been working on this idea for about three years. In fact three years ago I had an idea to use blowups of photographs, actual photographs, make them part of the painting somehow. But I couldn't figure out the way, technical way of doing it. I thought of Photostats and so on, then they'd be on paper, you see. And I thought, well, that's no good. Then I thought maybe I could have them printed on cloth. And then I thought maybe the ink would fade. And so I had this idea but I just was not ready to do it until now. That's all it amounts to. And it just happens that these other people have come along. But I am sticking just to the nude and there's not any of the Pop art philosophy in my work that I feel at all. It's fairly classical the only thing that would be close to it, I guess, is the fact that it's a torso. But not any of those people are using the full torso either, I guess.

RB: So far you have only done two large paintings involving the figure. Let us just define what these two paintings have in the way of a figure. Because six months from now it's quite possible that you will develop this into a way we don't foresee at all. What you've done in one painting, the one that you were working on yesterday, is to have two nude torsos, and they're not distorted bodies, they're more or less lusciously portrayed in outline but with suggestions of - shadow?

WR: Yes. And form.

RB: And one is yellow and the other is a bright green.

WR: Brilliant green, yes.

RB: And in the other painting one presently is gray and the other is - well,

WR: Flesh color. That's the first one. I think the second one is much more interesting. And maybe if I continue this the color of the nudes is the thing that's going to be fascinating. This idea of working with yellow and green nudes. And maybe two-toned nudes and so on. I tried that and it's most interesting. And they don't look the least bit lugubrious to me. They don't to you either?

RB: Well, they're not bodies distorted and made hideous or anything. They're - well, you said they come out of girlie magazines sort of thing.

WR: Yes. Well, I don't get them all there but this is where I got the idea. You see the first part of drawing these things comes in selecting a pose. What I want to do now is get a couple of good cameras. And I wish I could print

my own photos. I'd like to take my own photos and make my own poses because this, if I really get involved in this, should be really all me, you see.

RB: Oh, I think a visit to your studio will be fascinating when you're photographing the nude ladies in green and yellow all around the room.

WR: Yes. But then really the first and most important part of the whole thing after you have the photograph is then to dissect what you don't want, you see, and you cut off the arms or whatever. This is really the key to whatever is going to happen next.

RB: Let's see, has the flesh-colored nude got a head in that first painting?

WR: No.

RB: They're all headless? Is that correct?

WR: That's right.

RB: Well, the green nude has only a portion of the body visible anyway partly concealed by the yellow nude. -

WR: Yes. The yellow nude is a sort of standing figure but the arms aren't there nor the head. It sounds awful.

RB: You told me, Bill, that you used photographs to help get this flat effect.

WR: Yes. Well, you see I did study figurative painting for about three or four years, a very strenuous course, a very good course really in a way - not really very good actually. But let's see, as I recall, of the five days a week, we went evenings, too, it was a very long course, but I had about four periods, a morning and an afternoon twice a week of figure drawing. Then we had a costume drawing period. And then we had two full days, as I recall, or something like that, of figure painting. And this I had for about three years. And when I paint from life I get so much - color is one of my big features, I think, and I get so much color in my work, you see, so much suggestion of so many colors when you look at the flesh of the figure right under lights, that it gives me more form than I want at this point. And so the photographs tend to flatten out. Photography tends to flatten things out - and especially if they're not great photographs. And this is even better for what I want. Then they exaggerate the shadows and this is another thing I want. So this is why I'm using them. Even if I get to the point where I'll take my own photographs I'd prefer to do that at this point than draw from life. I get a completely different feeling when I draw from life. I'm much looser when I draw from life. I can't draw in this manner when I draw from life. I can draw much tighter when I'm copying from a photograph, you see. I guess that's normal. When I draw from the figure I get carried away with the character of the line or the different characteristics of the model, or the mood of the room, or whatever it is. But here it's a much colder and more calculated thing. And I want it to be that way. And this is the only way I can seem to discipline myself. And also I like to flatten this and make exaggerated shadows.

RB: In the last couple of years, I don't know just how far back - critical opponents of abstract expressionism have been predicting the return of the figure. Last year, I think it was, the Museum of Modern Art had a show of figurative modern paintings. It was pretty well panned. It wasn't a very good show.

WR: "Images of Man," you mean?

RB: No, "New Images of Man" was a show several years before. But this was a show to which artists weren't invited directly. They had to submit paintings. And it dealt with the figure. You may not have seen it.

WR: No, I did not.

RB: What I want to bring out is all this hoopla of critical comment in which certain elements who have never been very sympathetic to abstract expressionism have been predicting the return to the figure. You have never yourself been moved by this? You perhaps even have been ignoring this kind of discussion.

WR: I've never even heard of it.

RB: Your return to the figure isn't really a return to the figure in that sense?

WR: That's right.

RB: The figure in these paintings is really subordinate to the overall composition, is it not?

WR: Yes.

RB: The composition in a great many of these rectangles relates to your painting of last year.

WR: Yes.

RB: -- which was hard edge.

WR: As a matter of fact, when I first started the one painting, the first figurative painting, the figures I just laid in flat colors and they would have worked just as shapes, almost without any detail of figures. In the "New Images of Man" show it seemed to me a great deal of that painting, the figurative painting grew out of abstract expressionism. I mean it was very expressionistic, wouldn't you say? I mean it looked like they couldn't have done a great deal of that painting without the abstract expressionists. It was just kind of a little bit to one side of abstract expressionism.

RB: I would agree with you that the more interesting artists in the last six or eight years have used the figure. And I would include somebody like Richard Diebenkorn of California.

WR: Nathan Oliveira.

RB: They are definitely influenced by abstraction.

WR: Yes.

RB: That's what makes their work interesting to me. If they simply painted figurative paintings as of 1910 I don't think their work would be very interesting. However, the trouble is not enough of these figurative painters have originated something sufficiently novel or original.

WR: Yes. I think that this other was too close to the abstract expressionist movement.

RB: But I just want to bring out here that as of your thinking today you are not contemplating figurative painting as such?

WR: No. in fact, even if I do a whole exhibition of this I don't see at this point that it will last any longer than any of my other phases or periods. It's quite possible after thirty or forty of these pictures, if I could do that many, that I'd move right back into complete non-objectivity again. I mean I hope I can go on like this forever. I've always called myself a creative artist which is a very pompous thing to say but by that I really mean a painter who is interested in exploring new things all the time instead of just taking one area and refining it forever. Dizzy Gillespie, the jazz musician once said that he didn't own one record that he had ever made. Because once he'd played it he'd had it, you see. He didn't want to hear it any more. He'd had the experience. Well, it isn't quite like that with a painter but it's sort of like that with me. So that this figurative stuff I'm doing at the moment, even if I do thirty or forty pictures, it's quite possible that I'll go right back. One of the things I said in Canada that they quoted me on, too, was that there aren't any rules. And this, they thought, implied that I meant they couldn't criticize me.

RB: Above rules?

WR: Yes. But there really aren't any rules. At the same time there are millions of rules, you see. But it's better to think that there aren't any rules. I've had a couple of people look at these new figurative paintings - one was a commercial illustrator, and they had all sorts of do's and don't's. I couldn't do this under the knee and I couldn't do this here. And I said "Who told you you couldn't do this?" I can do anything I please. You can do anything you want to do. The fact that I happen to be selling them to a gallery or to a public I suppose that makes some sort of difference. But to heck with it! I'll do whatever I please. And whatever I decide to do will be right if I do it consistently and with authority. So that it's best to think that there aren't any rules. Ten years ago, and I also said it in this article, and you see you can see why this thing got twisted, I may have not said this. You see, I studied with this great man Macdonald and he was so sold on complete non-objectivity and "automatic" painting, he called it - painting from the subconscious. He was really caught up in all that. I don't know what he would say if he could see what I'm doing now. I just feel that none of us are brilliant enough or creative enough, none of us, to limit ourselves to any particular area; to say that this is it and that's all there is, you know. I just think that's stupid and just takes all the fun out of everything. I first started to paint so long ago, when I was ten or eleven years of age, and I did it because I liked it. And I want to continue to like it. It's not going to become labor to me. That's what Henry Miller, the author, calls laborers, you know - people who do run of the mill things, run of the mill novels and so on. By the way, to divert for a minute, there's a great LP with Henry Miller and Ben Grauer. It was made about six years ago. And it's very, very good. There's no profanity on it, I mean no pornographic material or anything. It's a wonderful thing. If you ever get a chance get it, and if you see one get me a copy. I want one. I met Ben Grauer about three years ago and I told him I had heard it and he said I was the first person that ever remarked about it. But it's a most illuminating thing. And he says a lot of very interesting things. He has some very interesting theories. But this business of the laborers I think is true. This is

what a great deal of the creative world is made up of - the laborers.

RB: Well, sometimes they're called craftsmen perhaps, as a distinct from creative artists.

WR: All right. Craftsmen. Miller refers to them as laborers - not to put down laborers - but laborers of the art world, the people who have to do certain kinds of labor, I don't know - how did I get on to that? I was just trying to illustrate how I like to move around. One other point about moving around: They used my paintings in a little fashion show at Princeton High School here about two weeks ago to raise money for a scholarship or something. And I had about five paintings on the stage eight years apart. There are probably 350 paintings between the first and last painting. And one of the high school teachers came up to me and said it was amazing the continuity he felt in the work. This is something that I have always felt in my work. I often have paintings hang that are eight years apart and I can see a definite relationship. And yet from one year to the next it looks like I'm wandering all over the place. But you really can't, you see.

RB: Well, Bill, you are aware, of course, that people who don't particularly enthuse over your art probably criticize it on the grounds that it doesn't have continuity. I think one of the outstanding aspects of your career is that from year to year, although the continuity is there, there is a change that is quite conspicuous and does baffle a number of people.

WR: Yes. You think it does me a certain amount of harm, I suppose?

RB: Well, this is something I don't know. One hears it said if an artist finds an image or a gimmick then it becomes easy for sort of amateurs. You notice that, for instance, every painting by Mr. XYZ has a pink letter T or something like that, a variant of a pink "T." And therefore wherever in a museum or gallery you see it across the room you know this is by Mr. XYZ and you feel a certain satisfaction in identification. And this is said to be by many critics extremely bad. Certain artists in your own gallery during the time you've been there have a fairly identifiable style. For instance, he's no longer there, but Georges Mathieu, the French painter, can be recognized across the room.

WR: Yes.

RB: There has been no remarkable alteration in his style. Insofar as I know it's a continuous variation on the same technique. What comment do you have, if you would - since we're not speaking for publication - on the kind of artist who from your point of view must seem to repeat himself and continuously do the same thing over and over again?

WR: Well, I don't know. It's changed a little at this point in my mind. Now initially I thought that these painters, say, Rothko and Newman, they're pretty good examples, I thought of them as extremists. I still think of them - especially Rothko I think is an outstanding painter and a fine man, and I think he has a great deal of knowledge, too; but maybe Rothko isn't a good example.

RB: Well, no, let's go on with Rothko for a moment.

WR: Well, I hate to because Rothko is a very good painter. And he does move. He does move.

RB: Well, but this is the point! Rothko's large sheets of color are identifiable across the room as a Rothko if anybody knows anything about him. Their subtleties may make them great works of art and so on, but they resemble in pattern, shall we say, each other and have done so over a number of years. And this has not prevented them from being good art.

WR: No. but you see Rothko is - what? - fifty or sixty years of age. So it's possible that a man can arrive at a statement by that time. I mean philosophers I suppose do, don't they? And so on. They arrive at a stand. And he's sort of like a monk I suppose in the art world. Kind of a recluse. He's not really a recluse but, you know, in his own painting. What gets me is when a painter of thirty-five does this - starts off with what appears to me to be a formula. Rothko did not start off this way. I do not recall seeing early major Rothkos but I certainly have seen small paintings by him. And he didn't start this way. This is something that evolved. And it really is a part of him because he can do variations on it. But with the younger talent I can't quite see it happening at the age of thirty-five or forty. It just seems to me that maybe some of these people are running a little thin.

RB: I presume you don't want to give instances of individuals, but what -

WR: Well, I don't like to do that except that I would say that Andrew Wyeth even - I like magic realism and so on - but Wyeth has a very limited statement. He's a very bright a knowledgeable painter and is aware of people like Rothko. I read a very interesting article by Wyeth in Horizon. I don't know if you've read it.

RB: No.

WR: I'll show it to you. And in it he says he likes the abstracts and so on but they aren't enough for him. Well, I feel the same way about him. In many ways, in just the same way, Wyeth is every bit as a oneness as Rothko or any of the rest of them. And much more academic. Not really as -

RB: I agree with you.

WR: But the Belgian, Magritte, now he's more of a surrealist. But I think if Wyeth had a little more of the mystical or surrealist quality and varied it a little more he would be more interesting. But it can be in all expressions. It's not just in abstraction that you find this. You find it in the figurative and realistic stuff, too. I mean what it amounts to is that Wyeth's work can become pictorial documentation. But not always. Sometimes there's a great deal of mood and so on. But that's the difference between a great figurative thing I think and something that just is pictorial documentation. And the abstractions become more or less a pictorial documentation of that guy's subconscious.

RB: The ordinary members of the public I think would not realize so well as you, being a painter, that Wyeth in a sense repeats himself because Wyeth has subject matter and he has a different figure, a different bush, as it were, in each painting. I was myself thinking not so much of Rothko but of other people like that in the abstract whom the ordinary public and perhaps the more obtuse critics who fail to see in a good artist like Rothko, say, the sensitive little areas of something that makes it art. And what they see is a repetition of an image. I used Mathieu who is all linear. And they are different in my opinion. There are all sorts of artists. In your gallery, take Ray Parker, for instance. At least for two years he has worked with blots.

WR: More than two. Three or four now.

RB: And he may be about to change. He's a young man. But for the last at least three or four years his work is to be identified very easily by color blots which perhaps have some of the beauty of Rothko's color relationships. Anyway, in a sense it's a formula. But what I want to find out from you is despite somebody having a formula like that, for certain individuals you would concede that if they're good enough artists they could exploit a certain formula for many years and still produce good painting?

WR: Definitely. I think it's really a part of the person's personality. I know Parker and I've seen him paint. And, boy, he just goes through hell when he's doing those paintings. And I can just seem some critic that doesn't like Parker making a fantastic joke about it, you know. How can this guy get so worked up over these things that appear so similar and simple. But, oh, the simplicity bit I certainly sympathize with. Because the simple paintings I did in the past year just knocked me out. They're the most difficult things. I mean I get headaches and everything else from just sitting there. Simplicity is the keynote of all good design, they say. And simplicity is extremely difficult. Working in a narrow area like that is difficult. It's just not for me. Now Hofmann, too, moves around a great deal, doesn't he? I mean he'll do a show with rectangles, a show with the linen coming through, almost like a watercolor effect on his oils, and then he'll do a very heavy, thick impasto-like, very Wagnerian; and then he does things that look like landscapes sort of, and still-lives in a very non-objective way. And he moves around a great deal. And Picasso, moved around a great deal. It's just the nature of these people. Picasso - the spirit of Picasso inspires me a lot. More in the last five years than it ever did. Because of his versatility. Now I don't necessarily like people who sing and dance and tell jokes, you know, that sort of thing. I think that's carried to an extreme, too, more in show business in this country. They'll make an actor do all these things and then he ends up being not really good at anything. I don't believe in that. My main interest is painting and then I do other little things but I don't consider them too seriously. Like my watercolors even. I consider that just more or less the lyrical part of my expression, like a little song or something. And the metal things are strictly for my own pleasure at this point and they're not sculpture, I know, and they're not that important. But it's just necessary for me to do these once in a while because it just is. I don't know why. I have many varied interests. That's the thing. It's just the way I am, I guess.

RB: This I think is bringing out the point that your personality requires diversity of technique or diversity of approach in your painting. And you feel that some other peoples' do not?

WR: Right. But I don't feel any need for people to identify me. I don't care if they do. I don't care if they say "this is Ronald." But do you know that most people who know anything about painting know my painting, I've heard them say "That's a Ronald," when they don't know I'm around. You know, even though it'll be completely different. And you yourself can usually tell. If you're familiar with my work you can see the thing there. But I'm still very young and maybe if I live another few years it'll be more and more obvious, you see. I think that we too soon get to the end, you know, we get to the end of our expression. We're all very limited anyway. I mean when it gets right down to it. Rothko came to my first show and I remember he stayed about an hour and was very helpful to me. And this is sort of interesting coming from Rothko. He said, "when you're a young man you think you have a lot of things to say" - and he wasn't being nasty about my show or anything; he liked it very much. He said, "You think you've a lot of things to say and when you get a little bit older you find that you only have one thing to say." I'm glad I remembered this. And I feel that Picasso only has one thing to say.

RB: Now? Or -

WR: Always. Really it's always saying only one thing. And I wouldn't know quite what words to use. It's very sexual and very vigorous. But really he is only saying one thing. And Rothko is only saying one thing but it's much more obvious that he's only saying one thing. But it's a very good way to think. Because I have some friends in show business and they think it's so clever to be able to write songs and to sing songs and to perform and to draw a little bit and act a little bit, you know. This doesn't impress me at all. And it's not what I'm trying to do. I hope people don't think that. But really I do feel that everything I do is really very limited. I agree with Rothko. We only have one thing to say. That was a very astute remark, I thought.

RB: A year ago I think you were definitely changing, too, toward this simplified work which you showed last January. You were doing a lot of these paintings with only two colors. Now you're getting out of this. Would you say you have gained in any particular way some new dimension to your experience as a painter? Your technique? Your skill? As a result of that limitation that you imposed on yourself?

WR: Well, I think the limitation probably came about partly because of the change in medium. You see I let the medium dictate a great deal what I do. Like I changed from oil paint to this Magna Paint which is ordinary pigment ground in acrylic rosin, as I mentioned before. And it is paint that you can't work too thickly with. It dries quickly. You can't overwork too much.

RB: Why did you change?

WR: Well, I really wanted to get away from the action in my paint quality and I wanted to get away from thick painting because I felt that I was making kind of a twentieth century statement with nineteenth century technique. And because of my academic background it's extremely difficult for me to get away from the paint surface, as it is for many painters today, you'll notice. I had to force myself. So I tried this paint which I had used many years ago. The first paintings I did then were very flat. And they shocked me even. I was shocked at what I was doing. This happens, you know. Just as these figures even though I've been working and planning, I was really shocked when I did them. So the first ones I did with the Magna, being very flat, looked very oriental and I think the whole thing just shocked me into a simplicity. I was afraid maybe to even use color. I don't know. And then as I painted on and on I got more back into myself again. Although I think two or three of those very simple pictures are quite nice.

RB: Oh, I'm not denying that. I was just wondering if you feel that you have learned something especially new from that experience.

WR: Well, I think so. Yes, I did.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM RONALD TAPE #2 (pg 74)

IN HIS STUDIO IN KINGSTON, NEW JERSEY

SIDE 1 JUNE 2, 1963. SIDE 2, OCTOBER 26, 1963

INTERVIEWER: RICHARD BROWN BAKER

RB: Richard Brown Baker

WR: William Ronald

RB: This is Richard Brown Baker talking with William Ronald in his studio in Kingston, New Jersey, June 2, 1963. Bill, let's talk about your move from Fergus. I think we have got you in that first reel that we talked together in April we got you as far as moving out of Fergus. I forget why you moved from Fergus to Brampton. Maybe you said on the other reel.

WR: I don't know if I did. My father's work took him down there. He started working in a war plant, as many other people did at that time. Who was it that owned that plant then? I don't know. I forget. Good heavens! I don't remember.

RB: There. Now you can go on.

You forgot why he -

WR: No, he went down to get work. Eventually it became known as the Avril. And eventually it was demolished by Diefenbaker, the idiot Prime Minister that they used to have up there. He decided that they weren't going to

build any more of these bombers. Well, anyway -

RB: You moved there I think about 1939?

WR: Yes, I think it was September of - it was just after the war began in Canada.

RB: Well, after the war had begun. And then your father got this job. Did this create any great regrets in your mind to leave Fergus?

WR: Well, a little. But, you know, it was kind of fun to think that I was going to a different place I thought.

RB: Brampton is a bigger town?

WR: Bigger. And twenty-five miles from Toronto. And it's, as I said, called the Flower Town. It was a very pretty town when we moved there.

RB: It's called the Flower Town because flowers are raised there?

WR: Yes. It's called the Flower Town of Canada. Dale's and Calverts I think are the two - and Finley are the main greenhouses. Dale's I think is about the largest in the world, or one of the largest. It's a very big place.

RB: Seed growers?

WR: No, plants. They actually grow flowers there. Then they have many other - well now, they have a lot of industries. The town has been, as far as I'm concerned, ruined. They didn't care at all about the zoning and very bad planning. It's gone downhill a great deal. But anyway, it was a pleasant experience. On the first tape you will recall we had our problems during the Depression and so on. And my father got this job and it looked rather good.

RB: What actual job did he have? Do you recall?

WR: He may have started as a machinist. But he was very shortly what they call a layout man. It was an interesting job. You have to draw right on the actual machine parts. But with instruments. With instruments that measure in half a thousandth of an inch and that sort of thing. Say, for instance, it's, oh, a large casting, you know, like a big round thing or something that fits on the engine of a plane. And it has to be machined at a particular point. Well, castings get very bumpy and irregular and, say, where this thing has to be faced or machined has to be within two-thousandths or a thousandth of an inch maybe. And so my father would indicate - he would paint it with ink and then indicate with calculations and so on exactly where the line should go or the lines should go to tell the man where to machine it. This sort of work is used a great deal in prototype, that is, when they don't have what they call jigs or fixtures yet. See, after they get going on production with the planes and so on they designed jigs and fixtures and he would also work on these. And once you get the jigs and fixtures designed then it's just a mechanical process of keeping repeating the same process. But before that all of this is done by hand more or less with machines. But you have to do everything, just set up each part. It's hard to know what I'm talking about if you don't know anything about machine shops. But you have to set up each part, you see, and it's sort of primitive.

RB: This interested you as a boy to know about this, I take it? I mean your father used to take about this --?

WR: Oh, yes.

RB: Did you visit the factory quite a bit?

WR: No, no, you weren't allowed to. Of course, it was the war and it was very -

RB: It was all secret and he had a pass probably.

WR: Yes. But here's what happened quickly though first. This was the first kind of ray of light we'd seen in a number of years with regard to getting money. And by a mistake my father was laid off about - I forget - half a year or something after we moved down there. It was a mistake we found out later.

RB: An administrative mistake?

WR: Yes, just an error. And I'll never forget that. It was so awful.

RB: He was plunged into -

WR: Well, I actually saw my father cry and he's not that kind of person, you know. And it was just after - I guess

thirty-eight he was then - years of such awful struggle and then get this break, and boy, it was really a terrible thing. He did get another job then with the greenhouse people. Which didn't pay nearly as well. And it didn't really make him happy because it wasn't his own greenhouse and that sort of thing. But then eventually he got back to the plant.

RB: How was the error discovered?

WR: I don't know. You see these big plants especially during the war were... somebody should write a book about them, if they haven't. I'm telling you I don't know whether I told you - I'm getting ahead - but I worked in one. And that is an experience. You see a great deal of the manpower, of course, was taken away and you were left not always with the best people.

RB: Supervisors?

WR: Yes.

RB: Well, let's save your own experience till later chronologically.

WR: Well, I'm just explaining they made ridiculous errors, you see, because men would get shoved into positions they weren't really suited for. But he was rehired and went back there.

RB: Meanwhile you had been put into a school I suppose?

WR: Yes. The Brampton High School.

RB: What stage were you at then?

WR: I was just starting high school.

RB: Just starting high school. So this was your first high school. And what sort of high school was it? Pretty much overcrowded? Were there a lot of workers' families, laborers, newly come into town?

WR: No, not really. Because most of the labor for that factory lived in a town called Malton which is right where the plant is. And a lot of them lived in Toronto and areas like Weston. So it didn't really hit Brampton for about three or four years. But the high school was just a very typical high school, you know.

RB: How big a class, roughly speaking?

WR: Well,

RB: Boys and girls naturally?

WR: Yes. Well, the first form or what you call grade 9 - we actually had three forms there, we called them forms then, good Lord, I'm getting old - 1A, 1B and 1C. so they were quite large I guess with maybe twenty to each class, I don't know. But there was a difference in Brampton. I noticed a lot more class distinction somehow or some kind of a social barrier of some kind. The kids seemed to be sort of paired off, you know.

RB: Well, you were a newcomer. Did you feel any sense of not belonging because you were not brought up with a certain set of children?

WR: As a matter of fact, because I was a newcomer it made me kind of a little hero. It helped me for a while. Well, I didn't seem to have any trouble.

RB: Most of the rest of the class had brought up right along together. So you were a novelty anyway.

WR: Yes, that's right. And then I was quite good at certain sports which helped me I guess.

RB: What did you first go out for to establish yourself there? In the autumn it would have been football? Did they play soccer? Or

WR: No, we don't play that much... well, autumn quickly becomes winter and it was hockey.

RB: Oh, you were a big hockey star. Ice hockey?

WR: Yes. I played goal. And I was very good at it really.

RB: It's a rough game.

WR: Yes. It's pretty rough.

RB: It's Canada's favorite game, isn't it? I mean the thing Canadians are most keen on.

WR: Yes, I would say that. And it's a very nice game really. And I was quite good at it. I could have made a career out of it if I worked at it. But I really had too much vanity.

RB: What position did you play?

WR: I played goal.

RB: Oh, yes,

WR: It's interesting I always did things like that that required an individual effort. Isn't it sort of interesting? I think of this. I played goal in soccer. I tried goal in lacrosse, but, oh, boy, that's really rough. But I always preferred a position where everything depended on me kind of at that point, you see. Whereas if I'd played other positions it would have been more of a team thing involved. But the thing was we played hockey outdoors and, oh, man, it was cold.

RB: Did you tell me before that you were physically rather small as a small boy? But by this time you had filled out, I take it?

WR: Well, when I moved to Brampton I was four foot eleven, and I was thirteen, going on fourteen.. and this is very short, you know, I mean by standards today. And even then. And by the time I was fifteen I was five foot ten. And my clothes just looked ridiculous.

RB: It's amazing indeed. That didn't strain your heart or anything?

WR: No, it didn't.

RB: You were eating more. Your father's job -

WR: Emotionally. Maybe that had something to do with my emotional state later on. I didn't think of that. No, I just shot up. I think a lot of kids do this. I really thought I was going to be small because my father is only about five foot seven. And my mother is just barely five foot. But then my father's side is all over six foot. His sister is even about five, ten or eleven. My father was a premature baby and this is the reason he was small. My mother's side I found out are all French and I guess that's the reason they're small. So that I take after my father's side more or less in size. Although most of them are bigger than I am - six foot four and so on.

RB: What about the art teaching you might have had at high school?

WR: None. Non-existent practically.

RB: There was no art teacher at all?

WR: Well, there was one nice little lady, young lady. And she died of something or other.

RB: And was not replaced?

WR: I don't recall any emphasis on art whatsoever. None. And this is where my trouble -

RB: What were you studying at this point then?

WR: Well, everything else but, you know.

RB: Math and --?

WR: Yes. And French. Everything else but art. But this is where my problems academically... I started to have a few problems academically because until that time I had been an honor student pretty much through public school, skipped classes and that sort of thing. And then I started to feel a pressure. I didn't make out quite so well in school. As I look back now I really blame the teachers because...

RB: But still you'd moved to a different group of boys and there were perhaps some very bright boys in Brampton.

WR: As compared to Fergus?

RB: Yes.

WR: I don't think there was much difference. I don't think there was really. I think that the main thing was that I was developing along creative lines and the school just had no idea about this whatsoever. And there was another man involved who if I ever meet again, if I ever see again - I hope he's in an audience sometime if he's still around where I am going to be because I will fix him. This man was a P. T. - we called them P. T. instructors - physical training. He did more to discourage me I guess and other kids. But I guess maybe I was more sensitive than anybody on the face of this earth. He was not a big man physically. And we used to box, you see, a little. I liked boxing. I still do. But he used to put the gloves on, for instance, with this one young kid that was very big and very slow-moving, almost retarded, you know, really. And this teacher, his name was Stevens, would pound the hell out of this kid, you know, till his mouth would bleed. And I hated that -

RB: He sounds like a sadist to me.

WR: Yes. And he used to make cracks to - and I still wasn't this big, you see - and he used to make a lot of wisecracks directed at me, directed at many of the other students. And I was extremely self-conscious about it. And it's interesting; most of the people that he made cracks about have turned out very well. One of them - I just have to say this - I guess this is all part of the bit anyway - Hunter McCracken, obviously an honor student. You can tell it just by the name. very short - I mean not big at all, see. And all these big, husky guys and football players. And old Hunter. And, oh, Stevens used to say terrible things to McCracken. Like "You're so thin you could hide behind a dime." You know, dumb cracks. And get big laughs from these jerks. And the funny thing is that Hunter McCracken is now a dentist. Which is sort of physical. But this man Stevens was a - I mention him because he's one of the few people I really despise. I don't feel like this about hardly anybody. And I'm sure he doesn't even remember me. For instance, playing basketball, he would take a basketball and throw it as hard as he could right at your stomach, see. And if your hands couldn't get up there fast enough, you know, it would hurt you.

RB: Did he justify this as sort of toughening the boys up and making them more manly?

WR: No, I don't believe at all. No, the thing was this. Here's what happened as a result of it. I would not participate in any sports in high school. And outside of the high school I excelled in every sport I participated in.

RB: How did you play outside of the high school?

WR: I joined what they call a town league of hockey. I won the rookie award. I was on the worst team in the league and I won the rookie award. This team had not won a game in three years. And I won the rookie award there. I played with a church league in basketball and we won the championship there. And so it wasn't that I couldn't do these things. But this man actually got me in such a state, you see, I couldn't. And this really threw me off school.

RB: You were not obliged to take athletic training at school?

WR: Yes, we had to take physical training but we weren't obliged to participate in competitive sports, I don't believe.

RB: This man was sort of in general charge of the whole athletic program or something?

WR: Yes. A beautiful thing happened one day. Somebody knocked him out. He picked on the wrong kid and they knocked him flat. But it really isn't a funny thing, is it? I mean there have been plays written about people like this. It's really unbelievable.

RB: Well, was he very unpopular with other boys?

WR: Very popular. Very popular. Sure. Because the bulk of them were bog, husky... You see it's a very normal kind of scene. Not a special school but, you know, middle class, a good, classy kind of school. You know, he'd be popular with most of them. But for the guys that were a little different, of course, he wouldn't be. When he'd make wisecracks they'd think he was smart. You see I was a good little boy, you know. I didn't do a lot of the things the other guys would do, you see. I behaved myself and so on. It's a strange thing; he ended up marrying one of the other physical training female teachers naturally. And the females used to wear little short skirts and he used to come in - I can remember this when I was only fourteen - and make cracks about her legs and stuff like this. It's really pretty fantastic, isn't it?

RB: A coarse man.

WR: You know, he didn't come on this way with adults, as I remember. He looked like a very well-dressed, conservative man. But I just despise that sort of bully. I hate a bully. For instance, I never will argue. If I get on a panel, say, a discussion with somebody that obviously can't take care of himself verbally, or if I'm too much for him, say, I won't try at all; I'll let him beat me into the ground rather - I don't get any kick out of that at all. I

despise that sort of thing. But anyway that's important in a sense because it threw me offstride a great deal in my academic... And I was very interested in high school, you know. I wanted to go on -

RB: Did the other pupils resent your refusal to play for the school team? Did that make you rather unpopular?

WR: I think they probably that I was kind of maybe a sissy or not part of the scene or something. But the thing was I knocked around with a pretty rough crowd outside of high school. I got mixed up with a very rough crowd of very good guys. Only one or two of them ended up in trouble. But then I broke away from this group when I was about fifteen or sixteen. Within about a year I was on my own.

RB: We didn't have juvenile delinquents theoretically before the war. By "rough crowd" you mean a sort of gang that might have today been -

WR: If that gang had been in New York City, you know, it would have been on the front... We didn't kill anybody or hurt anybody or anything like that. No, it wasn't like that. No, it wasn't like that. No, these were just tough boys. No, it wasn't.

RB: In what way were they involved in tough things? I mean throwing rocks at windows?

WR: Well, no, not at that age.

RB: Beating up cows? Or -

WR: No, mostly beating up on each other, I guess. Or one kid's parents had a car and we used to kind of steal the car to go for a ride around the town. And, oh, then they'd pick up girls and carry on a bit like that. But I didn't do any of that. I was always around, though. I was a kind of interested observer.

RB: Well, you were a little younger than some of the leaders maybe?

WR: Not too much.

RB: They were all about fourteen?

WR: Well, maybe they were a little... They start pretty early. Then when I got to be about fifteen I decided I wanted to be on my own. And so I've been a sort of lone wolf from then on. And then they didn't like me for that, the town, I noticed, you know. I was strictly on my own. I didn't have a car. Everybody else had a car. I didn't.

RB: How could you have a car at fifteen anyway?

WR: At sixteen you can have a car.

RB: I thought you said fifteen.

WR: Well, all right. But they had a car. Say, at sixteen when they all had a car and I was sixteen and I didn't have one. And this was sort of the way you had to get a girl friend.

RB: You would have liked one?

WR: I didn't care, no. I didn't get a car until I needed one. That was when I moved out here.

RB: I'm just trying to find out if you felt that your father wasn't giving you as much as other boys' fathers.

WR: Oh, no, it never occurred to me at all. That never occurred to me. I didn't want a car at all, no. The thing was that they all felt they had to get a car to get a woman. At sixteen. Kind of vulgar, I suppose. But that's the way they felt. And I found this wasn't necessary at all. I had no trouble. And this used to bother them.

RB: Was this already the year of going steady? Or hadn't this kind of social conduct developed in Canada?

WR: I don't think it really had. People - kids did do this but I -

RB: You didn't have a particular girl friend at the age of fifteen?

WR: Yes, I did. At fifteen I had a wonderful girl friend who was eighteen.

RB: Oh, marvelous. What was her name?

WR: A very sensuous and beautiful girl called Alice. And the thing that upset me about Alice was that when I was like fifteen and a half she told me she wanted six children. I used to ride out to her beautiful place in the country

on my bicycle. So one day I phoned up and said I sold my bicycle. And Alice now lives four houses away from my parents and she has ten children.

RB: She's done well. With one husband, I take it?

WR: Yes. And she's a lovely girl. And has a lovely family.

RB: She was a well-to-do family, I take it, from what you say.

WR: He was kind of an executive with a film company up there. But they were just very nice people. I wouldn't call them well-to-do, no.

RB: You used to go to - do they call them socials or something, dances with her and that sort of thing? Or -

WR: No, most of the time I spent with Alice was in the hay mow. We had a beautiful -

RB: Private rather than public.

WR: They had a beautiful farm there and this barn. And the parents were very free with them. And we didn't do - this is corny - if the other artists hear this I'll die - but unfortunately I behaved myself. Well, I won't say any more.

RB: It was what you call spooning or petting.

WR: Yes. Spooning. I haven't heard that one for a long time. Then we'd sit, or lie, in the hay. And there was a big loading window or something I guess where they'd load the hay, you know, and you could look out at the moon and the stars. Oh, God, it was beautiful. And that's mostly what I did with Alice.

RB: I didn't quite get the significance of your selling the bicycle. Was this to free yourself?

WR: I phoned her up and said I sold my bicycle meaning I can't get out there any more.

RB: And this was arrived at because you were frightened at the notion of being responsible for six children? Is that it?

WR: Yes. I didn't want six children. I knew I wanted to be a painter, an artists, and I wanted to have a career.

RB: That's very interesting. I mean it's curious.

WR: I was very deliberate about it. I've worked at it very hard all my life, you see. It is interesting, isn't it? I really made up my mind that I was going to do this.

RB: At this stage you haven't mentioned doing any artistic work. There was no work in school.

WR: No, but I was doing it at home. I forgot. I should have said this. I was drawing a great deal. Every night I would be drawing practically.

RB: You've already mentioned that you drew and so on since about the age of about eleven. I take it then this was a purely private venture?

WR: Yes. At this point I was copying *Saturday Evening Post* illustrations.

RB: In color?

WR: Both in color and in black and white.

RB: Not tracing them.

WR: No. Copying them.

RB: Copying them as a kind of personal training?

WR: Well, I wanted to be an illustrator at that point.

RB: Oh, this is when you wanted to be an illustrator. Expecting to make a lot of money as an illustrator? Or that was irrelevant?

WR: Oh, I'm sure that was part of it.

RB: ... Only fifteen to want to make money.

WR: Money was part of it because I never had any, you know. But mostly it was I wanted to be an illustrator. And it was another artist in town suggested that I do this.

RB: Would Alice not have been sympathetic for this?

WR: Oh, yes. She was a very nice person. I still like her very much. I was very sorry for a number of years after that I did stop seeing her.

RB: How did Alice take this bicycle sale? She was angry? Or -

WR: She was - I shouldn't say this if she ever - God - but she was pretty shook up about it. she was eighteen, you see, and you know an eighteen-year-old girl is much older than a fifteen-year-old-boy. But she was a wonderful person. I liked her a great deal.

RB: I suppose a lot of the nineteen and twenty year old had gone off to the Army and the Air Force at this stage? Of course, Canada wasn't actually - there was no draft?

WR: Yes, there was. The Frenchmen didn't hear about it. And that's a credit to them. No, I don't believe the province of Quebec would - they didn't go in for it. But you may be right. We did have what we call conscription. But maybe it was a little later in starting. But the Province of Quebec, as I recall, maybe they had it but most of the guys headed for the mountains.

RB: I have the impression from memory -

WR: No, we had it because I was called up. We had it.

RB: Later. But I mean at the beginning of the war. I mean in the so-called phony war period before the United States got in and it became an all-out war.

WR: Oh! That's a riotous remark, the phony war period. I haven't heard of that.

RB: That's what it was called.

WR: Before the United States got into it there was another war?

RB: No, it was called a phony war up until the time the Germans invaded Belgium and France and so on. There was a period when -

WR: That's a riot. When England and Canada -

RB: No, no. They hadn't bombed London.

WR: But when England and Canada went into the war it wasn't yet considered a war, you mean, down here?

RB: Well, just the way we speak of the cold war now because there isn't actual belligerency.

WR: This is why you have a lot of anti-American feeling in Canada. They're very sensitive about your attitude against the World War.

RB: Well, this was a general journalistic expression used I think in Europe as well as here.

WR: Well, it wasn't phony for those guys that were getting shrapnel up there.

RB: They weren't to any great extent. They were behind the Maignot Line and the Germans were behind the Siegfried line.

WR: It sure as hell was war to us. I remember it vividly.

RB: Not in the early months of 1940 to any great extent.

WR: 1939 was war. I mean I can remember the streets, the papers, the -

RB: Of course, everybody was terribly upset when it began. But - well, we needn't go in to that. But there was this phrase applied to several months only at the beginning of the war when military operations were at a minimum. And it was called a phony war. Then the moment the Germans attacked it became an all-out war and the situation changed drastically and rapidly. But that didn't occur till the spring of 1940.

WR: One of the things they always say in Canada about - that stirred up a lot of the anti-American feeling I think even in the first war is the impression they always get that the Americans think they won both wars. And all through my childhood I heard this. They always say oh, the damn Yankees they think they won the war, you know; they came in. and this is I think still a lot of bad feeling in the country, you know, deep-rooted with the older people. Okay. Where were we? Oh, I just sold my bicycle.

RB: Back with Alice in my mind.

WR: Good Lord.

RB: We'd better leave there. Let's talk a little more about your illustrating and so on. Did you try to show these to people? Sell them? Or do anything with them?

WR: No. But at about the age of sixteen I got rather good at caricatures. And for a short while I used to go around to Lions clubs and so on. I'd do caricatures on the spot and get six dollars or something for doing that. For a little boy that was hard work.

RB: You didn't just wander in and do them as a performance?

WR: Well, one time I did a performance sort of. But other times I would just wander around and sketch them. And they would pay me five or six dollars. I would draw maybe one of the leading doctors and leading officers of the various clubs and they would be reproduced in the newspapers of the small town.

RB: Oh, they did?

WR: Yes. This was for a very short time.

RB: When do you think the first reproduction in newspapers would occur? How old would you have been? You probably couldn't remember that.

WR: About seventeen I think. Then I just continued to do that. Then I started to do oil painting a little bit, very academic.

RB: Excuse me, you must have had a talent for likeness then?

WR: I was very good at caricature. Very good. In the war plant which I later went to I was really - I'm sure in the minds of about five thousand people that see me on television up there I'm still a cartoonist or caricaturist because I sure made them laugh a lot with these. I used to do very satirical cartoons on the guys in the plant. And the supervisors and foremen used to - were well aware that I - I would spend hours on these things and they knew it but it did so much for the morale that I got away with it.

RB: The attitude behind them was kindly? Or was it -

WR: Oh, hell, yes. But the guys were so cruel about it, you know. But I never - to my knowledge not one person was ever - I didn't hurt. I don't know why. I really tore them apart but, -- I don't recall, -- I got a very favorable reaction from all of them. They enjoyed it a great deal. It was a very interesting experience working in that factory. I'm glad I did it.

RB: Did you do this with pencil? Ink? Or-

WR: Oh, they started out just with pencil on the back of an ordinary kind of piece of white paper. Then I gradually got a real good stock of food paper in the place. I worked on what they call a milling machine in this plant. Okay, you want to get out of high school?

RB: No. No. Well, I suppose we should. But go on there. I was just wondering what the plant was and when you started to work there before you go on.

WR: Well, maybe we should go -

RB: Well, you can talk about this now if you want to. We might discover -

WR: Well, I left high school before I graduated. Because of a couple of reasons: I was generally unhappy with the way I was not progressing. I had been such a good student.

RB: Academically?

WR: Yes. I had been such a good student. And then I knew there just wasn't the money to send me there really.

And I'm such a conscientious character. It worried me, you see, to think I was draining my parents of this. And I also felt at that point that this was not doing me any good. I knew what I wanted to be, as I have stated. I knew the college I wanted to go to.

RB: What was that?

WR: The Ontario College of Art. And that that time this college had a very sensible rule whereby they would admit you if you had talent without what we call a senior matriculation, which was five years of high school. And I decided that the best thing for me to do was work for a couple of years in a factory for which they were paying very good money at that time and save the money and work on my art work and get my talent up to a level where I could be admitted on that, and then go to art school. And that's what I did.

RB: So you left high school at about what age?

WR: Sixteen and a half or something.

RB: Then you got a job in Brampton?

WR: As a matter of fact, I did get a job in Brampton for a very few months in a shoe factory.

RB: In a shoe factory!

WR: And this was a very pleasant job. I was what they call a cutter. It's an art, you know. They have patterns. My God! I've done so many different jobs! They have patterns for all the different parts of the shoe. And you have a knife and the handle for the knife is adjustable. And the blades are... Helen is always fascinated by all the different little pieces of knowledge I have about various things. It's because I've done so many different jobs. But you take an ordinary hacksaw blade and you have to grind your own blade - knife - and you grind a different angle, a different curve for every kind of leather. And, boy, you should see the way some of these men can cut. And you have to learn the leather and what's a good piece of leather and so on. So I did that for a few months. And I loved it. Because I love the smell of the leather and handling it, you see. But it didn't pay any money. So then I got into the war plant. I started out on a lathe, you know, machine doing very basic work. And then I went on to what they call a milling machine.

RB: This was also in Brampton?

WR: No. This was in Malton. Which is near Brampton.

RB: And you commuted by --?

WR: I commuted by car. Along with thousands of others. Then I got on a milling machine and this enabled me to draw because with a milling machine if you're working with a big piece of steel it can take ten minutes to run through. So you sit down and just sort of have to watch it. so I frequently seemed to get jobs that took a little bit of time especially if they wanted me to caricature somebody, you see. Anyway, that's how it went.

RB: Do you remember what you were paid - per hour? Or per week? Or -

WR: Let me think. Well, around three thousand dollars a year would it be? How much is seventy-five dollars...? Three hundred... around sixty dollars a week. Now this is a lot of money.

RB: Yes. At that time particularly.

WR: In 1943 or something in Canada this was a tremendous amount of money. I daresay there are people making that today, but not too many. I guess they're making more. I mean I managed to save quite a lot of money and start myself off at college for a couple of years.

RB: How long did you remain in this job?

WR: It seems to me I was there three years.

RB: Continuously.

WR: Yes. But it was not a bad experience at all. It was a very pleasant experience in retrospect. And even during that time. I enjoyed it, strangely enough, mostly I guess because I was doing all this drawing. And making the money. And, you see, all the time I didn't care what I did because I had in mind ever since I was eleven, as I keep saying, to be a painter or to be an artist. My only goal was to get to that school. So I was in good spirits most of the time because I knew this was my goal.

RB: How did you happen to be so keen on that particular school? From a living --?

WR: It was the only one.

RB: The only one available to you? The only one you knew about?

WR: The best one in Canada supposedly, yes. I later found out differently. But I mean it was the best one. It was just about the only one. It's a small country and it was about the biggest and most important and the closest. I mean I daresay there was one in Montreal just as good.

RB: In other words, it was the logical school? It was sort of inevitable.

WR: Yes. Very academic and basic and thorough.

RB: How did you get on with those fellow workers in the factory? Were they many of them women? Or were they much older people? Because most of the younger people -

WR: All ages. You had a number of youngish people that weren't physically - maybe couldn't pass the army physical. And then in the war plants you had certain people who got what we call deferments; they didn't have to go because of their job. And there was a great number of women. And it's a good job I wasn't two or three years older. I'd probably have gotten into all sorts of trouble. The women were... it was an experience. Whew?

RB: An American tragedy?

WR: Oh! Like they wore - remember the clothes in those days were not nearly as tight-fitting as the clothes today, you know - like the clothes both men and women wear today. But these girls were way ahead of their time because they used to wear these very tight-fitting coveralls. They just about drove us all insane. And the funny thing was at lunch time all the married men would pair off with their mistress. And all the single guys, like me, we'd go and play cards. This was always the way it was. Frequently the wife would work in another part of the plant. It was like a big village, you know. There were eight thousand people. And it wouldn't matter; they wouldn't get their directions crossed. Oh, it was really something! I just wish I had been a little older so I could have really grasped it more. Funny things happened, you know. Really strange. You'd see some horrible things in a way. I mean, maybe not horrible. Well, like a nice young girl would get married to a nice young boy and he'd go overseas and in three weeks she'd be making out with one of the guys. And it's really awful, isn't it, how we - I don't know if it's awful - but how we - how everything changes. All our standards. I don't know if it's awful. Maybe it's good. During a war everything changes and is accepted in a sense. I mean there was a certain amount of criticism maybe. Once in a while you'd hear one of the guys say, look at so and so. But it was pretty much accepted. I'll bet these same people today would be flabbergasted, you know, if they saw somebody doing something like this. But it was a very strange world, you know. It was all ingrown. you were all part of one another sort of. And, boy, the women deserve a great deal of credit, though. They did jobs that we couldn't... As men we'd go nuts where they... or instance in the machine shops - somebody has to do this - they would slot screw nails, you know; the slot in a screw that has to be for the screwdriver. Well, you have to put that in the machine and it has to run through. And believe me you do that for eight hours a day, five days a week, twelve months of the year. And a woman can dot his. Not because she's stupid but because - I don't know why -

RB: They have patience that the male lacks I guess.

WR: Patience, yes. Also they could handle small parts, you know, frequently that we couldn't. our hands are too big and so on.

RB: Your own job varied very much? Or it remained --?

WR: It was quite interesting. Quite interesting. Once I got on the milling machine I more or less stayed there. I did work on a number of machines. But it was always interesting. You didn't quite know what you were going to get next. It was interesting to me anyway. Mostly because I knew I was going to get out of it in two or three years, I guess. Everything was -

RB: Yes. You didn't picture it as your life career.

WR: It was an experience.

RB: What sort of hours did you have?

WR: Oh, I think we worked an eight- or nine-hour day. And then sometimes we'd have to work twelve hours.

RB: Starting early in the morning? Or-

WR: We had two shifts, as I recall. We worked both daytime and nighttime. The nighttime was wonderful. I used to love the night shift.

RB: You mean you worked -

WR: Worked all night, yes.

RB: -- you alternately worked day and night?

WR: It was extremely hard on your system and millions of people -

RB: How did that work? You mean every other week? Or-

WR: No, I think it was every two weeks.

RB: You'd shift from day to night?

WR: Or every month. I don't recall. But, boy, people still do this and that's awfully hard on you, you know. And especially on older men. It's hard on your system. Switching -

RB: Yes.

WR: But the night thing is very pleasant really if you get the right shift. There was a shift called the graveyard shift. Some plants had three shifts. We only had two, as I remember. The graveyard shift was from twelve till eight, twelve midnight till eight. That's a kind of horrible time. But if you worked from I think it was six o'clock, or five-thirty at night until about - or seven, I don't remember - until about three or four in the morning, something like this, you got home in time that you would get up maybe at ten o'clock. And, you know, you really enjoyed the day. And the factory at night was much quieter and it was a completely different atmosphere. And then frequently a bunch of us would go horseback riding at, say, four-thirty in the morning after work. And this was very pleasant.

RB: Wasn't it dark? Or midsummer perhaps.

WR: Well, maybe it was five-thirty and it was dawn. Yes, it would be in the summer. But it was getting light. And it was nice. I used to love that. And there were all sorts of activities like this. It was a real community. Luckily I didn't get into any accidents on the machines. Which would have been very easy. With my hands I mean. One time I almost had a heavy vise fall on my hand, which frightened me a great deal. And I did see a few accidents. I saw one horrible thing. I don't know if this - my God, I'm going on but you can cut it out - but it is part of my life. I haven't thought about it for years. But this young fellow was working on a press, they're terrible things, great huge presses that just have tons and tons of pressure and they just come down and they press out things. And we quit at five o'clock in the morning. And this was the last piece this man was going to do. And he was going into the Navy. He had been waiting for about a year to be accepted.

RB: A young man?

WR: A young fellow. And, my God, he made a mistake, and got his arm, and I can still see him, and he walked over to the hospital, which was a long walk.

RB: Was his arm mangled or cut off?

WR: With his arm dangling just barely hanging on. I hate to be gruesome but that's the way it was. And just barely on. And, of course, it was taken off. That's one of the things. It's amazing that there weren't more accidents. I'm frightened to death of machines now.

RB: I'm surprised that he was physically able to walk over, that you didn't all carry him.

WR: Well, he couldn't. I can still see him. I don't know -

RB: Was he screaming with pain? Or -

WR: No. Maybe there's a numbness or something, you know. It was a terrible thing. But there weren't too many accidents. It's amazing. I'm frightened to death of machines now. I hate them.

RB: You weren't then?

WR: No, I wasn't. It's funny, isn't it?

RB: What's caused this change?

WR: No, no, I think it's just because you're not with them. I have friends that were jet pilots in the Korean War that would hate to get on an airline, you know. And when you know the machine, like when you get these steel blades going four thousand revolutions a minute and you're cutting through a piece of metal and it breaks and it'll go boing! all over the factory, and God, you think it's going to hit somebody for sure. But it never did. It didn't frighten me then but now... I just don't like to be... If I was running it I guess I'd be all right. But that's sort of strange, I don't know.

RB: At what age did you develop your aversion to riding in elevators? Did you have no occasion in your youth ever to use an elevator?

WR: No, I didn't, you know. That's a fact I've never thought of before until this moment. Isn't that funny? I never did have. But, well, just let me think now. About the plant. Get me out of there. I worked there until I was about nineteen, yes. The war was pretty much over then. I did try to join the Air Force and the Navy. And they didn't need anybody. It was getting near the end of the war. They didn't want anybody. And I did not want to get into the Army. I was interested mostly in the Air Force. I liked airplanes and so on and I wanted to get in there. I was called up for the Army. But I didn't pass the physical. And I don't quite know what happened except I was sent to a psychiatrist. And he was an Oriental guy. A great big one. About six foot. A very nice man. And it was a funny thing. About six of us hung around together during this medical examination. Of course, they didn't really need men too badly at that point and they were being a little fussy I guess; I hope. But the whole six of us were rejected.

RB: Really?

WR: Yes. And I was extremely pleased, to be absolutely frank. I didn't want to be in the Army. I didn't like the idea of the Army. And so anyway that meant I continued on at the war plant for about another six months. And then I went in to school.

RB: Do you remember following the military events of the war with any particular, intense personal --?

WR: Oh, yes. This was the beginning of my elevator thing. That's why I wanted to get to the end of the war plant. Yes, this affected me a great deal. It affected everybody. And, hell, I didn't even get in it, you know. I remember talking to a veteran, a young guy that had been through a great deal of horrible war and how upset I was. And he got so furious and angry and laughed at me. And I felt like a fool. But I can't help it. I still did. I couldn't help it. I couldn't get in these damn things. And today I don't think I'd join. That's a great thing to say, isn't it? And I did want to become a citizen of this place. But it's just that I did try to, and wanted to, and it was a horrible feeling. And I guess I was a little more aware or sensitive, being an artist or writer or whatever, you know.

RB: Well, you would be. But some of your personal friends must have been in -

WR: Yes. All the kids I played hockey with, many of the kids I played hockey with were killed. Right away at Dieppe, you know. Oh, yes, it affected me. I followed it very closely. And then I had a cousin that I liked, loved very much like a brother. And I also loved his mother and father. His mother had been very ill from the age of about thirty and she was now about forty. And every night I would go up to see her. She was in her middle forties then. And I'd visit her for an hour or so. She was going blind and God knows what all. They never did find out what was wrong with her. And she was just living for the moment when her son would come home from the war. He was the kind of a guy you would think never would get killed. He was a big husky character. So the war ended. And a week after the war ended he was driving a jeep and he hit a mine hole, a hole in the road. And there were two guys in the jeep. Blackie - Harold his name was, and this other fellow. And the other fellow was thrown and landed on his rear end. And Harold landed on his head and was killed. And within two years this whole family was destroyed. I had so much of this it seems in my life. So much death and kind of, I don't know, I guess everybody has it but it just seems we had a concentrated bit of it there. The mother died in no time. Oh God, it was so terrible. She could hardly see. It was in June, wasn't it, when V-E day happened? Or something. And Harold was in Germany. And she got up out of bed and baked cakes and did all this, you know, because he was coming home. And then, God, he didn't come home. And this was the beginning of my emotional problems. That's what I really broke up and started to have, you know, real trouble. And that's when the elevator thing started. And then it got worse.

RB: Where did it first - I mean how did it first manifest itself? With elevators.

WR: With crowds! No, not with elevators actually. Crowds. I got to the point that I couldn't even stand to get on a bus. This is all not too uncommon. Many thousands of millions of people have claustrophobia. And that's all it was in the beginning. And then it got to the point that I couldn't get on a bus even. I'd get a smothered feeling, a closed-in feeling.

RB: You were still working at the factory then?

WR: No. It started to happen at the tail end of that thing because that's when all this happened, you see. At eighteen and a half was when Harold was killed. So it happened in the last six months at the factory and then at the beginning of the school. Now the school wouldn't help it simply because I had been waiting so many years to go there and it was such a difficult course. I mean it was so tough. It really was a tough course. It later became a horrible thing because they were such idiots. But the first year was a very good year; I mean very demanding. My God, we had to do everything. And I was trying so hard, you see, under the pressures of any student. And having been out of school, too, for three or four years even though I was going to an art school, you know that affected me. I wasn't used to the routine and the regimentation.

RB: Could I [Machine turned off] Bill, we've had a break of a couple of hours and you were beginning to talk about the art school experience. Let's approach this fairly systematically. To be exact, you applied for entrance and you had to take a competitive... You didn't cover that. How did you get in?

WR: As I recall, we just took in a portfolio of work. And I believe the name of the painter that was principal at that time was Fred. S. Haines. And he painted purple cows. Which I shouldn't laugh at because I'm painting green ladies. And that's all he ever painted was cows. But they're beautiful paintings, you know.

RB: Academically?

WR: Yes, but they were very colorful and so on. And he was a very nice, mild-mannered old man. He used to play the flute. Every morning when we'd go in he'd be playing the flute. But he just looked at this portfolio it seems to me -

RB: You approached him personally?

WR: It seems to me that's what I did. I don't recall. Maybe I showed it to one of the other vice-principals. But they were much more relaxed about it at that point because, you know, they sort of judged it by your enthusiasm.

RB: You don't remember the year?

WR: I think I was nineteen, so that would be 1945, would that be the last year of the war?

RB: The war ended in August 1945 - the war in Asia.

WR: I think it was 1945 then; I believe.

RB: Well, you would have begun at a regular term?

WR: Yes.

RB: And this place is physically situated where?

WR: It's on the same park as the Art Museum, the Art Gallery.

RB: In Toronto.

WR: Yes.

RB: So you could commute from home? Or-

WR: Yes, I could, and I did for one year. And then I moved to Toronto.

RB: So you entered in a class of a whole group that entered simultaneously - a whole group of students that began like regular school?

WR: Oh, yes. Regular schedule.

RB: Lots of boys and girls?

WR: Yes. And a great number of what you call GIs; we called them -

RB: I was wondering in Canada how that was set up because you didn't have precisely the same arrangement I'm sure.

WR: Pretty similar. We called it DVA - Department of Veterans Affairs I guess it was called.

RB: You were subsidized then?

WR: I was not.

RB: No, but I mean the other Canadian returning war veterans were subsidized.

WR: Yes. Right. So that we had - it was a freakish class that I started with because some of the men were forty, some of them were forty-five, fifty, you know. And it was a very, a lot of fun the first year. I mean there was an awful lot of hard work.

RB: How was it organized? I mean daily work from the model? Or -

WR: Oh, well, the first year was really a very good course. They had so many students, you see. It was really at its peak because of the veterans. And we had to sort of go in shifts. We had to go in the evening also. No, we didn't just do figure work. In fact we didn't do too much figure work until later on in first year. But we did everything. For instance, we had to do, say, compositions with three straight lines and one curved line. And maybe working in two tones of gray and black and white, or something like this. Problems like this. And this is sort of frustrating because by the time I got there I was ready to start oil painting.

RB: Emotionally? You wanted to?

WR: Yes.

RB: But you weren't allowed to?

WR: No.

RB: Had you done any oil painting up to this time? You had at home?

WR: Yes, a little.

RB: Most of the work you had done I gather was in caricature?

WR: Yes. And then the copies of illustrations I did render in watercolor, very tight watercolor. And then - well, what else did we do? I don't know, we had to do all sorts of things. We had to do a lot of designing. You see, the thing was that a great number of the students would end up going in to - they had many different courses; they had what they called drawing and painting, or fine arts. And they had the commercial course, which was advertising art. They had interior design or interior decoration. By the time I finished the school they had industrial design. They had sculpture. They had lithography. Well, just about everything. And so the first year you did everything. You did all these things. And if you weren't good at lettering, you know, it was pretty grim because you had to go through this lettering thing. Some of the guys were just terrific at it and they could sort of get by with their drawing, but for the people that were more I would say fine artists, or whatever they call them, the lettering was pretty difficult. And we did manuscript lettering with pens and copied a certain alphabet, very old alphabets. And had to do pages of that with a scroll on them. It was very tough for me.

RB: This was a formal curriculum which everybody alike undertook?

WR: Mmhmm.

RB: And had been going on for twenty years perhaps?

WR: I think so, but with changes constantly. I don't really remember the exact history of that school.

RB: Did you have different instructors in different aspects? Like for the lettering one person?

WR: Yes. And they were all fairly outstanding in their field.

RB: Who were some of the people?

WR: Well, my first lettering teacher was Franklin Carmichael who was one of the original, if I'm not mistaken, Group of Seven. And he died about a month or three weeks after I started. He was then replaced by a man called Eric Aldwinkle who was a much different kettle of fish, a flashy guy; but very good. And then, let's see, in first year we had a lady called Yvonne McKaig Hauser. She's still alive and paints. She taught us color and composition. And we had a lady called Frances Neal. And first year, my golly, it's so long ago, who else did we have? We probably had for figure work eventually we had a man called John Alston who was a very, very good - I hate to use the word "academic," because he's very good - portrait painter. And perhaps Eric Freefield. I'm not sure. Maybe Harley Parker for watercolor. That's about it. These names mean something to Canadians at least.

RB: Yes. Oh, I'm sure they do.

WR: I was very impressed, you see, with this whole group of men at that time because aside from these men were men like Carl Schaeffer, who was a prominent watercolorist then, George Pepper who does, or did anyway, sort of landscapes with figures; and, oh, Roly Murphy, who is a great old character. He did seascapes sort of. He was a great teacher. He taught figure painting. And, boy, he used to drive us. He was great. Talked out of the side of his mouth. He had been on boats a bit and he still pictured himself as a sailor. He was one of those teachers that everybody took off on. He was a cinch to caricature. And he was a great teacher. And, oh, who else that was sort of --? Well, Fred Hagan taught lithography. Well, I can't think think right quickly but -

RB: I would have sort of imagined, which apparently is wrong, that you would have been kind of a rebellious pupil.

WR: Well, I was.

RB: But certainly now the way you describe it you weren't.

WR: No, no, wait a minute. You're getting ahead.

RB: Yes, I'm getting ahead. That's one of the reasons I want to do this more systematically, you see, so as to get it actually clear.

WR: Okay.

RB: So you entered then more or less reverently or eagerly young and impressionable and all that?

WR: Right. As I told you on previous tapes I had been thinking about it for eight years at this point, but you see still at that point I wanted to be an illustrator and I wasn't giving anybody any trouble, you see.

RB: Tell me how much opportunity at this stage you had had to see original works of art of quality?

WR: Very little.

RB: And where had you seen them?

WR: I don't think I saw any original works of art until I went to the college and I saw them at the Art Gallery which is on the same grounds right thirty feet away. And at that time they weren't having any contemporary shows, shows of contemporary works at all, much. But they had many examples of the old masters: El Greco, Van Gogh, and some of the Dutch people, and that flower - Fantin-Latour.

RB: Would you have been aware at that time of the great split between the modernists and the traditionalists?

WR: No, absolutely not. I didn't know anything about it whatsoever. Nothing. You see I wasn't interested in painting at that point. I was only interested - in fact the first sort of really modern thing I remember was a man called Lawren Harris who is a Canadian. One of the Group of Seven. And he was considered modern, believe it or not, in 1945 in Canada. And he did sort of, oh, heavens, I don't know, stylized is the best I can think of - stylized things, let's say, icebergs. An iceberg with a kind of - instead of making it look completely realistic it would look as if it was made of marble or something.

RB: Could it resemble Rockwell Kent in any phase?

WR: I really think he was better than Rockwell Kent. This Group of Seven -

RB: I don't know what the Group of Seven was.

WR: That's very interesting that you don't. Because, boy, up there they think - they used to think like everybody knew about the Group of Seven. As far as I can remember - I have a book on it that I will lend to you if you're interested... I think it was around 1919 or something - when you look back you wonder why they were considered so revolutionary because of all the things that were happening at that time. They went to Paris at that time and, my gosh, so many things were happening in the Paris art world you would have thought they would have come back with some Cubist stuff or something of this nature. But they came back influenced by the Fauves.

RB: But they were ten years later than the Fauves at this point.

WR: Yes, I would think so. I'm not positive. We can check.

RB: Well, the Fauves were going 1905-1906.

WR: Well, I say I'm positive it was later than that that they did go over there. So they came back and they decided -

RB: However, you may be wrong because the war would have been on in 1917-1918. Unless they were there -

WR: Well, maybe it was after the war. But at any rate they came back with the idea - as far as I can remember there was a painter, a Frenchman, Morisot or something, with a sort of international name - from Canada. And Paul Peel I guess who was an academic figure painter and so on. And these people. And these men, a group of men wanted to do Canadian-type painting, you see, Canadian painting. And there is some beautiful landscape in Canada especially just a hundred miles from where I lived up in the Georgian Bay area and so on. And this is where a great deal of the Group of Seven painting was done, a great deal of it. I guess perhaps the most famous painting of the Group of Seven was by Tom Thompson who died very early. He was a commercial artist at one point and just gave it all up and went up to the woods and became a guide. And his death is still a great mystery. And a couple of the men, I think, still think that he was murdered. Because he was a great boatman with a canoe and so on. And he drowned. So he actually only painted I think for about four years and I guess he's about the most famous of the Group almost perhaps for this reason.

RB: He was quite young?

WR: He was in his early forties when he died. And he did - I guess the most famous painting probably of the Group of Seven called The West Wind. And do you know I was going through a group of little Pocketbooks I have of the sixteenth century I guess it is Japanese Okasaia and so on. And I found something there very, very similar to The West Wind. And I don't say that Thompson ever saw it but it's just extremely similar. They had a Japanese look about them. And they did get some beautiful textural effects. But they were the curse on the scene, you know, for the young painters for many, many years after this. But they were considered real kooks and radicals and everything. They called them the lukewarm school or some such thing. And how they could have ever considered these paintings far out is really hard to understand; but they did.

RB: You saw the original of these paintings? Many of them?

WR: Yes. Oh, yes. And two of these men at least, or three, are still alive. A.Y. Jackson, if he is still alive, is very old now. I think, if he's alive, he probably lives in Ottawa. I believe Lawren Harris is alive. He's probably out on the West Coast - British Columbia. And Varley. Now Varley is an interesting painter and an interesting man - if he is still alive. They're all very old. Varley they thought was going to die many years ago. He drank quite a bit, and carried on. He was quite a character. And he was an individual, too, boy. He kind of left the Group. And also went into figurative work in a way. And he kind of reminds me of at that time, I don't know, there was something very hot about his work; there was a hotness.

RB: In color?

WR: Yes, and in general feeling. He was a great guy with the women. He was a really hideous-looking man. This is probably why he attracted the women. Fantastic. I don't know, he'd been in an accident or something or in the war, and part of his face had been kind of... And, you know, that kind of hideousness that is almost attractive. Of course, his personality I guess was extremely attractive. But he's one of the more interesting ones. Old A.Y. Jackson just goes on and on and on and on, you know. I don't believe he's done much in the creative area. But I think Varley has done probably some good paintings in the last twelve years.

RB: Would you say that this Group of Seven and their work was perhaps more thought about by your fellow students than, say, Picasso, Braque and the leaders of the French School? A more immediate influence?

WR: Yes. It certainly was. At that time it really was. That was it. and I didn't know any better either. Oh, boy, it's hard to believe but when I moved down here in 1958 or 1957 and I would have Bill Seitz over when he lived here.

RB: Here being Kingston, New Jersey?

WR: Yes. And Seitz now is one of the Assistant Curators at that Museum of Modern Art but he was then Associate Professor or something here. He wouldn't believe the stories I would tell him about how far we were behind, you see. It's unbelievable, you know. Two hours away by airplane; now about an hour and fifteen minutes. To think - but that's the way it was.

RB: Your curriculum didn't include art history as such anyway --?

WR: Yes.

RB: -- or it did to some extent?

WR: Yes, it did. The first year not so much - no, I don't think any art history that I can remember. But we did have an interesting course in paleontology. We went to the Royal Ontario Museum which is a wonderful museum. It has one of the most outstanding collections in the world of Chinese porcelain. And I found that one of the best and most interesting places to go. And this is interesting because I think most of the students hated going there. But I found this a place where I could really kind of get away with things. I could do things a little freer here. Well, this is getting a little bit ahead. Yes, we studied the history of civilization, the history of man the first year. Well, that's it.

RB: When you said you could "get away with doing things" you mean you made sketches in the Museum as you were looking through?

WR: Yes, we made sketches and had projects. But I was getting a little ahead; that comes actually in the second and third years. I'll tell you about that later.

RB: Well, where do we go from here? ... some other aspect of your life that comes to the fore. Was there summer vacation?

WR: Oh, yes, of course.

RB: Well, did you take a job?

WR: And then I worked.

RB: What kind of job?

WR: Let's see. First year, good heavens, I don't know. I worked as a soda jerk and worked for this man who had a dance hall place.

RB: In Brampton.

WR: In Brampton and so on. I took all sorts of jobs.

RB: Well, let's hear about some of them.

WR: Well-I, I -

RB: I think I'm being very thorough. The experience of being a soda jerk I've never had myself.

WR: That was great. I loved that. I got to meet all sorts of young girls, you know.

RB: I thought you told me once about this. You think this was -

WR: Which part did I tell you about the girls? Well, I used to have a lot of fun at this one place. Gordon Vivian is the name of this man. Well, we used to have a lot of fun. I don't know if that's what I did my first summer or not. I don't recall. But I did do that. And then he had a dance hall place out in the country, a resort. And I would work out there.

RB: In what capacity?

WR: The same thing, selling hot dogs and, you know... between intermissions.

RB: May I ask you: during the term time the first year and other years did you work to support yourself at all? Or were you completely concentrating on --?

WR: Well, sometimes I did work. Like at the post office, as many of them did. Which was a horrible job at Christmastime.

RB: Mail sorting?

WR: Oh, boy, that's just about the worst job in the world. And, you know, I remember university students and that, we were all students working, and you know that the boredom of it and some of the brighter guys actually fainted. They were carrying them out, one or two a night from the boredom.

RB: Of sorting mail?

WR: Yes, big, husky guys just couldn't take it. it was the most horrible job I ever did in my life.

RB: You were supported largely at this time by savings you'd made in the preceding years?

WR: Yes.

RB: You didn't have a fellowship? Or a scholarship?

WR: I didn't have to pay any room or board at this point either at home.

RB: No, you only had tuition.

WR: The tuition didn't amount to hardly anything. It was just mostly expenses. The tuition, as I recall, at that time didn't amount to very much. It was mostly just the expense of going down there and eating and getting your supplies.

RB: Had you begun at this time to have this kind of a breakdown? You were speaking - just before we broke off you spoke of these deaths in the family that upset you so much at the conclusion of the war. What affect did this have on you during that first year of study?

WR: Well, I think the first year of study took its toll, too. You know, it eliminated a lot of the people too, right away. And it was so difficult.

RB: You mean this was harder for you than you anticipated?

WR: Oh, yes, because I did many things that, you know, I have never used in a sense. But I really don't criticize them for giving them to us because they were very good. I wish the rest of the course had been as sensible in a way, you know. Except that I don't really feel now that like in lettering, say, that they should expect someone that's obviously a painter, you know, to be a great lettering man and to flunk him or something if he can't make it. It's just sort of silly. But if they knew you were going into drawing and painting, if I remember correctly, they sort of probably did make some kind of allowances; you wouldn't get 80 or something; you'd get a 5, which is like 50 or something instead. And I was just a very average student in that first year.

RB: An average student?

WR: An average student. Yes. I managed - pretty good because -

RB: Well, you had been an average student at Brampton you said earlier. I mean you were very good at Fergus as a small boy; and then you weren't -

WR: I don't think I was even average - well, I guess I was. I was average, sure. I was probably better than that but -

RB: You probably felt you were brighter than your grades indicated, did you?

WR: At high school?

RB: Well.

WR: At high school I didn't know. At art school - well, no, the first year I didn't feel that way because I knew I just wasn't that good at many of these things simply because I wasn't interested in them. See, a great number of them were interested in these things, lettering and so on. And that's what the bulk of them ended up wanting to do, you see. They wanted to make money at commercial art. And to want to be an illustrator is every bit as asinine as to want to be a painter. It's just as difficult. Just as few people make a living at illustration I guess probably as they do at painting practically. It's an extremely difficult field. Especially in Canada. There are practically none. Because, heavens, you have only a very few magazines and the circulation is only maybe at the very most would be - what? - I forget. But it's not anything like down here. You've only got eighteen million total population - men, women and children. So you see to be an illustrator there it isn't everything you think about it when you're young. It means going into an agency and doing maybe the figures in a car ad, and another guy does the car, and another guy does the lettering, and so on. I found this out. And that's what the first year was about, to tell you all these things. But anyway I think we can move out of that. We did sketches, too. On-the-spot sketches. They would send us all over the city. "Saturday morning sketches" I think it was called. And we had to go all over the city, sometimes to particular parts. Maybe the Royal Winter Fair for some such thing and sketch animals in motion. Or send us down to Union Station and sketch people. Or maybe they would send us out on the street cars - they still had street cars then - and that sort of thing. And then I went into second year and I had decided to go into commercial, what they call commercial. Well, I tried it for six months - not six months - maybe six weeks, and I couldn't stand it. Now, by golly, did I go into commercial in the second or third year? Did I switch? You know I can't remember whether I went into drawing - no, Sir, I went into drawing and painting in second year. That was it. Which is fine art. And everybody that went in there either had money or was a girl or something because there was no way of making a living. No one could imagine - how could you make a living because there weren't any schools hardly in the country. Well, after a year of that, you know, I got

worried. Everybody kept saying, what are you going to do for money and so on?

RB: Your fellow students said this? Or your family?

WR: No, not my family. They didn't bother me at all about it. But my fellow students. During that year I didn't have much trouble. Again I was about average. One teacher seemed to see something in my work. His name was Stanley Moyer. And he paints sort of as an Impressionist painter; still does. And he liked the color and richness of it. and by the time he liked it, this was near the end of the year and I was beginning to paint still-lives with a palette knife. And the students were beginning to giggle a bit thinking what's wrong with Ronald; what's he doing; getting kind of funny painting with a palette knife.

RB: How did you start on that? A suggestion of Moyer? Or just something you picked up?

WR: No. Just started. Just started. I mean I did an awful lot of painting. We had still-life in second year. I did a great deal of experimenting in still-life because I seemed to be less inhibited, you know, to distort the bottle or so on. I don't know how that happened. But anyway in third year I decided I thought maybe I should go back into commercial. So I tried it - I think this is the way it went - and I didn't like it after six weeks. So I went back into the fine art thing again. I just couldn't stand it. I thought the teachers were idiots. And actually I thought most of them were so far behind. And I thought the main thing is here I should learn to draw even if I do go into commercial rather than learning technical things, mechanical things the best way to really learn is to be there. You know they used to have schools in the war for guys to go to to study to be machinists and so on. But the real only way to learn was just to throw you in the darn place and let you gradually work up. And so this was my idea about advertising art if I did go into it. well, I went into third year then about six weeks late. Now they used this later at the end of the year as an excuse for failing me. But my marks did not justify my being failed. I am absolutely positive.

RB: What did this mean "failing you?"

WR: I mean it meant I had to repeat my year.

RB: The whole year?

WR: And this was really because in this year I met Jock McDonald. And he met me. And he was one of my teachers. And I was doing a still-life one day and it was all kind of gray and blue and so on. And I thought, boy, this is awful. Because the guy beside me was doing what looked like a photograph. And they were all doing academic things. McDonald came along and said, "It's great." And told me what was great about it and so on. And from that moment on McDonald just babied me along like a - well, like nothing you could - well, just took me in hand and just taught me everything very carefully and cautiously, and sorted me out. Because McDonald was a lone wolf there. They all thought he was a kook.

RB: Let's have a brief resume of his career. I've met him -

WR: I wish I had a biographical sketch in my hand. I don't. But -

RB: He was a man at this stage in 1945 aged about --?

WR: Aged about forty-five, I would say.

RB: Yes. So he was a mature man, and had done not much exhibiting? Or -

WR: Oh, yes, he had a national reputation. Oh, yes. He was one of the original - you see they had all these groups. But then there was a group called The Canadian Group of Painters which was sort of a little bit of a - I don't know how they came about. But anyway Jock was one of the original members. He was nationally known.

RB: You had seen and admired his work? Or-

WR: No. I didn't know much about him. I found out later that he was - I think maybe he was doing automatic-type watercolors before Bourdois - Riopelle's teacher was really doing his so-called automatic stuff. I've seen paintings of McDonald's done many years ago that were Surrealist, and so on. That for Canada they were very far out. But anyway McDonald had a great deal of trouble with the teachers. No matter what they say today. They're all saying lovely things about him, saying how great he was. Because he's dead now. But I had a stack of letters to verify anything I wanted to say about McDonald's problems up there. And he had a great number of problems. He worked very hard; he worked four full days, and teaching usually a couple of nights, and then tried to paint in between times. He would give money to students who didn't have money. Oh, he was fantastic. Just great.

RB: You responded to his personality as well as to his artistic intelligence.

WR: Oh, yes, of course. And you see very few of the students liked him because he didn't represent what they thought was good. By "good" I mean they didn't think he was a good painter, you see, because he wasn't one of the landscape painters. Or he didn't paint in an academic manner. So it became known that McDonald was very fond of my work, and so on. So anyway... Then this man Schaeffer - Carl Schaeffer who was a watercolor artist, who won a prize about a thousand years ago still kind of pictured himself as some kind of painter. He was really a pretty bad painter by this time. Watercolor is about all he does; it's all he does actually I think. And he has very dogmatic ideas about that. And I submitted more or less the kind of watercolors he wanted all year.

RB: Well, let me understand more clearly, Bill. You were in class with several different instructors? Or -

WR: Right.

RB: Or in several different classes simultaneously?

WR: No. No. Every subject had its own teacher.

RB: So you were taking watercolors, as it were, with Schaeffer?

WR: With Schaeffer. I was also -

RB: And oils with McDonald.

WR: Well, I was taking still-life with McDonald. They wouldn't let McDonald teach anything else. They also would not let McDonald have second year, which was, you see, because then he could get you in second year and really get you indoctrinated, they thought, you see, I think. And they let him have third year. And by that time the students were so brainwashed that it was hopeless. He said that to me many times. I still have the letters. But Schaeffer was one of the people. And the reason I mention him is that I did these little kind of semi-abstract watercolors near the end, the very last group of things I handed in that year. And I was having a life drawing exam with Roly Murphy. And that's a very strenuous business, as any student knows. - life drawing exam - because sometimes you're not on that morning, and you're under a lot of strain. And Schaeffer came in the class and said, after seeing these semi-abstract things, said I had no damn right to be sitting in that chair and he was going to fail me. And he failed me. Well, anyway, this because I did not get started right away that year because I went to commercial art first for the first six weeks, this brought my average down. And because of this I had to go back and work in the plant again for two more years. And I'll never forgive this -

RB: You had to give up school completely?

WR: I had to, all because of this idiot Schaeffer who is now, I think the principal of the school. And he is a complete ass. What the heck was I going to say? Well I went back to the plant, and we won't spend any time there this time, but I didn't go back in the factory. I went back as an efficiency expert and time study. Which was kind of a logical thing because I knew machine shop work and therefore they put me -

RB: What age were you by now, do you think?

WR: Oh, about twenty-one or two. I don't remember.

RB: You were paid pretty well for this?

WR: Oh, yes, I was well-enough paid. Yes. It was pretty grim to have to do, though, believe me. It was horrible to have to do.

RB: What were your duties?

WR: Well, the job was all right. But it was horrible to have to do this after all this -

RB: To give up the art, yes.

WR: Yes. After all the things I've told you how hard I worked. You see the thing was that you had a bunch of GIs in there bawling it up and horsing around. A great number of these guys never did become any kind of artists. You had debutantes. I was one of the very few serious people. There were others, maybe six or eight. And these idiots - men - I mean I was on television just a month ago up there and I got - I still get furious about this because they were so insensitive to this. Just because I was doing - you know my paintings were not even 1910 Braque, they weren't that modern, I didn't know anything. I couldn't have done it anyway. But anyway that's what happened. And I did time study work which is to time men at machines. Then I got into estimating, which was sort of interesting. It was during the building of the first jet in Canada, called the CF 100. And it was the very first one and therefore we had to estimate how long it would take a guy to do fifty or sixty different operations on separate parts, not knowing what he would use for fixtures. And it was kind of complicated and technical. It's

a miracle that I did it.

RB: At this time had you an opportunity on the side to do any drawing or painting?

WR: Oh, I tried to maintain -

RB: At home I suppose?

WR: I tried to do it, you know, but I was pretty depressed a lot. And it was during this time, of course, that I got very sick.

RB: Emotionally?

WR: Emotionally sick. You can understand why. I was so intense about what I wanted to do and financially it was so difficult. And just because of this man. You know, I blame him. They said my whole average was down. But it was not down because my marks were posted all the time; your marks were posted and... Well, anyway it was because they did not like what I did. And I was becoming then a rebel, you see. And as far as the little emotional business it was very bad in a way.

RB: What were its manifestations?

WR: Well, I got I didn't want to ride on busses or trains, any place. I got to the point where I'd walk down the street and for a flash I wouldn't quite know where I was, who I was, or anything - oh, just a flash, you know. And then I got to the point where I thought I couldn't even walk. You know I just got to the point where I was just - and it was strictly emotional as far as I'm concerned. I don't know what a psychiatrist would say. But I went to a doctor who was not a psychiatrist but who I firmly believe treated me much better than many analysts that I've heard about in New York. He was a young doctor at that time and he spent a great deal of time with me. And I used to go and see him and we'd just sort of talk. Which I later found out is more or less what you do with an analyst. So with the help of that, and then he gave me some sort of tranquilizer things - not really tranquilizers - he doesn't believe in tranquilizers, interestingly enough; but they are that sort of thing, and sort of induce you to talk more. And I eventually got over a great deal of it.

RB: I'm not quite clear, Bill, whether this was going on already while you were still in the art school before you got bounced out of it - or not bounced out - before you failed; or whether this began only after you left, and was going on parallel to -

WR: To be fair to the teacher that I mentioned - Schaeffer - it didn't just happen because of Schaeffer. I think this thing had been growing ever since I was about eighteen. Because I was rejected from the Army and I never did find out why. And as far as I know since my last physical checkup I still have nothing wrong with me physically. So I think that this man when I was eighteen and a half sensed that I perhaps was heading for emotional problems of some kind. And maybe I was just lucky that I hit this particular doctor in the Army - lucky because I didn't want to go in the Army; and that he figured I'd be better off not in the Army. Maybe I would have been better in it. Who knows? But I've found that no matter what I've had to do in life I usually manage to do it, even though I hate it. But I was beginning to feel not too well during school. But I think a lot of that was just pressure. Many of us didn't feel well.

RB: What seems strange to me is that you could be an efficiency expert in a factory, apparently getting fairly good wages, and presumably working regularly every day, --

WR: Yes.

RB: Well, I surmised you did. At the same time having the state of mind that you did.

WR: Well, I did.

RB: This was the case.

WR: That's right.

RB: While you had this job, which you needed,

WR: You see I still had nothing in mind but finishing that dumb school. And why I bothered to I'll never know. Because I've never used the degree that they gave me ever. And any biographical sketch of me that mentions it was not written by me because I do not in any way - I never mention them. I always say that Jock McDonald was my most important teacher. And those are the only biographical sketches that are really mine. I always say I spent five years learning what not to know at that place. Which is very important.

RB: Well, let me ask you this: Jock McDonald had befriended you before you failed? He couldn't use any influence? Or he expressed - you kept in touch? Or -

WR: He did everything he could. I kept in touch. He did everything he could possibly do. Everything he could do.

RB: To get you back?

WR: Yes. And he was constantly fighting these battles with three or four students always. And he helped many painters in Canada that have become well-known in Canada. I'm one of the few - and I'm saying it completely immodestly - that still give credit to McDonald, and that ever did. But I do and I always will. I feel that McDonald in many ways was perhaps even a greater teacher than Hofmann because McDonald would - he could take a talent, a completely raw thing and nurture it and develop it patiently, whereas Hofmann, it seems to me - I love him very much - but I mean he's just different. I did go down for about six criticism classes and Hofmann didn't teach me at all. And in fact never really criticized my work. He just sort of said he liked it because I think he sensed that I was already sort of on my own track. But he I noticed with other students would just sort of throw out a line. It would be very profound and if they didn't get it then that was too bad. They'd have to go back the next week and get it. Whereas Jock would very carefully - and Jock selected the books I was to read. He wouldn't let me read *In Search of the Real* by Hofmann until I was in fourth year. And I didn't do it. I did everything he told me.

RB: What sort of books did he have you read, do you remember?

WR: No. Books by Kandinsky and maybe Moholy-Nagy.

RB: These were all art books? Theoretical art books? On aesthetics?

WR: Yes.

RB: This was while you were first a student? Or after you --? Did you do some of this reading during the period of emotional breakdown? Or while you were an efficiency expert? Or -

WR: I don't recall that. I don't recall doing too much in the way of art work during this time, this two-year period. I was just concentrating on doing the job. One good thing about the job: you had to do sketches on time study of the part sometimes, of the machine parts. And I used to do great elaborate sketches of the parts in three dimensions and so on. The other guys would just do a plan view and a side view. But I used to get kind of fun out of doing that. But I don't really recall on that. But the emotional breakdown didn't take the form of my being confined to bed or anything. Many people knock around in this state. But I being -

RB: Well, you speak about reluctance to get into busses and all sorts of things. There must have been a complication in daily living.

WR: Yes, it was. So finally what I decided to do was to get on an airplane because I thought if I get on an airplane I can't get off. So I just took a flight to Rochester for absolutely no reason except to help myself get over this thing. It took an awful lot of courage. Anybody that listens to this thing and knows these feelings will know what I mean. I figured, you know, I get this funny sensation that I get, that I think I'm going to do, or faint, or go crazy or something, you think all sorts of things. What can I do? So I did this. I would fly to Buffalo and back. It was only twenty-five minutes. So I did this sort of thing.

RB: What benefit --?

WR: Well, the benefit was that I could then ride on busses because I knew I could get off a bus and so on. I do think perhaps now that you mentioned it earlier, that my physical growth probably had a lot to do with this. I was still even growing in my twenties. I grew when I was twenty-six even; I started to grow again.

RB: How tall are you now?

WR: I'm not quite six foot. But almost. I'm about five eleven and a half, or something. But I grew a little bit more again at twenty-six. At twenty-two or at twenty-five I weighed, for instance, - it sounds ridiculous to talk about these things, but I think it's connected with the illness perhaps - I weighed like maybe 135 pounds. And at thirty, thirty-one anyway I weighed about 190. Now I'm down to about 170 which is about what I should weigh.

RB: You have fairly big bones?

WR: Yes, now. But I wasn't particularly - I was extremely skinny. But, of course, a lot of that was because I didn't have enough food. I moved to Toronto, I forgot to say, in third year - in my first third year.

RB: Oh. Well, you failed out your third year?

WR: Yes. But in that first third year -

RB: During that time you were living then - where were you living?

WR: In Toronto in a reasonable rooming house along with another art student. But a lot of times I wouldn't have enough money to buy food. I really think this is one of the reasons I was skinny. I didn't eat enough.

RB: Well, that might well have affected your general health. Why did you not stay at home? I mean

WR: Well, because of a lot of reasons. It was getting rather difficult. I guess it was my emotional problems, too, you see. I was getting so irritable with everybody. And I figured I should get out. And then when I was twenty-one, this was before third year, that's when I met Helen, you see; really met her. I knew her from when I was about - I actually knew of her when I was about thirteen or fourteen.

RB: Well, since we mentioned Helen, who is your wife, let us have you say what her name was before you married?

WR: Helen Marie Higgins. She hates the names Helen Higgins. Because she's so good-looking and beautiful and so on.

RB: She certainly is. Well, she was a native of Brampton, was she? They were in Brampton? I think she told me today she had seen you as a child earlier than that.

WR: Yes, she saw me when I was a newspaper boy. I used to have a newspaper route and that's when she first saw me. She was about twelve.

RB: Because you were a friend of her older sister?

WR: Well, her older sister had a crush on me. Which later didn't develop into anything. Yes, Helen saw me at that time. But Helen was very popular I think with a kind of more glamorous group of people than I. She'll probably laugh to hear this; but I think so. At high school. And then anyway I met her at a - I was at a teen age dance - you know they used to have these teen age things, high school dances sort of... And I think I was out of high school but we could go in; we had gone to the high school. And that's where we sort of met. She was about sixteen, seventeen.

RB: Well now, this was while you were still in high school?

WR: No, I was twenty-one.

RB: You were by then in the art school?

WR: I was in art school, yes; I was in second or third year, I can't remember.

RB: So you already knew her and were seeing a great deal of her at the time you had to leave art school, is that it?

WR: Yes. Right. And she helped me a great deal in many, many ways.

RB: All the time you were working as a timekeeper and so on you were still - well, she was your girl friend.

WR: She helped me a great deal at this point.

RB: What was she doing herself?

WR: She was an executive secretary, an excellent one. And she could have done other things. She could have modeled but it was a kind of a rough life, I don't know, it didn't appeal to her much. She did a little bit of amateur acting. I don't know if she would have developed into an actress, if it wasn't for the trouble I caused by being such a burden, you know. She was determined to get me through that college. And at one point I remember I didn't have enough money - it seems to me I needed a hundred dollars - recently in Canada I was criticized for this, believe it or not. They didn't know this story. But they criticized me for taking money from my wife. But that shows you the provincialism of that country. But she did give me I remember a hundred dollars. She had saved a hundred dollars, the only hundred dollars she had managed to save in her life, and she gave it to me so I could go back to school, because she was determined I was going to go back. But she helped me in many other ways.

RB: You were engaged at this time? Or just friends?

WR: No, we were going quite steadily. We weren't engaged.

RB: You weren't officially engaged.

WR: One unfortunate sad thing again. I thought, my God, I met Helen and she was so vivacious and happy and so on and I found out that the year I met her mother who was then forty-four was dying of cancer. I hate to be maudlin. But this is the truth. But, you know, this helped me, believe it or not, because here I thought - well, at first I thought here's somebody that is going to pull me out of this state of depression. Then I found this out and I nearly flipped. But then I found that I had to sort of smarten up and this helped me a great deal I think because I then had to bolster her up, you see, during this terrible period.

RB: Her mother was ill for many months?

WR: About a year.

RB: And she was working at the time?

WR: Yes.

RB: But she had, of course, the burden at home. Is Helen an only child? No -

WR: No, there's a sister and two brothers. At that time one boy was thirteen and the other was five. It was very sad.

RB: Oh, they were quite young?

WR: Yes. She was only forty-three or something, you see. But the father was a lot older actually. He was maybe fifteen years older.

RB: Was Helen's mother German? She spoke -

WR: Yes.

RB: Her mother was German, and her father would then be Irish.

WR: Irish-English or English-Irish.

RB: Well, so she had a lot of problems, duties at home.

WR: It was pretty grim.

RB: Oh, it must have been just terrible. Absolutely terrible. Well, how did you then manage to get back into the school? With her hundred dollars of help, but you must have saved a little yourself through this job?

WR: Mmhmm. Well, the hundred dollars came some other time in the middle of a year or something, I forget when. Yes, I saved more money and managed to go back. And worked at various odd jobs like all students did that didn't have enough money to go to school. And I went back the third year.

RB: Had you been in touch during this two-year interim with Jock McDonald?

WR: Off and on, yes.

RB: I forgot to ask, did you go much to his home and things like that?

WR: Yes. And then that third year I just passed. I was getting wilder and wilder in my work by their standards. But they passed me. And then in fourth year, which is the so-called graduating year, which was really my fifth year by this time, McDonald said - I was beginning to have trouble with some of the - Schaeffer was sort of bugging me it seemed again - and so McDonald said, look, smarten up and do everything they want you to do to get this thing. Because he was hoping maybe I could get a scholarship. Which was the furthest thing from my mind. I didn't get one. But at any rate -

RB: To go abroad? Or -

WR: Anything! He wanted me to come to New York. So I did everything they wanted me to. But, for instance, with Schaeffer, who then had the museum class and we were doing Aztec stuff, and I loved it, and I would do quite a lot of variations on Aztec statues, so he would ask for one thing in color or something. I would do two so that if I took liberties he couldn't say... He was speechless. You see, I did twice as much every time for Schaeffer. I ended up getting ninety all year for Schaeffer. Now also what I think encouraged them to give me a better

mark that year - because my work got more and more radical. So it wasn't because my work was toeing the line. And it wasn't because they were becoming progressive because they still aren't. But I was already exhibiting in professional shows up there. And I think in the second third year I exhibited in what they call the O.S.A., which is Ontario Society of Artists, along with four or five other young moderns. And it hit all the newspapers. Made headlines that all these screwball doodlers and so on were being accepted in the show. And some of the old members quit. So I had a little bit of -

RB: Who was behind that?

WR: This jury just decided that they should - these very same people that were part of the School some of the jury members were teachers at the College that would fail you if you did an abstract painting at school, rejected the work of the people they were giving honor marks to in school for academic entry, and allowed me and three or four other people in with our abstracts because it was beginning to happen down here and they knew it. And - well, my God, it had been happening down here for ten years. So they, you know, figured they had to get with it I guess. So they let us in. which was their big mistake. So that by the fourth year I was a young student with a bit of a name up there, you see. Here were all these honor students doing academic painting, figure paintings and so on, getting 90 and nobody ever heard of them. And here I was with a little bit of a reputation as an artist already. And then I won a scholarship in my last year with the Hallmark Christmas card thing - an international competition - thousands and thousands. Al Key was in that. He won one too. I did a straight non-objective watercolor. I didn't do any Christmas card. In fact I was in New York at that time. It was my first trip. In fact, none of them were Christmas cards; they were all sort of paintings.

RB: Well, let me understand that. You said you were in New York. You mean you came down just as a traveler or tourist or something? Or what?

WR: Yes, I came down as a tourist.

RB: What year would that be?

WR: It must have been 1952.

RB: You came alone?

WR: No, I came with a friend of mine - Hopkins. He's now a priest.

RB: And you came down by train? Or -

WR: Bus. A horrible bus trip. Nineteen hours.

RB: What was your main reason for coming?

WR: I don't know. McDonald kept saying I had to see New York. That was the time I went to Hofmann for about six weeks.

RB: Oh!

WR: But let me say first - we're getting - something went wrong here.

RB: Yes.

WR: Well, wait a minute; I'll tell you. I graduated in 1951.

RB: You received a degree?

WR: Oh, yes. First class honors. Imagine!

RB: What was your degree called?

WR: A.O.C.A. - Associate of Ontario College of Art. You see up there all the artists have initials after their names, you know. A.O.C.A. And then if you belong to the O.S.A. it's O.S.A. And then the Canadian Group of Painters, C.G.P. And then A.R.C.A. And, good Lord, it's ridiculous. Can't you just see a Picasso with A.R.C.A., O.S.A., and so on! Well, that's what they do. I graduated with first-class honors of all things. Because of these things though. Oh, no, it wasn't in New York I won the scholarship at school. I won a scholarship in Canada. That was it. I won a prize. And so with the prize winning and getting into these professional shows then I was accepted in another professional show now that I remember - I really think this is what they decided they'd better get a little piece of me here, you see, because I might amount to something yet. And so my marks went shooting skyward, you see. Suddenly I'm an honor student, you know. It was as phony as it could be. I told this to one person that's a trustee

and he had the whole thing investigated but he didn't get anywhere. Because I'm positive it was absolutely phony and fixed. I said this on television, too, so I don't give a darn. It had to be, you know; my work was more radical and these people were just the same. Well then, in 1951 I was out of school. A funny thing happened there.

RB: This is before you made this trip to New York?

WR: Yes, I'll tell you. In '51 at the graduation exercises - three days before I was on my bicycle and I fell off and hurt my knee and couldn't bend my leg. And then as girls and boys went up to get their diplomas - some of them had artificial limbs because they were in the war - stiff legs and so on... Well, I go roaring up there to get my diploma and with this stiff leg I can't bend my leg. And people are applauding like mad. And I thought, holy cow, I guess I've made it; they've accepted me. And then before I got back down I realized they were applauding my stiff leg. They thought this poor guy has got an artificial leg; he was in the war, and here he is. Oh, God!

RB: You weren't accused of having done it just to win popular support, were you?

WR: And then at any rate at that point I got a job.

RB: Just before we leave here I meant to ask you: through this whole series of years you talk about your teachers -McDonald, of course, was a big influence - sometimes people have fellow artists that they're close to from whom they learn quite a bit. Now you haven't mentioned any of your fellow students by name or as personalities. Did none of them figure really seriously?

WR: No. none. I'll tell you what happened. And practically none of them would speak to me because I did this funny work, you see; this work that looked like - by "funny" I mean abstract, semi-abstract. No, they wouldn't even associate with me. And in third year they didn't understand Paul Klee; they didn't know what Paul Klee was about. This is what these men had brought these students to. They'd just look at Paul Klee and laugh. In third year. Imagine! After three years of intensive study. So what was I saying? - I forget what I was going to say.

RB: You said they wouldn't speak to you. That took really literally the form of - I mean what did you do about meals in the cafeteria if nobody --?

WR: Oh, well, it wasn't quite like a sit-in thing.

RB: You just felt you had no friends?

WR: I had about four or five that were with me and they used to get in to some very heated arguments over me apparently, according to what I heard. And one of my good friends was Muriel Kosteki and Muriel ended up in a mental home. Everybody thought Muriel was crazy then. I didn't. So I don't know what that means. I still don't think he was.

RB: Well, I take it your group was undesirable from the other students' point of view?

WR: No. well then, there was a girl - the wife of a friend of mine and a very healthy, normal girl - who liked my work. And two or three other people. But most of them, you see - they couldn't help it. they didn't know any better. And as I failed a year I was then with two groups of students. So this means I actually knew about one hundred different students. And of those one hundred I can think of about four that paint. And I'm the only one that's amounted to anything. I mean this sounds awful. But there's Gus Wiseman. But he's a local talent. They all are. They're all local talents, what I would call local or provincial painters. The furthest they will ever be able to get will be kind of like a pseudo-Mexican type, semi-abstract, Cubist kind of thing with figures and so on.

RB: In other words, you got this degree. And this was, say, the autumn of --?

WR: No, the spring of 1951. Then I got a job at Robert Simpson's which is like Saks or something.

RB: A department store? Clothier or department store?

WR: Department store. A nice department store. And I did display work. I designed all the menswear windows for a year. I did - what was it? - eight windows every ten days I used to have to do.

RB: Did this pay as well or better than the job in the factory?

WR: Forty dollars a week. Horrible pay!

RB: But you wanted to do this more than the other kind of work?

WR: Oh, yes.

RB: This was more, of course --?

WR: It was kind of fun. I used to design the windows so there'd be a lot of art work in them and I used to have to do - God, I'd do - well, I had eight windows, great big windows, and I would do sometimes eight things eight feet by four feet for each window, you know. All depicting - say, if it was a sports car thing, or horses, or whatever it was, I always tried to incorporate art work. So I got a great deal of experience here and it brought a lot of attention to my work really even though it was a kind of a zany kind of... Do you remember a magazine called Park East?

RB: Yes.

WR: Well, they did sort of far out illustration cartoon kind of things. I did stuff like that in 1951 also. If Canada had been a little more with it I probably would have - I could have ended up doing that sort of work. But they were behind the times in the commercial field also. And so I couldn't get any work there. But I got sick of it and that forty dollars a week. And it was a pretty decadent crowd frankly.

RB: You mean your fellow workers? Or -

WR: Well, you know, they were - anybody that knows anything about display and interior work it's not very inspiring. I was in the minority if you know what I mean. I was working with a bunch of males but I was in the minority. I mean they were -

RB: Homosexuals?

WR: Yes. But not just homosexuals - like what they call queens, you know, real - the rouge and the whole bit. And it made a lot of laughs but you were kind of an outsider. It was interesting. But then I quit.

RB: You did this for how long?

WR: I did it for a year. Then I applied for a scholarship and won it. One thousand dollars.

RB: Where did you --?

WR: Ottawa. And do you know it was called The Canada Foundation. And who do you think put up the money but the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association. So my years playing hockey I guess paid off. The reason I quit playing hockey I'll just add was that I was playing right up to wartime and they wanted to conserve electricity so they checked off every other light and in doing so when the puck was shot, say, eight feet in the air it would disappear and I got hit on the head a couple of times, very badly cut over the eye. And a number of my friends were getting hurt. So I just said to heck with this. And that's why I quit. But anyway I got \$1,000 and came to New York.

RB: Well, you came to New York with the idea --?

WR: Wait a minute. My goodness, though, but I'm sorry. This was 1952 I quit Simpson's. Well then I had two horrible years in Toronto trying to make a living after that. I'm sorry. I had two horrible years trying to exist, trying to get something after I quit Simpson's. And I couldn't get any kind of teaching. They wouldn't have me. I was too radical. And I also forgot to say I did have a class of my own at twenty years of age in Brampton.

RB: In drawing?

WR: Yes, drawing and painting. Academic stuff.

RB: What sort of - where was that set up? I mean -

WR: In Brampton with the Recreation Center, community center thing.

RB: Was it a town-supported thing? Or a private institution?

WR: Kind of town and kind of private. It wasn't quite organized to the point of a real community center yet.

RB: What sort of people did you have as students? Children? Or -

WR: Amateur painters. No, adults. Another job I had now that I'm thinking of it, I did work at a summer camp as a counsellor - no, no, not as a counsellor - as an arts and crafts teacher. But that doesn't have much importance. But I had these two years after I quit Simpson's. And they were dreadful, dreadful years because I couldn't get anything. But all this time I was exhibiting and getting a reputation.

RB: Where were you painting? You lived in a boarding house still? Or -

WR: I lived in a rooming house. And then I had a studio. Believe it or not I did have a studio in a fantastic old house, you know, a good big room and a big studio where all artists lived. And I managed to pay forty dollars a month somehow for it. And all this time though I got money now and then, one way or another. I'd sell a painting now and then. A couple of hundred dollars. And I did build up quite a reputation as a young painter.

RB: Purely within the city of Toronto, I suppose?

WR: No, it was becoming national, you know.

RB: Well, how was it becoming --?

WR: Well, because the only way we could -

RB: Because you didn't have a show -

WR: Nobody had a gallery. There weren't any commercial galleries. And that's what we'll do on the next tape. We didn't have any commercial galleries at all. I mean there were two or three commercial galleries that handled second-rate masters and some of the Group of Seven. But the only way you could show would be in what they called group or Society shows that were juried by five men, three or four of whom would always be academic people. So your getting into these shows was extremely difficult. But because they did let us in in 1951 - we would get one small thing in or maybe one big thing once in a while - and it just grew. Some of these Societies were national. Like the Canadian Group show. And that would tour the country. And then we had one art magazine. A kind of government thing I think.

RB: What is that?

WR: Canadian Art.

RB: Canadian Art, which is still functioning.

WR: And once in a while we'd get reproduced in that. So that I became, along with a few others, known as a young Canadian painter.

RB: You were using the name William Ronald in this particular period?

WR: Oh, always. I always did. Right from when I was a cartoonist like in 1949.

RB: But weren't you enrolled as William Smith in school?

WR: That's right.

RB: Or were you called William Ronald?

WR: But I worked under Ronald. At school I signed - my professional stuff was Ronald like when I was entering exhibitions when I was at school. I was one of the only students, one of the very few students that actually did submit to exhibitions, too, I think, during the time I went to school. Three or four others did I think. But it's interesting because, you know, I was not one of their favorite or best students until the last year when they gave me honor marks. Which was ridiculous. You know I didn't hardly even go to school the last year.

RB: I wonder if before we completely finish your schooling if you ought to say - amplify further what you have to say about Jock McDonald's influence as a teacher, what you learned from him specifically, because you spoke of him before, you know, when you were dropped and then we haven't -

WR: Well, I don't know if we have enough time right now to really say all I should say. I really don't know. He taught me so much I wouldn't know where to begin. It's a subject in itself almost. I learned a great deal about - aside from maybe a little tiny thing we could touch on and then we'll go back to it another time - art politics.

RB: Oh!

WR: You know, which a lot of painters - take a painter like Parker, say, here - Ray Parker - he'd never known about these things maybe. Or even maybe Kline wouldn't. Maybe. I don't know. Well, Kline probably did.

RB: What did he tell you about art politics?

WR: Well, he'd tell me the whole inside bit; know what to expect. Because we were at the mercy of our fellow artists and no matter what they say about dealers there's no worse enemy for you the artist than his fellow

artist. Because you get involved in organizations then. And organizations are run by organizers. And organizers are usually second-rate or not creative talent. And they're guys that need organizations. In their creative field anyway they need organizations to have a name. and so they're the ones that attend the meetings and so that their thinking, their policies run these things. So that I was pretty much made aware of things and knew when to expect a disappointment or, you know, a lot of things. I was on the inside of everything that no painter my age was up there. That was when I was in my late twenties. But he taught me -

RB: Well, I can see that his influence - you mentioned that he submitted books for you to read - his influence was intellectual as well as purely in terms of painting as such.

WR: Yes.

RB: he was trying to build you as a man, as a mind. I presume?

WR: Yes. Well then, I think I got to a point where I kind of - I hate to say - outgrew him, you see. And he knew it. He knew it at that point.

RB: When was this?

WR: Well, I'd say it was about -

RB: Before you left the school?

WR: No, no. After I left school. About 1953 perhaps. I don't say I outgrew him but I mean he then started to treat me as a fellow artist.

RB: As an equal - yes, a fellow artist.

WR: Yes.

RB: But you were seeing him then only socially, of course?

WR: Well, we had a studio in the same building too by this time. I got him a studio. I forced him - he wouldn't, you know - he was working so hard, but I made him get a studio and forced him to - it ended up finally with me telling him most of the things he taught me.

RB: You retaught him his own teaching.

WR: Yes.

RB: Well, I could see it was a kind of give and take, as any educational experience probably is. Teachers always very close -

WR: It was very close to a father-son thing, really. Very close to it. except he had no - he didn't have any of that sort of strong attachment.

RB: Did he have any children?

WR: Yes, he had one girl but she was far away. But he wasn't possessive in any way. He was very outgoing with many other people. But I was one of the closest. And I became better known so that they associate me with him quite a bit. He was a very refined gentleman on the surface as far as the public knows. He was extremely refined and diplomatic and so on. Whereas I'm very outspoken and shake them up quite a bit. But I knew Jock quite well and that he wasn't everything that, you know, I mean not that I - he wasn't exactly as they thought he was. He had his moments. This is a Scotch thing, you see. He was extremely Scotch and had had a very strict upbringing; very strict. He used to - oh, and he told me... And we would spend hours just talking. Did you ever meet Jock? You did.

RB: I did meet him -

WR: Well, he was a great conversationalist, you know.

RB: I just met him briefly.

WR: He would spend hours just telling me stories. He told me fantastic stories about his own life. He was a great storyteller. And he used to profess to have ESP and, oh, he had a lot of stories about that. And he was interested in mysticism and Youspensky, you know. Do you know about Youspensky, the philosopher, I guess you could call him? And, oh, he had many interests.

RB: Well, do you think he was too dispersed intellectually to be as effective as a painter as he might have been?

WR: He was simply too physically exhausted. I can't even teach one whole day a week and do the painting I do. Hofmann is an exception. But McDonald - to teach four days! Oh, no! I don't know how he ever did it and live to be sixty-three. And the last few years he really painted a great deal and really tried to keep up with us younger people. It killed him.

RB: It was economic necessity that obliged him to --?

WR: Do you know how much money he made? He didn't even make \$5,000 a year when he died! And with all this teaching in that Godforsaken place! And this was after thirty or forty years of national reputation, in fact, international in a sense. I mean he was known in England in certain parts and in parts of Europe and so on.

RB: Did they come to him from abroad as they came to Hofmann?

WR: No, because you see here you've got a big country and you become international sort of automatically just as you do in Paris sort of. If Jock had been in the States he would have been just like Hofmann.

RB: Did he aspire to come here?

WR: I tried my best to get him. But he was extremely nationalistic and patriotic to Canada. He wanted Canada to make a statement. You know, he really wanted to help Canadian art. He really did. And I tried everything to get him to leave the last five years of his life because he would have been so much better off here. But he wouldn't do it.

RB: Well, I still would like to know a little more about what he actually taught you as a painter in painting; or perhaps it's not possible to say but I just thought it was a good time to go into it.

WR: Well, he just taught me all the basic elements of abstraction even. He started there. For instance, he'd say "make your whites move." Make your whites move all the time. And I don't know. He just, you know, spent so much time with me that... Then he would, you know, discover a new painter. Or he'd start getting interested in, say, Dubuffet and then we'd have a long talk - we'd go and have a coffee for three hours. He told me all this in a restaurant or -

RB: --

WR: Well, he may be. Maybe he went to Europe and got a scholarship or something. Once in a while he'd get something. He'd be over there. He knew Dubuffet. I just thought of Dubuffet. He would explain to me -

RB: He admired him, of course?

WR: Yes. And he would explain to me what was behind him, say. This doesn't sound like it makes much sense because down here a twenty-year-old person knows all these things, but up there you don't. it's much different.

RB: Well, they know it in New York perhaps. They don't necessarily know it anywhere. But this is the sort of thing -

WR: Certainly not then you didn't know it up there anyway. Now you know it.

RB: Well, I think at twenty-one hasn't had time to have sorted out all the reputations of teacher -

WR: Well, twenty or twenty-three.

RB: And a teacher who's talking in his own mind to a young man can be very influential.

WR: Mmhmm. And he was extremely encouraging always. He just praised my work to the skies and say it was just, just great.

RB: Well, but intelligently, I take it? I mean -

WR: Oh, of course! But listen, I had about twenty instructors and every single one of them was down on me. Every one except McDonald. He was the only one. I mean he had to do this or I would have never been able to continue. This was the only thing that kept me going was McDonald. That's all. Nobody else. He was the absolute. And then in my last year before I graduated he kept them in session from 4:00 o'clock until 8:30 trying to get me a scholarship. And they wouldn't do it. I didn't even know that for months. But it's a fact. No, he was the only one except this man Stanley Moyer whom they fired for no reason at all. Mr. Haines died; I forgot to tell you that. But McDonald is something I have to think about.

RB: Well, how was the faculty controlled? I mean, for instance, the Art Students League is a sort of cooperative here in New York and I don't know how they appoint instructors. But how were the instructors up there appointed? How did McDonald hold his job?

WR: McDonald got it I think through George Pepper who was a friend of his.

RB: How come he didn't get fired himself?

WR: Because he was - it's a different question to answer except he was such a fine man that it would almost be impossible. And he was a strong man. You see this man Moyer was a wonderful man, a gentle man, he was the kind of man they could do things to and get away with. But Jock was very well known in spite of all these things. And extremely well thought of by many people outside of the art world - outside of the art school anyway - or artists. He was extremely well thought of by many people all over the continent as a matter of fact. And in fact in Europe. I mean I think he knew Hofmann from quite far back; I mean ten years or so, or more. So they just couldn't because he just had a thing with... As time went on he got a bigger following, you see, among the students. And when he died I happened to be - I went up there, of course, and I went around the school just to see and the students were just so despondent. I went to the funeral home. The casket was closed and no flowers. A beautiful young girl came in - because the young girls used to like Jock. He was a gentleman, that was it, a good looking Scotch guy. And she just stood there for about twenty minutes with tears streaming down her face just crying like mad.

RB: Did he die suddenly?

WR: He died of a heart attack, yes.

RB: Oh. So without warning more or less?

WR: Well, apparently he'd had one about a month before and didn't tell me; I didn't know about it. So it was a very big shock to me. Then he had great tribute paid to him many, many times since his death now. Just as he always said they... I think he knew they would do this to him, you know. You see Hofmann is so lucky he's lived to be the age he has because if McDonald had lived another fifteen years, like Hofmann has, he'd have known this. Because he was coming to this fame up there and he'd have gotten over the border, too. He would have got international -

RB: Recognition.

WR: Yes. Yes, he would have. But he just didn't make it. He just literally killed himself. He was gassed in the first war which probably didn't help him any either.

RB: Would you think that without his encouragement you would have returned to the school?

WR: I don't think so.

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM RONALD - REEL #2

AT KINGSTON, NEW JERSEY. OCTOBER 26, 1963

INTERVIEWER: RICHARD BROWN BAKER

SIDE 2

RB: Richard Brown Baker

WR: William Ronald

RB: This is Richard Brown B

aker on October 26, 1963. I have returned to Kingston, New Jersey to talk again with William Ronald. A beautiful, warm, autumnal day. Since I was here there seems to have been a number of developments. Bill, you have laid aside the figurative paintings that you were working on, you've acquired in your studio a magnificent new apparatus for listening to music while you paint, and you seem to have taken up physical culture to quite an extent in the last few months. So before we go back to your life of a decade ago we might have a few words on these three topics.

WR: Is there any need to check the level before we go any further? Now the question was what?

RB: Well, I mentioned three developments in your life. Let's take the least significant - well, I mean the music. I don't know whether we've discussed the fact that you like to have music playing while you paint.

WR: I don't know if we did either.

RB: Well, I notice these two -

WR: Stereo outfit here. Yes. I love to have music with me and - well, sometimes if I'm overworked and I'm sort of down when I'm working I'll pick a particular kind of music, a piece of music that I think will lift me up. I have quite a vast collection now. I've been collecting LPs ever since they came out and I have everything from early jazz to progressive jazz and classics and 20th century and back. I'm more interested in 20th century classical music it seems, but I have some of the other stuff too.

RB: Well, at the present time you have these two speakers one on either side of your -

WR: My easel which is an eight foot by eight foot piece of masonite peg board.

RB: So when you're in the painting position you are ideal -

WR: It blasts my head off.

RB: Yes. You play it - when you come in you normally set up a musical program, do you -

WR: Right.

RB: -- before you begin to paint?

WR: Yes. I pick out exactly what I want. I sort it out before I come over here and I know by my mood. I've been playing certain records I get up here and if I get myself into - like I say that painting is basically emotional - and I get into such a state and it's an absolute scream, if they had a camera on me, no kidding, there's one guy gets me. And that's Sinatra. I think he's a great artist with a song, popular songs. He's the only popular artist I'm interested in. And he has an album out called "All Alone," and it has the saddest, most melancholy, melancholy stuff on it you've ever heard and absolutely beautiful I think. And there's one song by Irving Berlin - I think you'd never guess it was Berlin - written six months after Berlin's first wife died, or wife, I don't think he's had any more, I guess he has. And, boy, it's the saddest thing and it just breaks me up. And then there's another one where Sinatra does a soliloquy. He sings about a little girl. And every time I cry. I feel like an idiot but I can't help it. Tears start coming down.

RB: I think it would be an interesting experiment if one of the scientific members of the Princeton faculty came in every week and set up his own program of music to play for you with you having no control over it to see whether week by week there would be any correlation between the nature of the paintings produced and the kind of music forced upon you by this experiment.

WR: ... because some days I just can't stand certain things. I haven't been able to play Sinatra on his slow stuff. He sings slower than anybody I've ever known. And these slow things are so melancholy I haven't been able to play any for the last three weeks; I can't play them at all. And I love them. Other times I can just relax. But I don't think anybody from Princeton University would be much interested in coming in, and I probably wouldn't allow them in anyway.

RB: I should imagine not, not for that purpose. Well, you have actually been under considerable pressure in the last month or two and I think that may be one reason - you told me before we started the tape that you had taken up this exercise program. Do you want to say a few words about that? Because this may be only really something of the present. Of course, you were quite an athlete as a boy.

WR: Yes. No, I had thought about it for a long time and then when I found out I had to do this exhibition -

RB: Well, you might explain the "had to." Here we are in October now.

WR: October 1963. And I had more or less planned to have an exhibition around March 1964. And so I'd been sort of experimenting and playing around doing those figure paintings that we were speaking about and so on, and planned to start my show now and then have it ready about the end of January, you see. Well then, my dealer Mr. Kootz - three of the French painters couldn't make their schedule and he asked me if I could -

RB: When was this?

WR: He asked me this - I guess the middle of August he did ask me -

RB: Just after your vacation?

WR: He proposed it then. I didn't know if he was really serious. And after my vacation - no, that wasn't it - it was the first of August. And at the end of August then he made a definite date. He was serious about it.

RB: Moving it ahead from March to -- ?

WR: To December. And actually this is my third one-man show in eleven months because I did twice my normal output last year. I did fifty paintings last year which meant I actually did enough paintings to supply two one-man shows. And I had one in New York in January and one in Toronto in March. I actually had a retrospective of sorts in Princeton University in February. And I'm having this one now in December. So I am exhausted. But that's all part of it. That's all part of the business of -

RB: Well, you always get worked up but perhaps this time -

WR: ... just a little bit more. I don't really object to that kind of pressure really. In fact I like it. This is a little bit much. But I like that kind of thing. I even like a dealer that does pressure me. When you take a man of Mr. Kootz' age who is still that much interested, you know, in a sense - there may be other difficulties that bother me. But this sort of thing doesn't because this show actually to me it means that he's interested in seeing what's happening next, he can't wait really, this is really what it is; he can never wait to see what I'm doing next. Or what any of us are. And a lot of the young dealers haven't even got this enthusiasm, you know. This has a great deal to do with his success I think. He works very hard too. He works very hard.

RB: Pushing people in a sense?

WR: Yes, but he works - no, but he works hard for you, you know.

RB: Yes.

WR: When your show is on you're the only guy in the place. And I don't know how he does it. he does do it. I've seen him with everybody. When I'm on I'm the only painter and maybe they'll come in to look at Soulages instead but that doesn't matter. He'll still push me. And when Park is on, or whoever it is he's with them. I like somebody like that. I've always wanted that sort of thing. This is just a bit much but I don't - I never say no, so thank God I'm not a woman. But I don't believe in saying no.

RB: So when he told you you had to have the exhibition in December -

WR: I quickly said I would.

RB: You immediately agreed?

WR: Immediately.

RB: And then the headaches began -

WR: Right.

RB: When you started producing the work?

WR: I knew they would... but I'll tell you if I hadn't been experimenting so much there during the summer, you see, I'd have been all right. And then I did so much work the year before, the 50 paintings, and then the trip to Canada. That's really what put the final touches that month in Canada. You see last year was a bad year as far as the art market was concerned. And I think I came out fairly well thanks to my show in Canada. And part of that was due to the fact that I did a lot of publicity up there and, of course, probably if I mentioned that to my dealer he'd say well, maybe it's too bad my paintings don't sell themselves. Nevertheless, in Canada that's the way you do things. And I worked very hard at that and I came back completely exhausted in every sense of the word.

RB: We are tying this in though at the moment to the specific, perhaps minor phase of your life, this program of gymnasium exercises that you -

WR: Well, I got thinking that I had emotional problems starting at about eighteen. And this was when I stopped competitive athletics and all that sort of thing. And I started to think that maybe if I got back into better condition, although I was in pretty good shape they said, but got really in good shape and disciplined - had to go some place else to get out of my studio and get away from the environment here into something completely different. You know I hardly ever see anybody else, you see I live out here all by myself - with Helen and Suzanne but we see very few people. It's not even like living in New York - and just to get out of all this. And it's

really I think done me a lot of good.

RB: What does it actually consist in? You go, I think you told me, to Trenton.

WR: Mmhmm. About ten miles away.

RB: To a - what --?

WR: A gym actually. I go to the gym part. And it's actually body building and lift weights and all that sort of thing.

RB: Do you want to describe it a little more? Or do you think it's superfluous?

WR: Well, I don't know, it's -

RB: I think it's interesting you're the first artist I've come across doing this.

WR: To look at Al Leslie he must have done it.

RB: That's right. I think Al Leslie was professionally an acrobat! Many years ago.

WR: Oh, I didn't know. He looks like it.

RB: Yes, I think he was.

WR: Well, it's a very scientific approach they use. They start you very gradually and depending on your various defects, physically and so on and then -

RB: Did you tell them any particular goal you had in mind? That you wanted relaxation, that you wanted to build up any portion of your body or take off any portion? Or -

WR: No, they said I didn't need much of that but I did say - I just said I wanted to be in a little bit better condition and to relax or take tension off, not to sit in one of these chairs they have, vibrating chairs and relax. Some of the guys just go down there and sit in the steam bath and that sort of thing. But, no, I told them I wanted a change, something physical, not that painting is extremely physical but something more physical.

RB: Building up the muscles. Well, it would seem to me you are all well on your way to be the Hercules of the art world. That's why I'm bringing this up. You lift weights you said.

WR: Yes. It's fantastic. Already I life a hundred pounds with my feet yet on my back.

RB: With your feet? You're lying on your back?

WR: Yes. A hundred pounds I can lift - let's see, twenty times and then rest a minute. And that's only after about four months. It's unbelievable.

RB: And you hadn't done any of this gymnasium workout stuff ever before? Or did you do that in your boyhood?

WR: I did a little gym in high school but nothing like this. But it's extremely easy because they usher you into it very gradually depending on your age and your physical condition, etc. Except for the first day when I was just slightly stiff, just a little wee bit, I've never felt it at all. I just do it exactly the way they tell me and not a bit more. And I go two to three times a week. I try to. You should go at least twice a week.

RB: This takes the good part of a morning what with getting over there and changing --?

WR: Yes. I can't work in the morning and so it's perfect. I'm no good in the morning as far as painting. So it takes about two hours. But I can go down there and work out and come home and paint all day but I can't do it the other way around. I can't paint and then go down and do it. I've tried it.

RB: You're too tense?

WR: I guess so. I don't have the strength. I literally can't lift the stuff.

RB: Well, just a few minutes ago you were re-attacking an interesting big canvas making some changes in it and wearing yourself out, as it were. It's kind of -

WR: I'm exhausted now - not exhausted but I'm tired. I mean I couldn't go down there now and do this thing, I really couldn't. Yet many of the men have to and they do it. But I just can't. Painting is such a weird mixture of

emotion and physical - you know it's the emotional and the physical at the same time. But I've always wanted to do this anyway and I've just gotten around to it. And out here it's ridiculous, you live in the country and yet there aren't really any sidewalks. There are no places to walk. I do have a bicycle but it's extremely dangerous to ride it.

RB: You're right on a main highway, aren't you?

WR: Yes. And I find that in the States here, the Northeastern part, it's very hard to find a dirt road or something. Like in Canada you can go two miles out of a town and find a nice quiet dirt road, you know. Here I could drive many miles and maybe find a little piece of dirt road. But every road is almost a highway, you know. So that you do get out of condition. And I feel much better. Even though I'm under this pressure it's very good and some mornings I just don't feel any more like doing it and then I go and I'm so happy, I feel so much better. And then you accomplish so much it brings about a quick - what was it - development or something of the body so quickly, I mean it's amazing if you do it -

RB: The feeling of strength you've gained? Feeling of energy and general -

WR: Energy and... It is strength, too, you know, you do feel you are stronger. Like I have a trap door, as you see, to get up these stairs into my studio and it's quite heavy, and I lift it very easily now. And that's very good because painting is standing and reaching all the time and being able to hang in there that extra half hour physically is extremely important some days.

RB: What's the longest stretch of time that you paint consistently?

WR: Well, right now under this pressure I find I can't work too long at a time. I'll work maybe two hours at the most and then cut out and then come back. That's much cleverer to do that. In fact, a couple of times I've become almost ill and my doctor one time made me stay out of the studio a week; another time two days. And after the two days I came back and did a very good painting. It's extremely difficult for me to stay out of the studio though. He forced me too. He made me.

RB: Does that mean in normal conditions -

WR: I might paint longer but at this point - I don't know, I think Hofmann can paint for sometime, I'm not sure about that.

RB: What I'm trying to find out now is whether you take the conventional Sunday break in normal conditions?

WR: No.

RB: You work every day?

WR: Yes.

RB: That perhaps is bad, I mean for centuries mankind has known that a man should have -

WR: It probably is. Painters do it too. But I find I even like to work on Sunday. I like to work on days that I feel nothing is happening. That's perhaps because I worked a lot at night, you know, before. I like working at night too. There's a sense that nothing is going on, sort of peace and quietness, I don't know, I don't quite know what it is.

RB: Well now, let's turn to perhaps the most interesting development that I noted. When I was here we discussed this phase you were experimenting with of the human torso incorporated into painting. What led you to put this aside as an experiment? Did you ever do more than those two large paintings? Or three? Or -

WR: No, I guess I did not.

RB: After that?

WR: No, I don't believe so.

RB: Do you recall why you - what led to this --?

WR: Well, I felt - let me see how to put this - how can I say? It's difficult to say exactly how - I'll stammer around here. I'm under contract more or less to do an exhibition a year. Which I agreed to and I still agree to. I don't mind the idea.

RB: May I then intervene to suggest that what you're about to say is that you didn't feel that under the pressure

of time you would have had enough scope of leisure to --?

WR: No, that's not it exactly. If I'd really felt ready to show them I'd have either talked Mr. Kootz into not letting me show now or I'd have done it somehow. I didn't feel I'd done enough work in that area to really show them yet. You know you can't just... It would be as absurd for Andrew Wyeth to start to do abstractions and show them in six months. He couldn't do it. I'm positive he couldn't do it. And he's a very good painter and a very bright painter, a bright man, I think. But I don't think he could do it. But I still will continue to do it. And already I have different ideas. I do think that everything I do helps my painting and I think that the experience with those figures has, in a sense, even carried over into what I'm now doing a little bit. And then, of course, there was the fear on some people's part of being connected with Pop art. But I don't understand that. First of all there was one piece I know I did have some doubts but there was one piece that did look a little like Pop art. I know you even thought so. But I don't agree really because Pop art does not consist of... it consists of everything but what I - I mean the whole philosophy was different. But why everybody is afraid of being labelled Pop art -

RB: Well, who was afraid? I mean here you are in isolation - was it you --? Or -

WR: I don't know, there was just something.

RB: You say other people but... you were -

WR: You're putting me on the spot here. I can say but I just showed a photograph to my dealer and -

RB: Ah!

WR: And his reaction wasn't too favorable although I think if he had seen them in color -

RB: This was last summer? Or -

WR: Yes. But if I'd felt I wanted to do them this would not have mattered, believe me. Honestly.

RB: But this was a contributing additional factor? Your dealer -

WR: No, it didn't have any effect on what I was to do, I swear. No. Because if only because I felt that I was not ready; if I had been ready then I would have continued to do them regardless of anybody. Because you can't paint any other way if you're really going to be a good painter and amount to anything. You must only do what you feel. You must not compromise in your painting in any way AT all.

RB: Now this new phase of painting in a sense I think could be described as more closely related to the work, although it's different, of your last show than paintings embodying figures?

WR: Now really you stop and think about that and I wonder if that's true. The figure paintings had geometric squares and so on.

RB: That's what I'm about to lead up to.

WR: These have sort of interesting insofar as they have so-called kind of hard edge and yet they have rhythm in them and they have moment in some of the centers' images, but no action, and little texture. It's a weird kind of mixture.

RB: Well, I was trying to make clear that in addition to abandoning figures you seem at the moment also to have given up the use of the grid subordinate area.

WR: Yes, I think that's gone.

RB: -- which you were using in those two figurative paintings.

WR: Yes, that's right.

RB: And that was a late trend actually toward the end of your other show.

WR: That's right.

RB: So that you may come back to some other time. But the present set of paintings you're working on are not using that grid system at all.

WR: No.

RB: -- any more than they're using the figure system.

WR: Now they're using a figure system insofar as I think I always have and that is they have the central image which is very much like portrait painting, isn't it?

RB: They do have a central image, all of them, don't they?

WR: Even the first painting you ever bought of mine The Raven, you know, that's from my first exhibition I think this is maybe one of the reasons that Mr. Kootz was maybe attracted to my work because at that time most of the young painters and most of the painters were doing fragmented compositions, weren't they? I mean more or less de Kooning type of thing. And I got into the central image things and now... And Rothko, of course, has been doing it for many years. But his are different. They're not so much images as vaporous sort of things. But now there are many people doing central images if you notice.

RB: There's a difference though in the present central image from your earlier one which had in pastel and action paint surface -

WR: That's right.

RB: This area at the center of these paintings is apt to have a kind of lyrical treatment.

WR: Right.

RB: How would you describe this sort of --?

WR: It's more romantic. And that's actually the way I really am. I think I originally, even my first show that you saw was more a romantic type of show. It's more lyrical and -

RB: But how would you speak of this use of spot effect?

WR: In painterly terms?

RB: If it is a spot effect, this kind of - well, the painting that is opposite us contains a central area which is predominantly dark brown or black with bits of orangey and white rather misty forms that are definitely subordinated. One almost looks through the black into these things that are -

WR: Mmhm. I don't know, I think I'm beginning to find myself down here in this country. You see I seem to always kind of eventually when I find myself I rebel and in a sense I think if I manage to complete this show, and I hope and pray I do, it might be an interesting show after all because of the centers, you see. Because I'm going to have some movement and some vaporous, misty kind of sometimes almost Impressionist in it - not really, -- but some of the earlier bunch I did - quality. And when I say I'm finding myself I mean I usually find that I rebel against what is being done by almost everybody. And it's not that I don't like what - I love what other people do, you know; it's not that I hate the other painters at all. But it seems to be the way I am. I love living out here because the country is beautiful and I like the setup as far as living. But I also hate many things out here; and that's another reason I like it out here, you know. And it's sort of the same thing. And it might be an interesting show after all because on the scene today -

RB: To try to get a little farther on to the general characterization of this particular new set of paintings, despite the vaporous sort of inferior kind of treatment of the central image I think in all the paintings the outer areas are flatly painted which would be like your last show?

WR: Yes.

RB: Flatly painted, but nevertheless they're apt to be - these flat outer areas are apt to be pierced by spiny elements giving the central image in most of these paintings I've seen something of the suggestion, to me, of leaf, not that they look like leaves.

WR: They could very well be. I haven't even thought of it, Dick, but it could well be.

RB: Well, it's an autumn day. One is apt to think of autumn foliage.

WR: There's a beautiful woods, a beautiful place. I wish we had time to go before you leave, called the Hantown Wood, I think. And we take Suzanne there. And it's absolutely beautiful. And I took a walk through there and it could very well be. And, as you notice, I have on the wall a few photographs. I have usually nothing around me in the way of anything visual because everything influences me. If I put a 1953 painting of mine up on the wall some place it somehow will come out on that easel. But I picked a series of photographs here and one of them has leaves in it. But on the other hand I did, I don't know if I - did I send you a Christmas card a few years ago on

about a three by four inch casein? - you said you never did get that?

RB: No, I didn't get that particular -

WR: But anyway I think I have some in the house and I'll show them to you. And actually they are the forerunner of this show. I did these with tempera. And it's amazing. That's why I say, everything I do eventually comes out. These figure paintings that I did something is going to come out of them. I don't know what but something will. And I did these little things and I gave them to people. They were a great deal of work.

RB: These were the Christmas cards of several seasons ago?

WR: Yes. Most everyone framed them and the people that didn't were scratched off my list.

RB: That was 1960 I think.

WR: Could be, yes.

RB: About that time. I was abroad that year.

WR: They were very attractive little things. And I used tempera. And I dropped on white on red and blue and so on and I got rather the same effect, you know.

RB: Central area.

WR: Central area. I would do the whole piece of board that way. Then I would block out. And that's how I arrive at this spidery things. But then if I have some of my older works here like to go back to 1951 and 1950 you would see a great deal of this linear, spidery thing. I don't know if I said this on a tape before -

RB: Well, go ahead and repeat it.

WR: -- what Rothko said to me once.

RB: You did quote him once.

WR: I guess I did say it then that we think when we're young that we have many things to say but as we get older we find we have only one thing to say. And the longer I live the more I find that's true. And what he meant, and I said it before was that we basically really do. And we keep going back, you know. And Duchamp, too. I don't know if I said this. Did I talk about Duchamp and Pop art?

RB: I don't recall that.

WR: Well anyway, he said - I was curious... I had dinner with him, I found him to be -

RB: When was this? Recently? Or -

WR: A few months ago. Maybe we did talk about it, I don't remember.

RB: No.

WR: I found him to be a very fine man. I liked him very much.

RB: Had you never met Marcel Duchamp?

WR: Only to say hello and that, you know. But I thought he might be kind of a precious character and all that because of all the publicity and so on. But he was just a pure painter. I loved him. But I thought it would be interesting to talk about Pop art with him, you see, because of the Dada relationship. And he was quite happy with the whole scene. I mean he thought there was a great deal of difference insofar as that when they painted -

RB: His generation?

WR: Yes. That they didn't worry about dealers and money and stuff. But that's easy for him to say with all due respect. Because he had money. And a lot of those people seemed to have had money. Although Duchamp said - I think there were three brothers and two sisters, and the three brothers -

RB: Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp Villon.

WR: Yes. That's right. And the three brothers used to keep asking for money and he would keep giving them the money, and the sisters just took monthly checks. Well, by the time they were like fifty the three brothers had

shot the wad so they were broke. But they'd had a pretty good life up until that time anyway. And the sisters continued to get the money. But he said, "It takes the young to rediscover the old," you know. That's very good, isn't it?

RB: It's interesting.

WR: And he didn't have any bitterness at all. In fact he was quite happy. And then I played a tape recording to him that evening. This was at Brooks Bakeland's house.

RB: Bakeland?

WR: Bakeland. Yes, I don't know if I've mentioned them. They were important in my life. No, I guess I probably haven't mentioned them.

RB: No, I don't think so yet.

WR: Well, they came on the scene about 1954 or 1955.

RB: Well, that's beyond where we've yet got chronologically.

WR: Yes. Well, I just was at their apartment. We'll talk about them later then. Remember to ask me.

RB: NO, go ahead now while we -

WR: Well, Bakeland is the grandson or something of the man that invented Bakelite. And he's extremely wealthy.

RB: He should be.

WR: And very interesting people. He has a wife Barbara and - well, we are really getting ahead there.

RB: Are they somewhat your age? Or are they -

WR: A little older, not much.

RB: Because Marcel Duchamp is well over seventy.

WR: No, no, no, they're only a few years older. Very charming and interesting people. I saw a thing in the paper recently. He's gone to Peru or some weird place he's exploring. We'll get in to him later. But the thing is we were at their apartment and I took this tape that I did of a radio show on WBAI.

RB: Recently?

WR: I did the radio show, oh, I don't remember, a year or so ago. And it was a spoof on far out people because that's a very far out type radio station, see. It caters to all the far out types in a sense, intellectuals and... So I thought - this was supposed to be an art lecture - so I would do something that I'll see how hip these guys are because I have a theory that the so-called far-outs are very academic really in their own far out way, see. And I thought I'll just see how sharp they really are. And I put them on, you know for a change. And it was supposed to be an art lecture by me on me. Tworokov did one. And somebody else. Well, I played all sorts of strange music. Have I ever played you this tape?

RB: No.

WR: Well, that's something maybe we could get a copy of and give it to these people; they might be interested.

RB: I should think so. The Archives, you mean?

WR: I think it's good. I put a lot of work into it. I played music, I played and I recited nursery rhymes, and instead of playing Miles Davis and Thelonius Monk and all the hip jazz guys I played Glenn Miller's American Patrol and Jimmy Reid, a rock and roll singer. And, oh, I had a ball. And it was at the time of one of those bomb scares and I said, the last line was "I wonder what it's going to be like on the last night." And I had kind of a drunken singalong record that I picked up; so I thought it would be a singalong. Well, the whole thing was anyway that it was kind of Dada and yet kind of Rube Goldbergish. At any rate, Duchamp just loved it. He said he didn't know anyone was doing anything like that any more. He got a great kick out of it. He's very much alive, boy. He's a very bright man. And a very nice man.

RB: He seems to be a kind of older statesman of the New York art world. I've never met him but I -

WR: Well, I always thought, you know, that he was kind of precious and stuff and aloof. But he isn't. For instance,

we were at Bakeland's place and it's a very sophisticated penthouse, you know, and everybody there except for us were kind of poshy, and this blond walks in, a very chic looking thing about forty. And he called - I'm not going to say her name because I think she paints and somebody might know it - but he said, so and so, my, you're fat. That was his first remark. But I thought I like Duchamp. He's normal. I mean he's like a painter, you know. He hasn't got any manners. He comes right out and says it. And she was - it was all in good fun. But he since has had an operation or something and I don't know how well he is. But it's very interesting to talk to him. He likes that man Tinguely.

RB: Yes, Jean Tinguely.

WR: Likes him very much. It was Duchamp's icebox that - how do you pronounce it? - Tingu

RB: Well, I say - It's T-i-n-g-u-l-e-y.

WR: Well anyway, I think Duchamp gave him an icebox which -

RB: That's right. I saw it. That was in the New Realism exhibit.

WR: Well, that was Duchamp's -

RB: -- with the Pop art.

WR: So that makes it a bit funkier, as they say; it was Duchamp's icebox. And he thinks he's quite good; I think he does; I mean he seems to enjoy him anyway. Well, I don't know how we got on Duchamp.

RB: That was the thing that opened the door and introduced this hideous around, absolutely horrifying.

WR: Yes. Well, I enjoyed that evening anyway very much with Duchamp.

RB: Yes, it should have been a very stimulating experience. Were there other artists there? Or were you the only artist?

WR: Let me see, there was somebody named Biddle; that's kind of a big name, isn't it? And a very nice young man. And I think Pierre Matisse's son - would it be? - I believe.

RB: Well, it's my understanding that Madame Duchamp -

WR: She was there.

RB: -- is the former Madame Pierre Matisse, so that her son -

WR: Oh!!

RB: -- their son -

WR: I didn't know that.

RB: Yes.

WR: That's right. That's right. I did know it too now. That's right. Well, he was there.

RB: Yes. Well, he's part of the household I suppose. I've never met him.

WR: He's actually in San Francisco or something. He has an art gallery.

RB: Oh.

WR: And in fact he had heard this program strangely enough.

RB: On the radio?

WR: Yes, because they have a network. This Pacifica Foundation is sponsored is a sponsor... Have you ever heard of this radio station?

RB: I don't think so.

WR: Oh, you should! You pay twelve dollars a year to keep it on the air and they put on very interesting programs, and you should pay twelve dollars. And it's deductible.

RB: WBAI, you mean? Or the Pacifica Foundation?

WR: WBAI and it's called the Pacifica Foundation.

RB: Oh, I have heard of WBAI. I was thinking Pacific Foundation must be something in California.

WR: No, it's connected. And it's a little network. They played this program of mine twice in New York, once in the evening and once in the morning and then they sent it down to San Francisco and played it down there. And our friend the sculptor out here, I forget his name, Harry Balmer that you bought the sculpture from -

RB: Oh, yes.

WR: He heard it. Isn't that amazing? Too. He heard it in San Francisco.

RB: Well, that might be clarified. I think after we did the tape or at the time we were doing the last tape you drove me to Ringos, New Jersey to see some iron work done by some of what your guests had called an ironmonger who was a sort of sculptor in iron. Have you seen him since?

WR: I have seen him a couple of times, yes. He's very good and does these pieces of sculpture that you can buy for \$25.00.

RB: Or less. Because \$25 was the highest price.

WR: And they're good enough to be in many galleries in New York and if they were, they'd be \$250. But he believes that he'd like to do it this way. He has a wife and family and he said he can sell them at \$15 and \$25 so he sells them.

RB: He sells them by the roadside.

WR: He told me he made \$1500 last month.

RB: Did he really!

WR: Yes.

RB: Good heavens! Well, he also does things that aren't fine arts.

WR: Yes, but he's doing a great deal of fine arts. He's done two or three big things around town.

RB: As a matter of fact now that I think of it during the summer I visited somebody in Pennsylvania, I was taken to New Hope and I saw that piece outside a shop that we saw that he was working on.

WR: Oh, yes.

RB: It was really awful.

WR: Oh, yes.

RB: You remember that piece with bits of green metal.

WR: Yes, terrible. Just a display.

RB: Yes.

WR: But he tries not to do that I guess much. But he has to do it some. But he's doing all right. But I think we're getting off the subject.

RB: Well, yes. He had heard your program in California before coming East?

WR: Mmhmm.

RB: There's one other thing you mentioned that caught my attention. I don't believe I knew until today that you have kept a diary or journal.

WR: Not too long I haven't. It's only been the last year or two or so - two years. And it's very haphazard.

RB: Well, maybe we should wait chronologically to mention it but I was going to inquire if you had been keeping one through your boyhood and so on?

WR: No, unfortunately. I had thought that I might write, I do like to write, you know, and I've just written -

RB: Yes, I know. Well, you have published some things.

WR: Yes.

RB: We'll get to that -

WR: Yes. I might write it because I had an interesting boyhood as far as I'm concerned. And it's kind of funny now as I look back on it. and some day maybe I'll write it down.

RB: Well, you've already told us on the reel quite a bit about your boyhood.

WR: Yes I have. I'd forgotten that.

RB: Have you thought of any extraordinary aspects of it that you didn't --?

WR: No, I can't remember a thing at the moment. I've forgotten that I've even mentioned it. It's months ago now.

RB: Yes. Well, we went into your youth with some thoroughness I believe.

WR: I'm sure, I mean I know we did. I know it was thorough. I remember we were both exhausted.

RB: We have got chronologically - actually at the end of the last reel we were talking about Jock McDonald and you were speaking of his influence on you.

WR: We were to about 1952, weren't we?

RB: So we have had just about reached then but we have not -

WR: And I had worked for Simpsons and I was out of work now; I'm out of work now, 1952.

RB: I want you to sort of say a few things about your experience with Hofmann in New York. You mentioned that without going into it.

WR: Okay. I was there for about six weeks at that time in New York.

RB: Did you attend the school on Eighth Street regularly?

WR: No. No, I did not. Just let me say for a moment: I came down here with my friend Paul Hopkins who I mentioned before is now a priest, an Episcopalian priest; and then was not. I talked him into going to Hofmann because Hopkins is a very interesting character and has an interesting mind as far as religious circles are concerned, as far as I'm concerned. But the one thing he lacked was the ability to be creative, you know, in a sense. I mean he wanted to write and so on. And I thought maybe it would be good just to expose him to Hofmann even though he couldn't draw or paint and never had in his life. But anyway, so we came down together and I went for six weeks and I think I attended twice a week. And I took in paintings and Hofmann never to my memory criticized once.

RB: Your work?

WR: No. Because he would make remarks about it, usually favorable, because he felt, I think, I think he said it, I can't remember exactly, that I had arrived at something of my own, you see, at that point. And so that I took in all sorts of strange paintings to try to get a rise out of him but I couldn't. I took in one that looked sort of like Matta, the painter. And I thought, boy, this will get him, you know. And he just said that's a sort of a bland picture, what the French would call bland or something. And that's about all he'd say. But I learned a great deal just - I learned some from Hofmann from just listening to him criticize other people.

RB: Well, you attended sort of critiques, lectures or whatever?

WR: Yes. But he didn't have a profound effect, much as I loved him. He was a dear old man. But I still learned a great deal. I learned this: that Hofmann will answer a question, a most difficult question, which are usually the simple sort of questions, in six or eight or ten words and he never goes into it any further. And if you don't get it you come back tomorrow. And if you don't get it then you come back the next day. And, well, if you don't get it, that's your tough luck. And that's good. Because I found that the academic teachers so-called, you know, they would explain, explain and talk themselves into a hole and before you know it you didn't know where you were and they didn't know where they were and so on. So I learned this from Hofmann in my experience with being

interviewed or lectured: you answer the thing and that's it. then I think one of two outstanding things that I can remember about criticisms that he did: one was a man, say, of fifty or sixty, I don't know, who had been painting for a long time, thirty years, and he had a piece of very expensive watercolor paper I remember, probably a two dollar sheet of paper and he'd been laboring for hours on this still life drawing a very nicely done academic thing. And Hofmann came along and sat down and very dramatically ripped the page in four and just moved them around a little bit here, put the top left a little bit up and the top right a little bit down and so on like this and said, "There." And I think that man learned more than he did in 35 years. And hardly anybody else could have done that and gotten away with it. it was a fantastic demonstration. He did it without any viciousness or anything, you know. It was fantastically dramatic. He did it so naturally, you know. But it worked. You know I've seen him walk on paintings. I've seen him walk on them. And, boy, when he slashes into them - sometimes he'd do that to loosen a guy up or something and just about knock the canvas off the easel. Then he told a little Japanese girl I remember once just a tiny thing but so beautiful. And after being under these twenty-two or so academic people all these years to hear this kind of a criticism - he told her, he said, you know as if he were giving himself to her in the sense that she was Japanese and, you know, the Japanese poetry bit and the whole thing, he said, "You must be like a duck, a little duck and jump into the sea of color." It's so poetic, you know, and an Oriental mind would grasp that, you know. He is a genius that man. I mean that's an over-used word but, boy, he has it; I'm telling you he's fantastic.

RB: What I was wondering whether you got acquainted with the other people at the school to any extent and whether you noticed any difference in the atmosphere of vitality or work between your academic school in Canada and the Hofmann School?

WR: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, a great deal. No comparison. No comparison. First of all, you know, I was amongst friends. I wasn't a freak any more. Oh, yes. All the difference in the world. I mean I saw a number of painters that were imitating Hofmann, which Hofmann doesn't approve of particularly and doesn't want. But that can't be helped. He's such a powerful man. But, no, they were a very fine group.

RB: Do you remember any of the students at that time?

WR: Yes. Terrill Yamamoto, you've heard of him, haven't you?

RB: Yes. Isn't he the Japanese chap who lives part of the year in Provincetown?

WR: Yes. He's a very interesting painter. He's a painter that I hope and pray some day is going to come through. He's a very interesting guy and at that time was doing very Hofmannesque paintings and still does in a sense. He doesn't always make it as paintings but he's a most interesting individual, and I hope and pray he does; I think when he does he'll be great.

RB: I think he's the man who was also a student during the summer of 1957 when I was there. And did - he flung sand -

WR: Yes, he'd do everything.

RB: -- and did a lot of experimental things.

WR: Yes. And he married an English nurse and has a beautiful boy. I like him very much. He's the one that stands out most in my mind. There was one beautiful girl. I don't remember her name, I just remember her face. And, oh, yes, there was another fellow I think, James Gohegan, or something.

RB: Jimmy Gahagan.

WR: Gahagan, I think he was there. I think so.

RB: It's possible. He's a great admirer of, and he paints somewhat, or did somewhat more closely to the Hofmann style than -

WR: This is the danger I guess of Hofmann.

RB: Yes.

WR: You see McDonald was great with people that were just beginning, whereas I don't know if Hofmann would be that. I'm not sure about this. Hofmann might be better with people that already have arrived at something, you know.

RB: Yes.

WR: But I don't know; I can't remember any other -

RB: Well, I was just trying to sense the atmosphere -

WR: But they were very fine and it was completely different.

RB: Where were you living during this particular time? Did you and your friend have a room together? Or a studio?

<>WR: Oh, yes, we had a very strange setup in a sense, I mean we lived in a house that was like behind everything. You know how the Village is in New York how some sections are... Is that needle going up high enough? I continually am amazed by this tape recorder ; it's excellent. Yes, we were living in this house that was like - part of the Village is sort of a town within a town; do you know that? Like there are houses behind the stores. Did you know that? Like behind Bleeker Street there'll be all stores and you think that's it but there are like little communities behind that. </>

RB: Well, do they have inner courtyards? Or -

WR: Yes. And this place was kind of Mexican-Spanish looking and I was there for two months before I realized that it was only one-room wide but it was five rooms high. Well, it was owned and operated or rented or something by these two people that had a theater called Originals Only. And it was a pretty funny experience. It seems that everything in my life is. I think we paid \$25 a week. And Paul and I shared this quite nice room.

RB: Furnished?

WR: Yes. Oh, yes. Very nice. And there was a very strange doctor there that I'm sure was on something and supposedly had an office on Park Avenue, but he was a strange character. And then there was an ordinary type advertising guy. And the two theatrical people. And another kid, I can't remember what he did. And then the funny thing was we'd have breakfast there at the house.

RB: Which you made yourself?

WR: Yes.

RB: Or you and Paul?

WR: That's right.

RB: There was no dining room in the place?

WR: That's right. But we had a maid look after the cleaning and so on. And it was quite good actually. And for dinner we'd go over to the theater and we'd have our dinner in the theater.

RB: In the theater?

WR: Yes. In the theater.

RB: How come?

WR: That's the way it was. They'd serve - they'd make the dinner there. They had a kitchen and one guy was a great cook - Tom Hill I think his name was, and Donald Stuart, they were quite well known. They did some very weird plays. They were the first off-Broadway theater in New York. I don't know where they are now. I think Tom used to do the cooking. And they'd cook up all this stuff. But the funny thing was -

RB: You mean you -

WR: It was downstairs. It's now called - it's on Seventh Avenue there by the Village Vanguard. It's not called Originals Only; it's got a different name now. But it's still there. And we'd go down in the cellar where it is and we'd eat just off-stage.

RB: You mean you were their guest? Or you paid?

WR: No, we paid \$25 a week and we had two meals a day and one of the meals had to be served there.

RB: Oh, this was provided with your room rent?

WR: Oh, yes.

RB: Oh, I see!

WR: The funny thing was people would come in and audition then and it was a scream because you might have a big chorus girl there doing a Charleston kicking her legs up. Or one time there was about a seventy-year-old woman doing a song from the 20s, and oh, boy, it was a riot.

RB: Was this theater a stock company sort of thing?

WR: Well, they would do to kind of make it, as I recall, maybe for money or something they'd do a thing once or twice a week, a revue, and maybe that's what they were auditioning for; I don't remember. But then the rest of the time they had a very serious play. As a matter of fact, they were doing a lot of plays, as I recall, on homosexuality and stuff. Which today is very popular to do things about, but then was pretty far out.

RB: Way back eleven years ago, yes.

WR: In 1952, yes. I think so, yes. And there was one actor there, I forget his name, who later appeared in a Hitchcock movie called The Trouble with Harry. It was a funny one. And he was the professor in that movie. And he was also a painter. But it was fun.

RB: Was this the first opportunity you had to sort of be acquainted with theater people? I don't remember in Canada that -

WR: More or less. I had been around a few radio people but they're not theater. Yes, this was the first time. And I wasn't that close with them, you know. But they were very nice and I got along with them.

RB: While you were rubbing elbows with them I guess.

WR: Yes.

RB: But this whole episode only lasted -

WR: I forget now. Three months or so.

RB: What season of the year was it?

WR: Oh, it must have been early fall and going into winter, I guess; about now and on into maybe December. I don't remember exactly.

RB: You financed this with money you'd saved up from --?

WR: I guess so, yes. Yes, I did.

WR: Of course, you weren't spending much I presume.

WR: No.

RB: But you were painting in this room? Were you able to paint there?

WR: Yes. I don't know. Don't ask me how. It's a horrible thought. I painted in the kitchen. As a matter of fact, that's the place I painted the watercolor that won the Hallmark art prize, now that I remember, in the kitchen down there. I've painted in some pretty small areas. But so have all painters.

RB: That means you submitted this watercolor in New York? Or -

WR: Yes, I did actually.

RB: Was that an abstract watercolor?

WR: Yes, I mentioned that before. A totally non-objective watercolor.

RB: Yes. At this time - is it time to introduce your beautiful wife Helen?

WR: Yes, it is, because I'm married by now.

RB: Oh, you were already married?

WR: I just got married and then I left for New York or something like that.

RB: Oh, my word. Well, let's go - let's meet Helen.

WR: That's what I said, let's go - no, I didn't.

RB: You mean while you were in New York on this occasion you were already married?

WR: That's right. But so what?

RB: Well, I would have asked you about the marriage before then if I'd realized -

WR: No, well, it was very close to that time. Helen and I had known each other for so many years, you know, when we were young. I had my eyes on her when she was twelve and I was about sixteen or something. But I started to take her out when she was seventeen, sixteen. We sort of got together at a high school dance.

RB: This was in Brampton?

WR: Brampton. She was very beautiful then and still is.

RB: Still is.

WR: She was extremely, fantastically looks - a marvel.

RB: Maybe we're repeating things but -

WR: Maybe, I don't know.

RB: No, but I want to know her name.

WR: Helen Marie Higgins.

RB: Yes, we did cover that.

WR: She hated that.

RB: Yes, we did cover that. Well, go ahead and just tell me about the courtship if you will.

WR: Yes. Well, I won't get too intimate, you know.

RB: Well, I don't know -

WR: No. She has always been a great help to me.

RB: No, what I meant is tell me about -

WR: I know. Wait a minute. I'll get to it.

RB: You knew her for all these years.

WR: Yes.

RB: You used to take her - what sort of dates were you able to take her on?

WR: Well, really! Oh!

RB: I don't mean for you to describe kissing her in the back of a car but I mean to say what kind of common social life were you able to have before marriage?

WR: It was pretty miserable because I was going to college, art college, you see. I was about twenty-one and having financial problems. So I've always been a problem to her. And there was always difficulty with money and so on. And she actually helped me once I remember.

RB: I think this did get mentioned, yes.

WR: Yes, I think so. So anyway maybe we've done all this.

RB: No - well, we haven't really got you married.

WR: Oh, well, I'm married, brother. But I'm very happy married.

RB: I think it could be said in passing I take it that she was not an heiress with any large private means.

WR: No, no.

RB: But she got a job herself at the time she finished high school?

WR: Yes, that's right. Well, her life was difficult at that time because very sadly her - I don't know if we mentioned this - her mother died.

RB: Well, let's get to the actual ceremony of the wedding and when did you finally decide that it would be financially or otherwise possible for you to be married?

WR: I didn't; I didn't think it was and so on. But we did get married on September 6, 1952.

RB: In -

WR: In Brampton.

RB: In Brampton at - the wedding was at -

WR: What they call the United Church.

RB: With her family -

WR: The mother had died by that time. And the father was there. And he has since died.

RB: And your family came?

WR: Oh, yes, my family were there.

RB: And it was what you might say a conventional church wedding?

WR: Yes. Except we went away on a honeymoon to one of those ungodly places up in Northern Ontario that everybody in Canada loves. And I stayed one day and I had to get the hell out of there. I couldn't stand it. One of those parks, you know, up Georgian Bay way.

RB: You took her with you, I suppose?

WR: Yes. But I almost lost her. We did go for a ride in the woods, horseback riding I used to do a bit of and I don't think she'd hardly ever done any. And she kind of got lost or something. But I hated it.

RB: You mean she - when you use this word 'you almost lost her on the honeymoon' it could be interpreted to mean that she almost left you as a husband.

WR: Well, we got lost. I don't know.

RB: You mean you almost lost her in a geographical sense?

WR: Yes. Well, we lost everybody. Well, maybe it was intentional. I don't remember. But the point is I hated it and I got out of there. I mean everybody up there in Canada loves these Georgian Bay things, you know. This is what these old guys, the Group of Seven, had been painting for fifty years. And all I see is oil paint every time I look at them. But I couldn't stand it. We left after a day. But then what?

RB: Did you go somewhere else for the rest of the honeymoon?

WR: I don't remember. I probably went back to paint. I probably did, I think we did, I think we went to Niagara Falls to some friends; that's where everybody goes. I don't remember, to tell you the truth.

RB: Boy, she'd better not hear this part of the tape.

WR: Why?

RB: She'll be angry.

WR: No, she won't.

RB: I think I'll interview Helen about these things. She probably remembers, being a woman.

WR: Good Lord.

RB: Well, you set up housekeeping at all in --? Or you had to -

WR: No, no, we were living in Toronto. We set up -

RB: Yes. I'm trying to get back to this business of your coming down with your friend Paul.

WR: Well, Helen always put my career first. Which is great.

RB: She had a job? She couldn't have come -

WR: She had a job. Well, she didn't particularly think it would be a good idea anyway, you know. She believes in giving me a great deal of freedom. And I could hardly stand to be married to anyone that was any different; or at least I would imagine it would be difficult to find anyone quite like her. Maybe I brainwashed her right from the beginning but she believed in my work right from the beginning and always believed in me doing whatever was best for my career and my painting. And she thought it would be a good experience for me. And she's very realistic you know; that's the German part I guess. And it didn't bother her. I mean then I came back after six weeks. It wasn't too long.

RB: And what did you do when you returned?

WR: I didn't do anything. This was a very bad time that I don't want to go into too much because it was just a time of looking for work and all that sort of thing and not finding it.

RB: How do you go about looking for work in those cities?

WR: Well, television was starting up there then you see. I tried to get on CBC television doing sets. Which wouldn't have been bad at all actually. It paid very well and was very simple and it didn't take too much effort. But the art director - they deny this now but it's true - was a friend of a very academic well-known artist up there. And I was then well-known actually as an outspoken rebel. And they wouldn't hire me. They said I wouldn't be satisfied, my temperament. And I don't know whether I mentioned that I did get my brother a job there, who had much less experience.

RB: This is your brother Jack?

WR: Yes.

RB: Who is -

WR: John Meredith he calls himself.

RB: John Meredith, the painter. But he was quite young at this time.

WR: Yes. He was only about 20 or 21 and they gave him a job but they wouldn't give me one. And the irony of it is that Jack wouldn't stick with the job. I would have. He wouldn't put up with it. Jesus! And, you know, I'd have given anything. You know they were paying him \$85 or \$100, which was very good money up there. You had to work hard for it but I was willing to do it. But they wouldn't do it. So it was just one thing after another like that. And I didn't really want to do advertising art. I wasn't any good at it anyway. I did do it for about four months. I don't think we've covered that, have we? I don't recall. Did I tell you that?

RB: I don't recall.

WR: A man called Russ Taber did hire me for four months.

RB: What was his position?

WR: He was head of an advertising agency called T.D.F. - Taber, Delmadge and Feeley. And Russ Taber has since died of a heart attack. He built his business on service and killed himself doing so.

RB: Was he a young man?

WR: Yes, very young.

RB: Oh, at that time quite young?

WR: Yes, he was 38 or so. I mean he maybe died at 42. But he liked my painting and liked me and so he hired me. But they never let me do any work as a commercial artist.

RB: Oh!

WR: They never did give me one single job in four months. Paid me 50 bucks a week or something. He would

have been much better off to buy a painting and leave it at that. They never gave me a thing to do. All I did was I'd do all sorts of abstractions and I got all the lettering men and all the commercial guys that had been sitting there soaking up booze for thirty years, I got them so shook up that they had to finally get rid of me because they were all starting to do abstracts and Pollocks. And it was a riot.

RB: You mean you went to an office premises daily? Or -

WR: Yes, a place where they did ads, you know, like car ads where one guy does the figures, another guy does the car, another guy does the lettering, another guy does the layout. It was horrible. But it's not horrible if you like it and if you're good at it.

RB: But I'm not quite clear whether they didn't use what you did or didn't assign you to do things?

WR: They didn't assign me to do one thing.

RB: How do you explain that?

WR: Just because Taber was the boss. He liked me and he did sort of have me doing some drapes supposedly for the office, designing the pattern, and also some Christmas cards, which was just a hoax.

RB: Well, am I to understand that while you were physically present on the premises you were free to paint on your own.

WR: That's right. But it was horrible because I wanted to do something and I could have, you know. My work could have been applied. But they didn't know how to. That's a fact. I mean I'm not a good commercial artist. I know it. But my work could have been used. It sure as heck would have been used down here. But they didn't know how. But Taber liked me so he wanted to help me. So instead of buying a painting he did this, you know.

RB: His motivation was presumably then to provide you with some opportunity?

WR: It ended up with him giving me \$800 for going there for four months but he would have been much better off to buy a painting, wouldn't he

RB: Yes. Well -

WR: He was very nice to me anyway and it was a good -

RB: But that was his aim? I mean not really to use you but for the business --?

WR: I guess so. But maybe he had trouble; you see there were three partners, two other partners and maybe they gave him trouble too, I don't know.

RB: But at the end of a certain time though you had to be dropped --?

WR: At the end of a certain day at three o'clock in the afternoon he called me in to the office and said, you know I'm sorry, you know; and I said, yes, thanks. And I was very grateful.

RB: Taber himself?

WR: Yes, and he was very nice about it, very nice.

RB: Not even a week's salary in advance?

WR: No.

RB: One day's notice?

WR: I don't remember. Maybe there was. But he was very nice to me. And so it went like that. Well, then I won the \$1,000 scholarship I guess.

RB: Yes.

WR: I mentioned that too. I don't know, we're all mixed up here.

RB: Well, it is difficult not to repeat but it's not too serious. You - WR: She had a job. Well, she didn't particularly think it would be a good idea anyway, you know. She believes in giving me a great deal of freedom. And I could hardly stand to be married to anyone that was any different; or at least I would imagine it would be difficult to find anyone quite like her. Maybe I brainwashed her right from the beginning but she believed in my work right

from the beginning and always believed in me doing whatever was best for my career and my painting. And she thought it would be a good experience for me. And she's very realistic you know; that's the German part I guess. And it didn't bother her. I mean then I came back after six weeks. It wasn't too long.

WR: Well, I won it then and came down here in 1955.

RB: But did you go into this in any detail?

WR: What - the scholarship?

RB: Did you initiate the idea of applying for it? Or was it just handed --?

WR: I don't know who did that. Maybe Jock McDonald did. And I did tell you what it was about. You just wrote in and told them what you wanted to do. I said I wanted to come down here where I thought the center of painting was.

RB: Who provided this scholarship?

WR: The Canada Foundation. I told you that the money was actually put up by the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association.

RB: Yes.

WR: And I just got \$1,000 and came.

RB: And once again you came by yourself without -

WR: By myself because I had to have another \$600 to get Helen over here. You had to put up a bond and all that sort of thing. And also, let me think now 00

RB: Helen , of course, was self-supporting.

WR: Oh, yes. And she helped me. But I usually managed to look after myself. Although I don't mind admitting that she helped me at times but I usually managed to make a few dollars one way or another. I always sold pictures. I sold more pictures than many - I sold more than almost many of the moderns up there I guess actually.

RB: This was through individual conversations with -

WR: Yes. Oh, I used to do lectures, did I tell you that? I guess I -

RB: Well, we've spoken of them, I've often heard you speak of this and I really don't remember how thoroughly - I don't think we've gone into this program completely.

WR: Well, I did lectures. Well, it was at this time. I did lectures with the Toronto Art Gallery. Extension courses they were called.

RB: In Toronto?

WR: Well, you had to go to the suburbs. But for this I got like \$10. Oh, boy, it was rough.

RB: Well now, you have told me years ago, and I don't think this is on tape, how you used to set these things up and how you'd stay awake all night afterwards because you'd get into such struggles and bitterness and all that.

WR: Right.

RB: I don't think you've gone into this on the tape so do you want to -

WR: Well, the first people to collect me were Professor Gilbert Bagnani and his wife Stuart Bagnani.

RB: Bagnani?

WR: Bagnani. Italian. B-a-g-n-a-n-i. He's a very nice man and she's a very attractive and nice woman. And they collected my work. And so she decided to push my career. She worked with the Art Gallery of Toronto in what they call the extension courses or extension department or something. And it's a sort of educational thing for the suburbs. It's very interested. And the Art Gallery of Toronto. And she got this idea of putting on art lectures by painters. And they used to ask you to do a demonstration which was extremely difficult.

RB: She asked you to do this?

WR: Mmhmm. And you do a painting on stage or at least go through the motions.

RB: Well now, that's what you told me about years ago and I don't think the tape describesWR: She had a job. Well, she didn't particularly think it would be a good idea anyway, you know. She believes in giving me a great deal of freedom. And I could hardly stand to be married to anyone that was any different; or at least I would imagine it would be difficult to find anyone quite like her. Maybe I brainwashed her right from the beginning but she believed in my work right from the beginning and always believed in me doing whatever was best for my career and my painting. And she thought it would be a good experience for me. And she's very realistic you know; that's the German part I guess. And it didn't bother her. I mean then I came back after six weeks. It wasn't too long. it. I had the impression though that you traveled quite a bit in Canada doing this. But this was mostly -

WR: I traveled a little but not much.

RB: it was mostly in the Toronto area?

WR: Yes.

RB: And the audiences were what sort of groups?

WR: Oh, very hostile Canadians.

RB: Well, I know they were hostile but I mean were they women's clubs or school students? Or -

WR: Oh, no. a mixture, men and women and it was people that were interested in painting. Maybe they belonged to the Art Gallery of Toronto somehow, I don't know; but they were all ages and all sexes and all types. Boy! And I usually had one with me, one that would be with me in the evening. But the last lecture I gave I didn't have a soul with me. They were all against me. And I never did give another one. I ended up telling them all to go to hell literally and I was very upset.

RB: It's painful but could we go into that whole incident more fully then? Where was that?

WR: The last one?

RB: Yes.

WR: The last one I think was in a place called Willowdale. And I was finally so shaken. I remember there was a table there so I just lay down on the table, see. I always have had a sense of the dramatic, of show biz, but I really couldn't stand up any longer I was so... Because I had one guy stand up who was about 30 who was crying, he was sobbing because I had shaken him so because I disillusioned his ideas about landscape. You're interrupting too much.

RB: How had you begun your talk? What did you say in these talks that shook him up so?

WR: First of all I would just start painting I guess and then maybe I'd throw it open to questions and I think that's how I did it. I didn't prepare anything. I tried it and it didn't work. So I'd paint and then I'd just throw it open. And, boy, that's all you had to do then up there, you know. I mean 1952 and 1953, you know, I was doing Tomlin kind of things and action things. That's all you had to do. And then I'd put down all the old painters up there that they just loved. And praise all the Americans and, of course, that was the time of McCarthy and they didn't dig Americans at all, a lot of them. And they'd tell me to go to the States. It was wild. But the last one it just happened that I didn't have a soul with me. There was one lady but she didn't say anything. And I just decided that was it. I used to get about \$10 but I had to do it; I needed the \$10. Well, it was a good experience I guess. And Mrs. Bagnani was trying to help me, you know; and she was upset too by that. But a very strange thing happened at that lecture. I told them all to go to hell and said I don't give a God-damn if you ever go to an art gallery again - those were my exact words - or what you do, etc. etc.; and I said you can all go to hell. And I ran off the stage. Well, I peeked out again, because half the time I'm kidding anyway, and even though I was kind of shook up, and the whole audience came up - it was at a real auditorium - the whole audience moved up like one person, and I thought, what the hell, are they all going to attack me. And it ended up that they were the most grateful audience that I ever had in the country. And one business man who was in a tuxedo going some place, I can still see him, he reminded me kind of Benchley, getting over everybody's head and shoulders trying to shake my hand and saying he never felt better. But sure, you know it's great for all those guys. They were feeling great. But I was upset still. But it was kind of funny. I finally, you know, brought them to their senses what they were doing to me, you know. They were crucifying me. And I was just a young kid. And I was standing up for my beliefs and nobody had ever done that in painting anyway up there.

RB: These people were asking questions? Or -

WR: Most of these people were amateur painters now it comes to my mind and there's nothing worse, you know. I would never give a lecture to them again. There's nothing worse than amateur painters, Jesus! They think if they sell, if they sell something for \$100 that they're really swinging. And they know everything. And they've got better materials than I had, you know, all the sable brushes and all that jazz. That's right, they were mostly amateur painters or what supposedly would be professionals.

RB: Their attitude toward you was that you were a sort of impersonal fraud who knew very little and was imposing on their skill?

WR: That's right. More or less. Yes.

RB: I see.

WR: And some of these were held at the Art Gallery proper too, which is a very impressive sort of sculpture court. You know they were well-attended always. Good large audience.

RB: I don't think I've ever been in anything quite as dramatic as you make this sound. How did you dress for these occasions?

WR: Oh, I didn't dress quite as wildly as I do now, I don't think. No.

RB: Well, you didn't have the money to, for instance.

WR: Well, I was well-dressed. I was always well-dressed just the same. That's something that carried over from - I mentioned -

RB: Yes, you said that.

WR: I was well-dressed but not like I dress now.

RB: So you didn't fix yourself up to look strange? Or -

WR: No. I probably looked strange but I didn't fix myself up to.

RB: Well, that experience of your life I know you told me about years ago and apparently it was a very crucial factor in making you feel that Canada was a hostile environment for you..

WR: Mmhmm.

RB: Isn't this true? Isn't that one of the principal experiences -

WR: You mean these lectures?

RB: Yes, the experience of the attitude of these audiences?

WR: Well, the lectures, the whole scene. It wasn't just the lectures. I was lucky to even get them I suppose because, you know, they were using much bigger names than myself to do those things. But just the whole atmosphere, you know, the fact I couldn't get any kind of a job teaching or anywhere, you know. Of course, I wasn't willing to compromise much I must admit. But still really when I look back on it I can't blame Canada. I mean it was just so far behind, you see. We had absolutely no commercial galleries. And that was it. Let's cut it off for a minute and take a break..

[Machine turned off.]

RB: How did you artists function without commercial galleries in Canada? You just sold from your studio, did you?

WR: No, we had to exhibit in what they called academics and societies, you see, that were juried by the people in these organizations, the artists. And they were usually academic people or semi-abstract at most. But usually not that. And so they would reject our work, the work of the abstractionists quite a bit. And then they did accept us though, as I said before, I think in 1951 on a small scale. So that by 1953 there were a number of us beginning to make a name.

RB: As abstract painters?

WR: Yes. And there were a couple of commercial galleries in Toronto but they were like a sort of Wildenstein type of thing only not quite as posh. And they weren't interested in us. And that was including McDonald in the group who had a name for thirty or forty years nationally and even in Europe sort of, and I think he had

exhibited in some parts of the States. Well, so actually really the beginning of Painters Eleven - that's what we eventually called ourselves - was Eleven painters, although I don't get any credit for it, and I don't really care any more, was when I was at Simpson's this lady suggested that we have seven pictures by seven different painters to decorate seven different room settings in this store.

RB: She was one of the staff of Simpson's?

WR: Yes. And so I got six other fellows and myself, I think it was five other men and one woman - no -

RB: Who were they?

WR: Wait a minute. Well, I think it was Jack Bush, Casio Nakamura, Oscar Kaheen, Tom Hudson, Alexandra Luke, and Ray Mead, and myself. Now I think that's seven.

RB: Were most of these men about your age?

WR: Alexandra Luke happens to be a woman.

RB: Oh! Alexander really?

WR: Alexandra. Her name was Margaret Mc Laughlin. She's of the General Motors outfit; a great friend of Hofmann's. Well, no, they were all different ages. They were from my age up to - at that time I was about 28? - 26? - 26 up to at that point about 45. And then with McDonald later after this show, and then Hortense Gordon - she must have been 70 - so we had all ages. Anyway we did do this show and during the hanging of that show they wanted a publicity photograph of the seven of us, which I have a copy of, and they did take it. and then after that we went down to my studio in Toronto and discussed the possibility of forming another group, a real group, and trying to get a show in a professional gallery, in one of the two or three places there. So we had a meeting at this Alexandra Luke's - Margaret McLaughlin's cottage by the lake, Lake Simcoe or Lake Ontario - Lake Ontario I guess, I don't know. And I have the minutes of that meeting. Actually that was the first meeting that the Painters Eleven had.

RB: Was it conducted in a sort of formal fashion with somebody presiding?

WR: It was. Helen was there and she took the minutes. And we've added a painter by the name of Harold Towne who has since become quite well-known in Canada.

RB: And has shown in New York.

WR: And has shown in New York. And who else? - we added Walter Yarwood, Jock McDonald. Jock couldn't make the first thing, he was just too busy. And Hortense Gordon. But Towne and I right from the beginning didn't get along too well and he didn't approve of Helen being there so that minutes were never taken much after that to my knowledge. Meetings from that point on were a fiasco.

RB: May I ask why he wouldn't have approved of Helen? She was the only non-artist present, is that it?

WR: He's very difficult to explain; he's a very - personality-wise we just don't get along, you see, Towne and I.

RB: Is he an older man?

WR: No, he's about the same age.

RB: But how does he differ from you in a general way? In background at all? I mean does he come from a different kind of religion?

WR: No. Well, not too much.

RB: But he is an abstract painter? I mean he's not an academic --?

WR: Oh, yes. But he also was very good at commercial art and illustration. He did a great deal of that. Well, he has a definite personality that we just don't get along at all. We're just completely different types. And I don't know, he's got a sort of weird thing about good-looking girls or something, I don't know. He's married and all that but I mean he just objected to it. it may have been some kind of a jealousy thing, you know. At any rate, we decided to have that exhibition. And then we couldn't get any publicity. So in order to get some I said I would write an article for this magazine called Canadian Art about the Simpson's department store show as a gimmick. And in the last paragraph I added that as a result of this show we banned together another four painters and made it Painters Eleven and we've having our first show at the Roberts Gallery in March or February of 1954 I think. And that made Towne so angry that he said he wanted me to meet him at a place called Queen's Park and

he's going to hit me over the head with a chair. Because, you see, I knew that sooner or later I would not agree with the group. I never do. And I just wanted it documented once. And I don't want any other credit really. But because since then my name has been noticeably absent from all publicity -

RB: Concerning Painters Eleven?

WR: Yes. In many cases. They mentioned on one show - you see what happened briefly: the first year I went with Kootz they had a show at this gallery. As a matter of fact, it was the D. of T.D.F. of the advertising company I was with, the Delmadge or the Feeley, I don't know which - Hugh Feeley - I don't remember. But he had this supposedly posh gallery and they all decided they wanted to show there.

RB: In --?

WR: In Toronto.

RB: Yes.

WR: And I flew up about this meeting. I made a special flight and everything.

RB: From New York?

WR: Yes. And I didn't approve of it because there was a critic called Paul Duval involved who was like, you know, Canaday or O'Doherty or you know represented nothing and everything we were supposedly against. And I had the feeling that they were selling themselves down the river to get into a posh gallery, you see. And Duval was going to be kind of - write the stuff and so on. And I figured it was phony. And then I did say that if I - that if Duval had nothing to do with it I would go in this exhibition. And also that they would have to pay - the Gallery up there would have to pay the expenses of shipping because Kootz would own these pictures and otherwise it would cost me a couple of hundred dollars.

RB: To participate?

WR: Yes. Well, they used to drink quite a bit at those meetings and they claimed that I didn't say this. So this was during Helen's pregnancy and it was very rough. And I had a lot of very nasty phone calls from Bush and he said all sorts of things. And finally anyway I pulled out of it. Jock McDonald offered to give me the money. I wouldn't, of course, let him do it and so on. He wanted me to stay in to keep it together. But by this time we had had two or three shows and I thought the thing had had it. I thought otherwise we'd become like the O.F.A. and all the rest of the societies up there, you see. And it did run on too long. They did get like that because, you know, some of the painters weren't as good as the others even in a group of eleven.

RB: Am I correct in believing that once in New York possibly before your first show at Kootz I saw in a New York gallery which I don't know the name of an exhibition of Painters Eleven from Canada?

WR: That's right. That was the Riverside Museum, yes. And I think I -

RB: Were you in it?

WR: Yes, I was in it. I'm just trying to remember how I got in it?

RB: I thought this was a commercial gallery.

WR: No, no, the Riverside Museum that was associated with that American Abstract Artists -

RB: Association.

WR: And I think I got that rolling, too. Yes, I had that one picture that I still have called Drumbeats over the fireplace in the house. That was in it. and I got very good reviews there as a matter of fact. But, yes, we did have a show there.

RB: Shouldn't we go back a little more to this origin because -

WR: Yes. Then to the origin: we had the meeting and then we went and negotiated and did get a show at the Roberts Gallery.

RB: What ones of you went to Mr. Roberts?

WR: Oh, golly, I can't remember.

RB: Many of you?

WR: I didn't.

RB: Oh, you didn't go?

WR: It may have been Towne or somebody that knew him, or maybe McDonald, I don't recall.

RB: You didn't participate personally in that?

WR: Not in that -

RB: But it was arranged by members of this group to put on this first show?

WR: Mmhmm.

RB: Which you already knew about by the time you wrote this article. I wanted to ask you if this was the first published article you have produced?

WR: Yes, I guess it was really.

RB: You had trouble getting that in Canadian Art?

WR: Not - because I had a gimmick, you see. I used a gimmick. I would have had trouble otherwise I think at that point; not now. But we had a gimmick about, you know, putting paintings in department stores and that sort of thing. Although it was done with very good taste. And then anyway we had this show. And it was quite successful really. I mean very well-attended. And we sold some. It caused a tremendous stir.

RB: Did you yourself sell a picture?

WR: Yes, I did. I don't recall the price or the size. Anyway, since that time there has been a number of galleries sprout up and hang on. And I think they would have started anyway. But I do think that even though these painters now are not all the best painters up there that that had a great deal to do with changing the whole atmosphere. But a lot of these guys stayed in with the societies. I dropped out of them. Well, the only one I actually did get in as a member was the one called Canadian Group of Painters. And I resigned from it because I felt - I was nominated by McDonald so I thought I'd better be gracious enough to accept it. and then I signed after. Because I thought that, you know, if we backed up these people, that's what they wanted us to do. They wanted us to join them, you see, then that would make them as hip as we are.

RB: The academic group of painters?

WR: Yes. I mean it's sort of like what George Scott, the actor, won't - like he said if he won the Academy Award he would tell them to keep it because he doesn't want to give them any credit, or he doesn't want to give them any power, or whatever you want to say. But a number of these painters, including Towne, have stayed in the societies very actively. And I think this is very grim.

RB: What was the purpose of this society? For exhibition purposes?

WR: Which society?

RB: Well, you say "the societies" -

WR: The other societies -

RB: The one you joined. WR: She had a job. Well, she didn't particularly think it would be a good idea anyway, you know. She believes in giving me a great deal of freedom. And I could hardly stand to be married to anyone that was any different; or at least I would imagine it would be difficult to find anyone quite like her. Maybe I brainwashed her right from the beginning but she believed in my work right from the beginning and always believed in me doing whatever was best for my career and my painting. And she thought it would be a good experience for me. And she's very realistic you know; that's the German part I guess. And it didn't bother her. I mean then I came back after six weeks. It wasn't too long.

WR: Oh, well, the Canadian Group of Painters, I'm not sure of all their history. That started about in the 1930s. You see this was the only way I guess painters could show up there.

RB: Well, they were for exhibition purposes?

WR: Oh, yes.

RB: So there would be an annual or biennial -

WR: Yes. And the Canadian Group is national. And then O.S.A. was Ontario Society of Artists, I guess a whole series of provincial organizations. And then there were various ones, you see. Each guy gets in these ridiculous organizations and then they actually put the initials of these societies behind their names.

RB: You people in Painters Eleven I don't suppose did do that?

WR: No. I didn't. No, we didn't. But everybody does keep referring to me as a member of Painters Eleven. I am not any longer.

RB: Does Painters Eleven still function as a group?

WR: No, it's stopped now.

RB: How long after you separated --?

WR: I think two years or so after.

RB: It did continue for two years after?

WR: Kind of. Not very strong really. Not that I had anything to do with that but it didn't continue too strongly. But the one article I read that somebody sent to me said that due to commitments in New York - that's what they said - I couldn't stay with the Group. Which wasn't true. Another one said - and since then Oscar Kaheen was killed in a car accident at the young age of thirty-nine; and now McDonald is dead; and Hortense Gordon is dead. But at that time Oscar was the only one dead and I read this article that said "through death and defamation there are now only nine." So I don't know what that meant. So they leave me out of it. But that's all right. It doesn't matter. But it was good at the time.

RB: It resulted in sales, publicity and any stimulation?

WR: And the recognition of the fact that there was a group of painters doing - a concentrated group, you know, more or less doing good abstraction, you know.

RB: What was the reaction of the Canadian museum world toward this Group?

WR: Well, it was fairly good. I mean very shortly after that the Art Gallery of Toronto, they call it the Art Gallery, here they call it a museum - they purchased the first museum purchase of mine, of a painting called *In Dawn the Heart*.

RB: This painting was shown with Painters Eleven?

WR: Yes - wait a minute - I think it was, another year. I think it was. I'm not sure. But at any rate I got around \$650 for it and that was just enough to get Helen down here to New York at that time. That's when I was already - that was in 1955 when I was in New York that I had that sale. And the National Gallery of Canada now have three of mine. And they bought one, I don't remember exactly, but it was around the time of the first show, after my very first exhibition, one-man exhibition, at Hart House, University in Toronto. Oh, Painters Eleven definitely served a purpose. But you see they had this other group called the Group of Seven which, you know, discouraged Canadian art kind of like for years they went on. And so we called ourselves Painters Eleven. And they were a group of landscape painters sort of like in the manner of the Fauves, you know.

RB: Oh.

WR: Only painting the Canadian scene always, you see. And a couple of those guys still live, A.Y. Jackson, I think; and Varley maybe, but Varley he kind of quit, he was kind of a rebel too. So this was the first small group. Like the other groups were big organizations sort of. But I feel that in all organizations that the organizers eventually take over. No matter how far out the organizations are and the organizers are always send second-rate creative talent. Because the creative guys can't be bothered. And so then the outstanding people usually end up, you know, --

RB: Well, who of Painters Eleven was of this character? - an organizing type?

WR: Well, I don't think it - well, I was one of the guys that started it all right but I don't think it ran long enough to get into much trouble. I think it would have been even better if we had stopped even after the second show. But I don't think there was much damage done. I think it stopped in time.

RB: Well, you weren't actually as much involved with each other as some of the New York groups of young painters who formed cooperative galleries?

WR: We were pretty much involved; much more probably. We had regular meetings that were really wild.

RB: Had you dues to pay?

WR: No, but we had expenses to share.

RB: And you just divided the expenses?

WR: Yes, I think so, as I remember.

RB: What was the character of the expenses?

WR: I guess advertising and so on. I am not sure about all this, but I think I'm sure we did have.

RB: Because as you know, in New York I've talked with people about, for instance, the Tanager Gallery and the now-defunct Hansa Gallery, both of which were artist-owned and, of course, the participating artists being also proprietors and having dues to pay had to involve themselves very considerably in the joint effort.

WR: Mmhmm. I can't remember. I think we had to pay for our catalogues, but I can't remember really and truly.

RB: But through Painters Eleven you had your initial - how shall I put it? - public presentation in Canada?

WR: Well, we were showing in the group shows spasmodically everybody from about 1951 on and I guess some of the older men maybe earlier. But this was really the first big strong statement where somebody stood up and really took - I was hoping that they would all... Of course, I wasn't in any of the societies then. They could say it was easy for me. But I was hoping all the people in the societies that were in Painters Eleven would say to heck with the societies and drop them. But they didn't do that, including Jock; they hung on to these stupid old societies. But the societies now have lost all their power as far as the young creative talent is concerned. The young painters no longer have to have anything to do with them whatsoever. And the majority of the young painters that have been exhibited abroad have nothing to do with the societies to speak of.

RB: I'm not entirely clear what the societies' role toward the individual artist would be in a negative fashion, that is to say, by being a member of this reactionary body what harm would it do an artist?

WR: To be a member of the provincial groups and so on?

RB: Yes.

WR: The harm it would do as far as I'm concerned now is that - well, you're involved with an awful lot of bad painting, really bad, really.

RB: You mean you have to show together with mediocre painters?

WR: Yes. Yes, and you get involved. And you don't need it any more, you don't need it because there are galleries. And before the trouble was that if I sent in two paintings or three paintings they would accept maybe the smallest one, you know, at first. Then they started to accept them a little bit bigger. But it's just the association. I mean bad painting is very infectious if you get around it too much. That's one of the reasons I don't even go to too many exhibitions in New York. And there's an awful lot of dirty politics and people, you know - oh, it's terrible. All sorts of ridiculous petty things, you see.

RB: You spoke of these heated meetings at Painters Eleven. What were you all talking about? Anything to do with theories of practice of art?

WR: No, just to do with how we were going to -

RB: Practical matters?

WR: How we were going to plan the next exhibition. And then people started to want exhibitions. And, oh, we'd get into awful arguments. Oh, mostly always good fun. A couple of fights now and then. But it was wild.

RB: Now in these years in Toronto did you occasionally have come to your home, your studio, persons interested possibly to buy art and look them over? How did this work?

WR: Very rarely. But two people that did come that turned out to be very important were Bob - Robert and Barbara Hale - Robert Beverly Hale of the - I guess the Assistant Curator then of the Metropolitan Museum, American Section.

RB: How did they happen to come?

WR: They were visiting Martin Baldwin who was Director of the Art Gallery of Toronto. And Baldwin liked my work. And then they came up and we spent the whole day together. And they were the only two people I knew in New York when I moved down here. And they helped me a great deal in the beginning. They got me a studio and introduced me to some people and were very, very helpful to me.

RB: I gather the Metropolitan -

WR: They haven't but the thing is that I forgot to tell you that in September Helen and I became citizens of the United States.

RB: Oh, you have!

WR: Yes.

RB: Really. Well, congratulations. I will now sing The Star Spangled Banner. We'll turn off the machine. In September. Both of you.

WR: The judge said something about do you both something or other about the United States of Amurria (sic). We had to repeat that so we both said without even telling one another United States of Amurrica (sic). But they were very nice to us actually.

RB: Where did you take this - initiate --?

WR: In Trenton.

RB: In Trenton, yes. You mentioned once to me last year I guess that you were seriously considering it after your return from Canada and I didn't know you had actually -

WR: Yes. This was the reason I think I wasn't in the Met; I don't think they could buy me.

RB: Well, of course, they don't but really very actively so it doesn't surprise me.

WR: Well, some museums can't buy unless you're a citizen. And I hung on to my Canadian citizenship a long time and I really did it because I really thought maybe it would somehow help the Canadian art world, although Canadian enemies would -

RB: Technically speaking, are you still a Canadian?

WR: Nhhn.

RB: You're not?

WR: No.

RB: Because sometimes people have dual nationality.

WR: No, I think that there's something that the British Empire doesn't ever really disown you or something but I'm a citizen of the United States and I can do everything but become president I think. Which I wouldn't want.

RB: No. you could not because you weren't born here. That's right.

WR: That's right. But everything else. I think I could be governor and all that stuff. But anyway the point was that it was getting to the point like I'd been here off and on for almost ten or eleven years and certain publications I could not get in because they only want United States citizens. And certain exhibitions. So it was affecting me economically. And also I found every time I had anything to do with Canada it was extremely upsetting. So I just figured the heck with it. I really liked it here better and had for a number of years. So we went through with it.

RB: Did you have to take any preliminary study?

WR: Oh, yes, that's a right.

RB: ... for everyone.

WR: We had this book, see, and I memorized every damn line in it. That's the way I used to study at school. I memorized everything. And I memorized every line of it; I bet I knew things you've forgotten about the government and so on.

RB: Oh, I'm sure.

WR: And going down to Trenton I went through the whole thing again, and they had all these standard questions and so on. And I was all ready to hate everybody there anyway because I don't like authority and -

RB: Officialdom?

WR: Yes. And all those people. Well, and so I walk in and I expect him to ask me one of these questions. Instead of that he says, "Tell me all you know about the United States government." And I was so angry. And I won't say what I said but I -

RB: Why not?

WR: Well, I said, "Get off the shit." And just luckily the guy was an art lover and an artist; he liked artists. And he was very bright and tolerant. I said what the hell, you know I was studying this book for a month and staying up till one o'clock in the morning - "What do you mean what do I know about the United States government?" And then he was very nice. Well then, he asked me what the Fourth of July was. And I was so mixed up I didn't even know that. So I said it was Declaration Day. And it really is the Declaration of Independence. And he said, "Well, that's good enough." Then he asked me who would be president if the president died and then who would be president if the vice-president died. And that was it. Actually they were very, very nice to us. I was always expecting some idiot to come along but they never did; they were very, very nice to us right along the line. It was funny. But thank the Lord he liked artists and he was very - or I'd have had it right then.

RB: I doubt if they would have rejected you unless you hadn't been able to speak English and had never heard of the Constitution.

WR: I don't know. I was so angry because I thought, you know, I'd studied all these questions so I was just expecting somebody to be smart and then he did it. But he was very nice about it.

RB: Well, let's go back though now historically to the visit of Robert Beverly Hale. Mr. Hale teaches anatomy still at the Art Students League.

WR: I think he's - is he still --?

RB: Yes, I know he does. Yes.

WR: He's still Curator?

RB: Well, I think he is very definitely still Curator at the Metropolitan with a very active young assistant, named Henry Geldseller. I've always felt that he was not particularly avant garde in his own mentality -

WR: Well, maybe he was not but we just got along personally very, very well. And they got me a studio when I first came down here, which was Larry Rivers' studio.

RB: Was it!

WR: Yes.

RB: Really? Where was that?

WR: On Second Avenue at St. Mark's Place. An excellent studio.

RB: Where was Larry?

WR: I don't know. He was in Europe or some place. It was an excellent place. Thirty foot square. Had a kitchen and all that.

RB: Well now, when did you decide - we may not have finished all you did up there but you might clarify how soon after this Painters Eleven episode you came down?

WR: And then I won a scholarship, you see. Then I got that \$1,000.

RB: And you came here when that time?

WR: I think it was October of 1955.

RB: And, as we said before, Helen didn't come up then?

WR: No. She didn't come until six months.

RB: Yes. So you occupied this Larry Rivers studio by yourself?

WR: By myself. Then she moved in. And it was pretty grim living. Boy! It was really. I mean I'm not used to that sort of thing. I know hundreds of guys do it but after living in a provincial place like Toronto where everything is pretty easy it was rough.

RB: Well, there are artists who feel if it weren't for lofts New York wouldn't be an art center because they feel lofts are so ideal for painting and for the artist -

WR: Well, I don't dig them at all.

RB: This probably had practically no heat nor running water?

WR: IT had heat and running water but it had - we were robbed, of all things can you imagine - and we didn't have much but everything we had was taken. And we had prowlers on the roof. And, oh, you know - and then the next door -

RB: Well, you were right in a slum district with all -

WR: Well, Second Avenue and St. Marks isn't so bad. It's rather poor people but they're not slums. No, they're not slums.

RB: No, that's true.

WR: There are very nice people there. Very nice. And the cops were good too. Any time we had any trouble they'd be there in a minute, in three minutes they'd be climbing up the roof. But it was pretty grim.

RB: It seems that I have had other friends living in that area who have been robbed too.

WR: Well, I mean it changes all the time. This was 1955, yes. Well then, at any rate, the next door neighbor which was like two pieces of - almost a board away... He used to have all the critics and, you know, jazz musicians come up and artists and everybody used to come up there, Parker I think used to -

RB: Who?

WR: Ray Parker. Everybody -

RB: Yes, but who was the next door neighbor?

WR: Howard Kanowitz, the painter. A friend of Rivers. He's had a couple of shows. And, my God, they used to play jazz all night till like eight o'clock in the morning. I'd go out of my mind. But I didn't get involved with any of them. For about two years I lived there. And hardly anybody knew I was there. When I did get my show with Kootz they thought I'd just arrived from Canada. I didn't get involved. I had enough of that involvement in Canada.

RB: To go back for a moment to Canada I think you started to say there were two people and you said that Robert Beverly Hale and his wife -

WR: And his wife Barbara - his then wife - you know, she's not his wife now.

RB: Oh. But these were the two. There was not another person that you mentioned?

WR: That came to the studio you mean?

RB: In Canada that was interested in your work?

WR: Martin Baldwin was interested in my work besides Jock McDonald and Gilbert and Stuart Bagnani, and the collectors and Allan Jarvis of the National Gallery who I later got into trouble with a little bit but he did purchase my work after Baldwin. But actually Baldwin and the Bagnanis were the two big -

RB: How did Baldwin become acquainted with your work? Through exhibitions?

WR: Actually through the exhibitions with the societies.

RB: Oh! So they did do a bit of good.

WR: Oh, yes. They did do... But this was, you know, after.

RB: In other words, as a professional he was going through this big group show?

WR: The Art Gallery of Toronto was, and I guess still is, forced to give exhibitions of these groups. And it's too bad for them. And so he'd see the pictures.

RB: Yes. He saw them and was exercising selective judgment.

WR: And Mrs. Bagnani was directing him toward them anyway but he wasn't much for that kind of painting and yet he latched on to mine. Boy, they retired him at seventy which was absurd because he's just full of beans, you know, he's really going well. And he did get them to buy a - or try to get a Kline. And he got a lot of pictures in there finally near the end of his reign as director.

RB: When you came down to New York did you do much museum going here? Of course you had already been here earlier. I forgot to ask you whether places like the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art had any - played any role in expanding your acquaintance with contemporary art?

WR: Yes. The most outstanding shows I can remember were first going to the Museum of Modern Art and seeing one room with a Still, a Newman, a Pollock, and I think a Rothko. And I'll never forget that because that was in 1952 and, boy, that just knocked me out. Just four huge canvases. And then the other thing I remember was a very good show by Gottlieb in 1952, I think in 1952, at Kootz's old gallery on -

RB: Madison.

WR: Yes, down near 57th. Frozen Sounds exhibition.

RB: Oh! That was when he got through his period of - what did they call those -

WR: Yes. Calligraphic kind of grid things.

RB: Yes.

WR: But these were big shapes but thick paint, and oh, boy, I loved that show. I can remember that one vividly. So I did go to quite a few exhibitions in museums when I first came down. And then later when I started to work I stopped because I found it too confusing. And then actually after a while living in New York I found I really didn't like it; because I liked New York too much. And I'd been rebelling for so long that I really felt I'd be happier some place that I didn't care too much for.

RB: I infer from your saying that you had very little to do with fellow artists you didn't become a member of The Club of go to meetings?

WR: No. I did go to one meeting I believe. But it reminded me so much of Canada that I couldn't stand it.

RB: Why?

WR: They had a meeting with some critics and stuff and they were so idiotic that I was almost ready to go back. I think Hilton Kramer was one of the idiots that was on there.

RB: As a speaker?

WR: Yes. And I remember that Kline and all these guys were in the audience. And this was before they were really making any money anyway but they had made a little. And Kramer - or somebody said something to the effect that these people were painting like this for money. And here were a bunch of poor, old artists who were starving for fifty years. And you never heard such a unison of sarcastic laughter in your life. It was a panic. Everybody looked so poor like they couldn't care less about money. And it really bugged me. I didn't care for it at all. But, of course, I understand it used to be quite something. But that's what I tell you: all groups are the same, you know; they end up like that.

RB: Yes, all groups change -

WR: And I don't like artists' groups anyway. I don't even particularly care for the company of artists because I don't have that - what do you have to talk about much, you know? I cultivate friendships with people in all sorts of fields but not artists. I have very few artist friends.

RB: Well, I've often wondered - I'm still interested and puzzled by the fact that New York has brought together in the last fifteen or twenty years so many people as artists and they have sort of got together.

WR: Usually artists like that. Most artists seem to like colonies and like to be together and kick around ideas. But

I don't.

RB: Curiously enough each of the few artists that I have talked to as extensively as I'm talking to you have claimed to be quite apart from all the others.

WR: Well, I definitely am.

RB: Yes, but maybe I've just been talking to odd sticks but -

WR: No. It's beginning to happen. I noticed other guys are beginning to do it. Lassaw has moved out of town, you know; he's living in East Hampton now; he still has his loft.

RB: Well, Jackson Pollock lived away out... years ago.

WR: Yes. Jackson Pollock was the first guy to do it really. But I had my fill of it, you see. I had a taste of it in Canada and I got to the point, you know, where - well, it was different up there I guess but I don't know, all the conversation and stuff reminds me of recess at college kind of. I'm so sick of - not sick of - but tired of painting by the time I leave my studio that I don't want to talk about it.

RB: Well, I think what must be the reason that artists come to New York is not to talk to other artists -

WR: Oh, no.

RB: -- or to look at other artists' work but it's partly because the market is here, isn't it?

WR: Mmhmm.

RB: This is the opportunity, they've become big time not to have a local reputation but to have an international, possibly an international reputation.

WR: Oh, yes.

RB: But once you've got the gallery, I mean you could go and live in Iowa as far as - as long as you have your gallery -

WR: That's right. But a lot of guys - right now I don't think you could ever get Stuart Davis out of New York, I don't think.

RB: No -

WR: I've met him a few times. But I think like now he just loves the city. He's part of it, you know. It's a thing with him. Where like Hofmann his paintings couldn't happen anywhere else but Provincetown because they're just full of Provincetown light. And that's why they're so brilliant. I paint with brilliant colors but I find that light too much for me. And so it's a personal thing. Those are two good examples. I mean Davis is definitely - he's really, you know, a city man.

RB: Yes.

WR: He loves it I think. And a lot of the guys, as you say, come for purposes of a career and I guess if they can't get a gallery they have no other way out. But maybe a lot of them once they start to get money they do move out.

RB: Did Kline's reputation stand out at this time in your consciousness?

WR: Yes, I do remember Kline's painting in 1952. I remember seeing a small Kline at the old Whitney. I also remember Fritz Bultman. And I remember a very nice black and white de Kooning. The same people that sort of made it stand out in my mind. Bultman you haven't heard so much of but he's a good enough painter.

RB: I understand he's been very sick this summer.

WR: Yes.

RB: But before that hasn't he recently been doing rather good or some people think rather good sculpture?

WR: I don't know but he's a good artist.

RB: He turned toward sculpture in recent years, I think. Bultman is the man whose studio you leased the summer that I knew you in Provincetown in '57.

WR: That's right, yes. He used to be with Kootz too, I guess.

RB: That's before I was familiar with the Kootz Gallery.

WR: Before me too I guess.

RB: Did this large studio that formerly had been Larry Rivers' have any influence on the size of your painting?

WR: Yes, I think so. Oh, yes.

RB: Did you start - were they bigger paintings than you had done in Canada?

WR: Oh, yes. That was partly because in Canada you just couldn't afford to buy cotton. It's so expensive, it has some ridiculous markup.

RB: Oh, really.

WR: Everything in Canada from the States has a fantastic markup. Cars - oh, my Lord! There must be a third. And appliances. And I don't know exactly but awful! And a cotton shirt that's \$3.50 I've seen for \$7.00 up there.

RB: Well, of course, we grow the cotton and I don't suppose Canada does. But I didn't realize the price of cotton -

WR: No, but it's awful. It's got better. But we all painted on masonite and it was awful, you know, and it's limited to four foot widths. So that was the reason.

RB: You don't currently paint on cotton canvas, do you?

WR: I switch. I switch around. Sometimes I like it actually.

RB: But in the beginning before you established your financial connection with the Kootz Gallery you did by virtue of not being able to afford linen, I suppose?

WR: Right. Yes. But I can afford it but frequently at this point sometimes now I paint on cotton and sometimes linen. It's just how you feel. I think - I don't know if Parker switched but up until certainly I think a year or so ago he just loved cotton, he couldn't paint on anything - he didn't want to paint on anything else, you know. It just had the right texture, tooth, and everything. There are many arguments, you know if it's good cotton, heavens - it will last -

RB: Well, in the last couple of years you've been using oil paint less. I take it, and using some of these more --?

WR: Yes, but I think all of my last show was on linen. But now at this time I have switched to cotton. I just felt like it. Now I want some linen. I want both.

RB: At the beginning of this reel we spoke about your new paintings and I think I discovered after we stopped talking on the tape that you have been using a new kind of paint since last spring.

WR: Yes. Well, I'm using -

RB: Do you want to say something about that?

WR: Yes. Aquatec is the trade name. it's simply pigment ground in polymer emulsion like Lucite or something, and water and possibly some ammonia to kill the odor.

RB: What do you prefer about it to what you were painting with six months ago?

WR: Well, I was painting with Magna and still am to finish some of them. But with Magna you have to use turpentine and it has quite a strong odor. And it's just different. Every medium is different you know.

RB: You just like to use different --?

WR: Yes. But this one has many advantages. It becomes impervious to water after it's dry because it gets the plastic film on it. And you can have it a matte finish or a shiny finish. You can build it up. You can put it on with a knife. It has absolutely no odor. It dries instantly. It has many things in its favor and probably if it isn't now, will be more permanent than oils because there's no oil in it, you know, and that's one of the worst things, I guess, that could be in paint; it leaks into the canvas, it yellows, and so on. And I think the plastics are the coming - you know, the thing. I've been using them for years. I used a polymer emulsion I think twelve years ago on a painting called Bright Vision that this Alexandra Luke bought. A very nice painting. And I mixed it with ordinary casein then. And it's the very same idea. And I really think it's nothing more than this Elmer's Glue basically;

very similar to that. But it's a very nice medium and you can do many things with it. I haven't explored it to its fullest but you can do everything with it you can imagine. And you can get something with it called molding paste and you can even get extra texture that way without using the actual paint which might crack, you know. Even oils if you load it on the way some of them have been in the past years probably will crack eventually because just from sheer weight.

RB: What base do you use? What - Do you use canvas already sized?

WR: Well, at the moment I am but if I don't I've been using latex base which hasn't been proven yet but again the purists', I suppose, wouldn't approve but I very much believe in these plastics, especially if you're going to use the Liquid-Tex. Of course, with this plastic emulsion with water as a solvent you can put oil right on top of it too after it's dry.

RB: It does dry very rapidly.

RW: Yes, very. Yes, it has many advantages. Especially no odor which is - I mean we're always exposed to odors and so on. And the Magna is rather strong. But I do use it. it's also fast drying. And then you can use oils with - I use oils with Acramedium which I think is a kind of plastic thing. And I've used that for ten years and my paintings have stood up very well. I've had no complaints so far on any of my paintings actually.

RB: To abandon for a moment this technical aspect - to go from the technical aspect to your living - I'm so well aware how comfortably Helen provides for your domestic situation, like food and all the rest - I'm suddenly curious to know how before she came when you were occupying Larry Rivers' former studio where you ate, what you did -

WR: Well, I made it myself. I left my home in Brampton, you see, and moved into Toronto I guess at the age of twenty-one and roomed with another fellow, another student. And we cooked our own meals. I cooked it myself a great deal. And actually though I had such a little bit of money that I didn't eat very much. You know I wouldn't even get weighed until the wintertime when I had my overcoat on I was so skinny. Because I couldn't stand it. I weighed about 145 and, as you know, I'm almost six foot. I then went up to - after I got with Sam and my wife had a baby and she started to feed me so well, etcetera, I don't know what it's got to do with the baby, but I went up to about 190. I'm not about 175. But I didn't eat a lot. And, you know, it used to make me so mad, I'd get invited out to these parties in New York when I first came here through the Hales, gosh, and everybody drank. And, as you know, I don't drink. But there'd never be any food. In Canada, you know, people eat a great deal it seems and always when you're invited out you have great food. And I used to be filling myself with potato chips and saltines all sorts of damn things. So I starved too. I actually was hungry, really hungry.

RB: Well, I should think under the circumstances, yes.

WR: Yes. But I did - I could make my own meals. I mean very simple -

RB: What sort of inexpensive food would you provide yourself with?

WR: I never did things inexpensively, no, no. I never did things that way. I never do and I never have.

RB: You mean you just ate nothing and then on another day you would eat well?

WR: No, if I was really hard up I would drink milk. I always figured if I had milk and I always had eggs and bacon. I have to have - I eat an enormous breakfast. I always have to have that. Oh, I managed, I don't know. But I wouldn't eat cheap food or anything like that. But I also spent a great deal of money on supplies, you know; that's where I would always put a great deal of my money. Well, this only lasted for a short while.

RB: But during these months you didn't take any odd jobs or anything to add to your income?

WR: Not during those months. But shortly after Helen arrived I did take a job with a display company called the Silvor Display people. And they were very nice to me really and paid me quite a good salary.

RB: What was your duty?

WR: I was a display designer. And, boy, was that rough! But the difference in the people. When they hired me they didn't care if I had any experience or anything. In Canada they wanted to know where you had worked, etc. etc. All they wanted to see was my samples. I made up a bunch of sample. Some day I'll show them to you; I don't think I ever have. And they were just a bunch of zany things and this guy happened to think he knew how he could use them. And he said I don't care if you've ever been to school or if you've ever worked, he said, this isn't Europe, this is the United States, and this is what I'm interested in. and I think he offered me \$100 or \$125 a week which was very good, you know. And I took it. And I stayed for a few months. And it was very hard work. Like one day a man came in from Carolina or some place and he had a whole store, a great big department

store. I forget how many windows. Oh! I had to design a whole Christmas presentation in one day.

RB: In one day!

WR: With this guy standing over my shoulder. And by "design" I mean design and then figure - now, say, I make up a Christmas tree, just a simple thing, but I've got to tell him how it's built, you know, how is it made, etc. etc. And I was just faking the whole bit, you know. I'd never - boy! - But anyway what I -

RB: You earned your salary.

WR: Well, anyway, what I actually quit about was another thing: there was a Negro that worked there, a man. And the bosses used to treat this guy so badly that I got so upset -

RB: He was a fellow designer? Or in a lesser capacity?

WR: No, a sweeper or something. Had one arm. And they used to treat him just terribly. And one day I really gave them hell. I found out later this guy had won \$50,000 in a sweepstake and he dug it, he liked being treated like that. Not that any other Negroes do in this whole world; but he did. And I felt like an ass. And the poor man, Joe Silvor, was so surprised when I came on him like this. Because he didn't have a clue about what I was talking about. And I can see I was being very Canadian and stupid now because these people were Jewish and, you know, I wasn't with it. you know, they have a certain manner. And I love - well, that sounds condescending, I don't mean to say that - but they do, and I wasn't used to it, you know. I was used to Scotch people and so on and I just wasn't used to the manner. Like getting on a bus, you know how when you first come to New York - I mean you've been around much more than I - but I'd say, "How do you get to 57th Street?" They'd say, "What do you mean! How do you get to 57th Street!" And I found that if I'd just hang on for about thirty or forty seconds and bear with him then he'd be very nice to me and he'd say, "So long, Buddy," or something. They don't mean a thing by it. it's just the way they are. Anyway, I quit the job because of this. I couldn't stand it.

RB: You mean this Negro had some sort of masochistic temperament?

WR: I just couldn't stand the way they treated him. Yes, he didn't mind at all because he had enough money, he could have quit. I mean even \$50,000 is nothing to most people but to a man like that!

RB: Well, surely, it's a considerable amount even with -

WR: But he didn't have to take it. He took it. Well, I don't know but the point is it bugged me and I couldn't stand it. And anyway the job was ridiculous. But anyway they were good to me and it was some sort of an experience. And then after that I - well, on the next tape I guess we'll get talking about the Bakelands and so on.

RB: But during the time you had that job you couldn't have had much opportunity to paint?

WR: I tried but it was very difficult.

RB: You stayed up late at night --?

WR: Yes, that's what I used to do. Oh, boy, it was rough. And I couldn't paint too well then anyway because it takes me a long time to move and to get reorientated. I don't move around well. It took me three years before I really felt like I was in New York. So I wasn't too productive in 1955. I think I only did about six pictures and I worked kind of all the time really. But, no, I couldn't do much work. That was for sure. Then I just quit it. And I managed to get money. I started to sell a few pictures here and there in Canada.

RB: Well, isn't it logical to imagine that in a sense you must have been a bit lonely separated from Helen and --?

WR: Yes, but when I was working I wasn't separated. I was with her.

RB: Yes. By that time, yes. But then you wouldn't have had much time to paint -

WR: Oh, it was horrible.

RB: But then you wouldn't have much time to paint but I mean in this whole early years, say.

WR: It was horrible. I didn't know a soul.

RB: -- you must have been quite unhappy generally?

WR: Oh, it was terrible.

RB: You mentioned going to all these parties though.

WR: No, I didn't go to "all these parties." I went to a few, you know; not very many. Not nearly enough. I was alone most of the time. And it wasn't very much fun. Especially I was there during the wintertime. My God! How do I always get on these awful things! And the snow I can remember being right in the middle of the floor coming through the skylight. I had to sleep with my clothes on. Holy God! What thoughts.

RB: Were you a good correspondent with your wife? Did you used to write Helen?

WR: Oh, yes. Yes. And I did take a trip up there once or twice so that we could see each other.

RB: Well, it was rather expensive to do.

WR: Well, I know. But what are you going to do? I mean I was selling some paintings and that year I made about \$3,000 on paintings.

RB: Well now, how did you sell these in New York?

WR: In Canada.

RB: Oh, in Canada?

WR: I was getting a name up there, you see.

RB: Well, these were ones you left behind? Or had sent up? Or took up with you?

WR: Well, maybe sometimes I'd go up there and do them, you know. And - well, Bakeland always said I willed the gods. I didn't have the money - he had so much money - but he always said I'd make out one way or another because I forced the gods to... and I sort of always believe that now. It kind of helps me.

RB: Well, it's a nice sort of -

WR: It works you know. I don't know whether I've mentioned it but my author friend says one way to be a successful artist is to never take a job.

RB: That may be, yes. We -

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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