Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Louis Siegriest, 1975 April 5

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

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Louis Siegriest on April 5, 1975. The interview took place at his home in Oakland, California, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom 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.

Interview

PAUL KARLSTROM: The interview will take the form more of a conversation between Mr. Oliveira and Mr. Siegriest who are old friends - both of them born in Oakland. As a matter of fact, if I'm not mistaken, Louis was born in this very house, or at least on this very site where the interview is taking place, in 1899. Nate doesn't go back quite that far. Their relationship, I gather, does go back a number of years. When was it that you two met?

LOUIS SIEGRIEST: 1945.

NATHAN OLIVEIRA: 1947, I think, when I first went to school.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Maybe it was, because Lundy went to school with him, and Edna knew you before I knew you. Edna had met you some place.

MR. OLIVEIRA: She'd gone to school.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, I guess so, because you had lived in East Oakland, wasn't it East Oakland when you got married? You had us over for dinner one night and I think that was the first time I met you.

MR. OLIVEIRA: No, I met you once before-you were teaching over in San Francisco at that little school on California Street - what was the name of it?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I know you were living in East Oakland at the time and Leon Golden was here. I think he was invited that night to the party. He had a little apartment over here.

MR. OLIVEIRA: That's what started it all.

MR. SIEGRIEST: And then you moved down [to] 56th Street.

MR. OLIVEIRA: That was after the Army.

MR. SIEGRIEST: That's when I saw more of you because you'd come off the hill and stop in here. It was only about two and a half blocks from here.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Where the freeway is now.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, it's gone. The freeway's taken the whole thing over.

MR. OLIVEIRA: During that time Lou and I and Mona, my wife, became very good friends. They were always inviting us to participate in everything that was happening here and during that course of time Lou revealed many interesting aspects of his life. I think we go back to stories of him living in this house and one specific story has to do with Adora Park, right, which was over there where my house was, before my house [was built]. When was that, Lou?

MR. SIEGRIEST: You mean when it ended?

MR. OLIVEIRA: About when was the time when the parachutist, balloonist…

MR. SIEGRIEST: Some time in the twenties, because this was the only house here except the barn in the back. That house wasn't here - there was nothing. My old man had that property out there. It ran down about four or five houses down there. That was all open fields and we had fruit trees dividing the property. There was a dairy over there. Well, they had a balloon session every Sunday.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Over at Adora Park.

MR. SIEGRIEST: A fellow by the name of Hamilton and his wife used to go up in a balloon.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did they charge admission, or what?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Us kids would go over there and hang on the [goddamn] balloons until he hollered, "Let go!" One guy went up with the balloon he went up about five or six hundred feet and let go.

MR. KARLSTROM: Hanging on?

MR. SIEGRIEST: He froze on the thing. Anyway, they used to sail around here and - he had an acting bar - that's all he had on the thing. It wasn't a basket, it was just an acting bar.

MR. KARLSTROM: You mean a bar he held on or sat on?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, he'd sit on the thing and do stunts. His wife did, too. When he came down all these kids would run over and fold up the balloon. He'd pass out tickets, see, free tickets for the Adora Park, and Jesus, the kids would break their fannies getting over there. There was a sharp point on this house - did you notice that thing? I think the one in the front has been hammered down-it's metal, see. Well the one in the back, he just missed it by that much. About a foot or so, and he let down in a fruit tree. He was all tangled up in those things.

MR. KARLSTROM: This is when he was landing.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, when he was landing. I don't know, he used to guide that thing pretty good. He let out air or something.

MR. KARLSTROM: When was this, now?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, it could be 1919, 1920…

MR. KARLSTROM: You would have been about twenty years old.

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, younger than that. It would have been 1914 or '15. Yes, 1914 or '15.

MR. KARLSTROM: Way back when you were a teenager.

MR. OLIVEIRA: This was before you were a cowhand, running cattle.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I was never a real cowhand. I had an uncle up in Lotus, up in Eldora County, and he used to drive the cattle from Lotus all the way to Mount Rubicon which is up near Tahoe, above Tahoe. He had seven hundred head of cattle at the time and they'd drive right through Placerville - right through the town - everybody did. Then over to Georgetown, and then up from there, there was nothing but ranches from there on. There was a Portuguese guy [and] we'd stay overnight in [his] place - I went up for a long time with my mother, but this time I was about fifteen, sixteen or seventeen. I went up alone. The old man was a tough old guy; he had a big black beard. The two girls rode in the cart, in the back. Jesus, they got all the dust from all these animals. We camped along a creek that night and I said, "whereabouts do you sleep around here?" The old man said, "you grab a blanket and [you] go over by the trees and sleep." Jesus, I was a green pea. And the next morning I asked him, "where do you wash around here?" And he said, "you're on the goddamn creek." Jesus, the water was snow water, you see, and I struggled to wash my face and that was enough!

MR. KARLSTROM: I'll bet that's when Lou decided to be an artist…that morning bath in the ice water.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Did you drive the cattle down to the Bay Area or where did you end up?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well they had all the cattle at Lotus, see, at the ranch there, [we] spent three or four days rounding up all the cattle and we got them in one bunch and then we'd start driving [them] there. They had two bulls, I remember, big [guys].

MR. KARLSTROM: To keep the cows happy.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yeah, and they were mounting the cows all the way, you see, and I was kind of embarrassed on account of the girls in the cart, see, but they were used to it.

MR. KARLSTROM: They probably liked it.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yeah, they both liked it, but to beat it all, one of the cows had a calf on the way up, and the old man said, "Come over here," and he put the goddamn calf up on the saddle, see, it was all slimy and everything and I had to carry that calf. Jesus, that killed me.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Where did that drive end?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Near Mt. Tallac they had a wooden building, I mean a log building, and the first thing they did, they had a stand up in a tree, and they would put a salt lick out. They'd go up at night time and they'd shoot [either a bear or a deer] and they'd make jerky out of that. The attic was all open, and they'd put that stuff up there and make jerky out of it. Everybody carried jerky in case you got lost. You could eat for a long time. But I only made two trips where I thought I was a cowboy.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And a lot better than the cowboy [experiences I've had].

MR. SIEGRIEST: But they would meet other herds either coming or going, and the bulls would fight and you'd carry [a] big black snake whip. They had two cowboys and the old man, and the son. Jesus, they could really throw that bullwhip around. It would take the hide right off the bull. That was something.

MR. OLIVEIRA: This must have been when you were sixteen or seventeen, wouldn't you say?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yeah, about that time.

MR. OLIVEIRA: How soon after did you go to art school over at the Mark Hopkins?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I was going to grammar school - '14, '15 was when I was going to school, and I wasn't getting along too good because I wanted to be a cartoonist, you see. I was drawing cartoons in all the books and cartoons of all the kids around there. There was Mutt and Jeff - Bud Fisher used to draw Mutt and Jeff. He was in San Francisco and he put in the Chronicle - I have the ad around - the one who draws the best strip will win ten dollars and a chance to go and see the Mutt and Jeff movie or something [over at the Alcazar], and I won it. I was going to grammar school and all the kids, Jesus, they thought that was great. "Gee, this guy, he's a real artist," and so my mother was very proud of that thing and the teacher said, "You ought to send him to art school at night time." So I went to Arts and Crafts at night.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Over here?

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, no, in Berkeley, that was when Perham Nahl was up there and Mr. Meyers ran the thing and he was a strict German, you were in the cast class, see, and boy, you had to noodle down and make all those things correctly before he'd let you go. I was there a year, I guess, at night.

MR. OLIVEIRA: You were still in grammar school…

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yeah, I was still going to school.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Then after that, did you go over to the Art Institute?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Then I met Red [von Eichman] at the school.

MR. OLIVEIRA: You mean, at the Mark Hopkins?

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, at the Arts and Crafts in Berkeley, and I'll never forget the first night I met that guy. I knew him, I mean, but the first time I went home [with him]. A fellow by the name of Rudolph Smith and another fellow and myself. See, he was about two years older than I was, and he had a studio in West Berkeley. He invited us after class to go down and see his studio. He opened the door and lit a match and he put [it] on the wall and the whole…

MR. KARLSTROM: This is [von Eichman]…

MR. SIEGRIEST: Von [Eichman].

MR. OLIVEIRA: Yes, he was a pyromaniac.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, yes, he burned his house down four different times. Well, not down, but…

MR. KARLSTROM: Why? To collect insurance?

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, no, just to see the fire engines come, and oh boy, that scared the hell out of me.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Good stories of him later on, I guess in Monterey, when you guys were painting down there with the Society of Six. You say he used to pile up his furniture in his living room and put the torch to it?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, no, that was in West Berkeley. He married a model who used to laugh like hell because…

MR. KARLSTROM: Go ahead.

MR. SIEGRIEST: That's all right. Anyway, he married this model. He built a place in West Berkeley, way in the back of a lot, a very high studio, practically a one-room joint, and he invited [Gile] and Gay and [William Clapp and] myself to go down there for dinner one night and some other people, too, I forget who they were. Everybody drank wine at that time - it was during Prohibition, see.

MR. KARLSTROM: Things haven't changed much.

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, I know, and anyway, he got loaded, and it was an old trick of his. I'd seen it before but not to that extent; he piled all the furniture in the middle of the room and then climbed up on - it was as high as that wall. We all beat it, because we knew what was going to happen. He'd fall off the thing and we all beat it home, but he was quite a character.

MR. OLIVEIRA: He torched that place, too?

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, he never torched any place except the burlap on the wall. The first night I came there, [he] burned all the fuzz off.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Going back [to von Eichman], both of you went to the Art Institute when it was [called] the Mark Hopkins.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I was still in the cast class and they had a life class at the other end of the hall. I used to go down there and peek through the keyhole to see the nude models. Bob Howard and all the Howard boys went there. They were drawing…

MR. KARLSTROM: Was that the same time?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: So you and they were fellow students.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He's older than I am, you know, Bob Howard must be in his eighties.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Yes, he has to be.

MR. SIEGRIEST: But they would draw life size practically - great big charcoal - and finally Mr. [Nahl] let me in one night to see their work, so I said to…

MR. OLIVEIRA: Who was the teacher?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Perham [Nahl] - he was a well-known teacher in the area.

MR. KARLSTROM: This was in Arts and Crafts.

MR. SIEGRIEST: At Arts and Crafts.

MR. KARLSTROM: We'll get him over to the Art Institute.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Anyway, let's see now.

MR. KARLSTROM: You were peaking through the keyhole.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Then I went to see Mr. Meyers. "I've been here a year and why can't I go into life class?" And he said, "Well, you have to do the skin man."

MR. OLIVEIRA: Skin man?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Da Vinci did it, you know.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Oh that's right, with all the muscles.

MR. SIEGRIEST: A small one. He said if you do that and do a good job I'll let you in the life class, and [when] I was about through with the skin man he said - oh, I won a scholarship up there.

MR. OLIVEIRA: In San Francisco or Arts and Crafts?

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, Arts and Crafts, and I couldn't get out of that goddamn [cast] class. They kept me in there all the time.

MR. KARLSTROM: I see, you had the scholarship to the plaster cast class.

MR. SIEGRIEST: And so he came over [one] evening and he said, "You're the scholarship man. The model didn't show up and you have to pose." Well, it was a mixed class, see, and I was about sixteen or seventeen years old. Mr. [Nahl] never had [the models in] a jock strap and I thought, "Well." They had a little booth where you changed your clothes right [off] a regular stage - and he said, go in [there] take your clothes off. Gee, I got into this room and I couldn't come out, so Mr. [Nahl] came in there and he said, come on, come on out. So he gave me a sword and the goddamn sword was going up and down in the [pose]. There was a fellow by the name of Billy Creel made [drawings, marvelous ones.]

MR. OLIVEIRA: Do you have them?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I had them at one time but they got wet up in the tank house with the charcoal.

MR. KARLSTROM: These are drawings of you with the sword?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: I'd love to see them.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, I'd love to have them.

MR. OLIVEIRA: I'll bet you made a lot of friends after that experience.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I was on this thing like a stage, see, and it was a mixed class - not too many girls - but I'd look down to these people... Anyway, I got used to it and then I met [von Eichman], he was in the class, and he said, "Hey, I'm going over to the Hopkins School, would you like to go over with me?" A fellow by the name of Rudolph Smith was there also, and we said, "yes, we would like to go." We had heard about the Hopkins School, that they had good teachers over there, and Van [Sloun] who had just come from New York, the Art Students League. He studied with Robert Henri and Henri was a god to us as a painter. George Luks and those fellows, that's all we ever saw.

MR. KARLSTROM: I think Ruth Armer was at the Mark Hopkins at the same time.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, yes, I think she was.

MR. KARLSTROM: She told how influential Van [Sloun] was in terms of spreading the Henri gospel.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, yes. I was in a portrait class with Macky's wife, Constance Macky. I liked her better than I did him. To me, he wasn't too good, but she was pretty good. Then I took life from Van [Sloun] for a very short time - I don't think it was even six months - because he got into a fight with Lee Randolph, who ran the school, over something I don't know anything about, and he quit. He came in the class one day and he said, I'm going to open my own school. Anybody who would like to go there get in touch with John Winkler, the etcher. We thought that would be the thing to do, to go [with] Van [Sloun]. So he opened a school down near the City Hall and it was quite large - one big room - but he must have had forty students in the place.

MR. KARLSTROM: Do you remember when this was, what year that was? 1918, perhaps?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, about 1918-19. Correct, because [I was] at Hopkins during the war, 1917?

MR. KARLSTROM: Yes, 1917, I think, when the U.S. entered the First World War.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, [there were] a lot of the fellows [who] were going to Europe and I remember - I can't think of his name, now - he wanted for all of us to go over and drive ambulances over there. Dr. Alouitious? I think his name was? He's still living in San Francisco, but he was a well known man through [out] the art world - everybody knew him.

MR. OLIVEIRA: This was when you went to the art school for six months, at the Hopkins School, then you went to Van [Sloun's] school. Now how long was that?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well Van [Sloun] wasn't long. I think about a year and a half I went to Van [Sloun's].

MR. OLIVEIRA: Was that during the period of time at the art school and at Van [Sloun's] when you and Red [von Eichman] used to go down to the Barbary Coast?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, that was the time. We'd come off the hill, [and] we'd come down California Street. I can't think of the guys name, he lived down on California, and he told us about all the girls in the Barbary Coast. If we

went down we had free models, see, and Red said, "Jesus, we'll go down tonight," and so we came off the hill and all these girls had little booths that they sat in.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Was this in the House of All Nations?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, four stories and it had a fence around it and you looked down the thing. These girls would run up to you and say, "Hey, draw me, draw me," and we'd make a little sketch and give it to them. Oh boy, then they got a hold of [von Eichman] who had fiery red hair, curly red hair, and they thought that was the greatest thing in the world; it brought them luck. [So] all the girls would rub their hands through his hair while he was just sketching them.

MR. KARLSTROM: I wonder how he could keep his mind on his work.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I don't know. [Laughter]

MR. OLIVEIRA: They were very naïve, you see.

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, only one time. There was some girl there and Red said, "Why don't you take her on?" I said, "No." I was scared to death of the thing. Anyway, he threw my hat in the goddamn room, and it went under the bed. I had to crawl under the bed to get that hat.

MR. KARLSTROM: At least it didn't land on top of the bed.

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, underneath, underneath the bed. So we used to draw quite a bit down there.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, what would they do, I mean, would they just be sitting around while you did quick sketches?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, they were waiting for customers.

MR. KARLSTROM: And they didn't mind, they liked it that you were down there?

MR. SIEGRIEST: If it was a bad night - not many customers - I don't know how many gals were in the house. It was a big place - four stories - they called it the House of All Nations.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Wasn't this right in the middle of [the] Barbary Coast when it was in its heyday?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, it was in the Barbary Coast, but I can't tell exactly where anymore. I know we came down California Street and it was right...

MR. OLIVEIRA: Yes, but this was in the heyday of the Barbary Coast when it was going full blast, and guys were getting shanghaied.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, I went to - what's the name of the place on Pacific Avenue? It's got who's statues out in front[?] You know, reliefs out there, they're still there. A well known...

MR. OLIVEIRA: Stackpole?

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, no, before Stackpole, a well known - I can't think of the name of the place - but I went in with Red [von Eichman] and there was dancing downstairs, [and] a big long bar. We went upstairs, there was a balcony, and as soon as you sat down some of these gals would come up and they'd sit down and want a drink. I had five bucks. That was big money in those days, and so I paid the girl five bucks - we got beer, I don't know what the hell they drank, they drank champagne or something. Anyway, no change came back, so I said, "Hey, where's my change?" and she said, "Oh no, you don't get any change back." Well, I was ready to clean somebody up because five dollars was an awful lot of money and some guy came over. He said, "Hey buddy, either you shut up or get the hell out of here," and so I beat it. I told Red, "Let's get out of here because I'll up and smack somebody." I wanted my change.

MR. KARLSTROM: I don't blame you.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Was this the total art school experience that you had, Lou, I mean the Van [Sloun] school and then...was there anything else after that?

MR. SIEGRIEST: That's the total of art schools that I [went to].

MR. OLIVEIRA: Then what did you do after you left Van [Sloun]?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, when I was going to Van [Sloun's] my mother knew Maurice [del Mue] who was French - he

was a pretty good painter - I saw one of his paintings, impressionist things. He was born in Paris and my mother knew him, knew his father. He was chef at the Palace Hotel, and everybody was working at Foster and Kleiser. That was when they were doing billboards that were real billboards [and] posters.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Painted.

MR. SIEGRIEST: And I had monkeyed around with that stuff at home, posters and stuff. So I asked my mother if she would take me over to see Maurice [del Mue] who worked at Foster and Kleiser. He was one of the head artists there. There was Maynard Dixon, [Paul von] Schmidt. They had twenty-two guys working there. Well, I went over to see him and he said, "I'll try and get you in" - not as a poster artist - as an apprentice, where you had to clean the palettes, although you did posters - that was an amateur practice of an art. Well, I finally got a job to do some - I have a sketch downstairs - and they saw that I had feeling for making posters so they gave me work to do. So I worked there for about two and a half years - two years, anyway, and then [Willard] Cox and Louis Hughes were up in Seattle and they were making money hand [over] fist. They were commercial men.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Before you go any farther, where did the Society of Six come in? Now that had to happen back... Were you still going to school?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I was still going to school.

MR. OLIVEIRA: That was with [von Eichman].

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Gile?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I was going to Hopkins. How that happened [was] my mother bought me a box of oils and I used to copy photographs and postcards. The laundry man came one evening - he was a Frenchman who used to come and get the laundry - and he saw me in a little room up there, and he said, "I know a couple of artists you'd like to see," and they lived up on James Street.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Here in Oakland?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Gile and Gay lived up there and he said, "I'll take you up - they're not home - but I'll take you up there and you can see all their paintings." Because at that time, they left the back door open, [and] the laundry man would come and get the laundry, the bakery man [would come] or whoever it was, and so he took me up and I saw all these paintings on the wall. Well, he invited me out to paint and I went out the following Saturday, I think it was. We went up on Chabot Road where there used to be nothing but farms through the valley there. He was only on James a short time when I knew him. He bought a house on Chabot Road and gave the place up on James Street, and it was a one-room side hill house, very steep lot. He had a small kitchen, a john or something there, and he had a basement on the side hill where he used to make home brew. I had been up there at night when the home brew went off. Gee, you'd think the Germans were coming. You know, one bottle would pop the other bottles - boom, boom, raise hell, and so I brought Red [von Eichman] up there and he was pretty particular who he had around unless you worked you didn't come up there to visit. You had to paint, see.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Now you and [von Eichman] were young guys compared to these others...

MR. SIEGRIEST: We were about seventeen.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And Gile and Gay were about how old?

MR. SIEGRIEST: They were ten years older. Gay was maybe six years older than I was and Gile was maybe ten or twelve years older than I was.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Well, how did you and [von Eichman] look at those paintings? When you saw Gile's paintings, these were exciting paintings for you and they were real artists, but [did you consider them] kind of modern or extreme?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, they were modern because [it was an] impressionistic type of painting and I had never seen that before. I might have seen it, but I didn't.

MR. OLIVEIRA: You were still in the life class.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, he painted in a very high key at that time [in an] impressionistic type of work.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Before that you were involved in Robert Henri and Sloan and those people.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, more than type.

MR. OLIVEIRA: So these were revolutionary in the sense [that] you were really excited…

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, revolutionary to me.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Really slapping the paint on…

MR. SIEGRIEST: Because there weren't enough galleries at that time to see anything.

MR. KARLSTROM: This is one of the things I was going to ask. What was available to be seen in San Francisco at that time?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, [Courvoisier] was a frame shop and also carried paintings. [

MR. KARLSTROM: How about the] City of Paris Gallery?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Madame [Ryan] ran the City of Paris. She ran her own gallery. I can't think of the name of it. Not Labaudt. But she ran her own gallery and she had a lot of well known painters at the time. Gile even showed there one time. The Beaux Arts Gallery, that's what she had, and she went from there - I don't know whether she didn't make it or what - she went to City of Paris and she had the Rotunda Gallery on the fourth floor and… did you ever show there, Nate?

MR. OLIVEIRA: No, no. I remember Mme. Ryan. I met her - I didn't know her. I think we talked about something, but I was very young.

MR. SIEGRIEST: She was a character. She always wore a big, large hat with roses and fruit and everything on top of this hat, and she was sarcastic as hell - she'd eat your ass off.

MR. KARLSTROM: What kind of work did these very few galleries we're talking about - around 1920, now, or a little earlier - what kind of work would they show, local artists, California artists?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I never got around too much to see those galleries.

MR. KARLSTROM: So you didn't run around looking at pictures an awful lot.

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, I didn't. At that time the Panama Pacific Fair, in 1915 was there. I had gone over there to see the paintings, but I was more impressed by a Spanish painter by the name of [Zuloaga]. I have his catalogue here. They were large things of Spain, mostly of Spain.

MR. KARLSTROM: This was a contemporary, or modern painter, I mean it was not an old master we're talking about.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, no. He [was] still living. And I was so impressed with those things that I was torn between quitting - he painted with blacks, see, and Gile would throw you right out of the place if you used any black. So I was kind of torn between. I admired this fellow, [Zuloaga], and I liked Gile's painting for landscape, so Gile won out because I couldn't go out there and use black. Oh geeze, that was an insult to use black.

MR. OLIVEIRA: But your sources at that time were fairly limited - the things that you could relate to or see. It wasn't an active art world in any way, and it was fairly limited and very few reproductions and not many publications.

MR. SIEGRIEST: The only publication we'd see was *The Studio*, remember that English thing? And that only had one or two color reproductions; [they were] generally black and white. But [von Eichman], who got around, became a fireman, water tender or hauler or something on a boat, and he made trips around the Panama Canal to New York. He'd bring back art magazines. At night he used to bring them up to Gile's and we'd all look at these, but we were still impressed with Impressionist painting, like Childe [Hassam's] - I can't think of any names -

MR. KARLSTROM: [Prendergast], was he….

MR. SIEGRIEST: Twachtman and that type of thing.

MR. KARLSTROM: And so in California there was maybe a twenty year time lag, because the American Impressionism in the East was really in the '90s, that was the heyday. I gather that these still, then, were the painters admired out here as late as 1920. Certainly, the heroes weren't the Cubists or Matisse.

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, I don't remember that. If I did see it, I wasn't impressed. I was more for the Impressionists. Most of the fellows around here painted that way, anyway.

MR. KARLSTROM: Sure. It was a very international style in some ways.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, but it's a funny thing about Martinez. You know, I saw him in school and I saw him [at] different places. I never met the man.

MR. KARLSTROM: He was in Oakland, wasn't he?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, he lived in Piedmont [the] edge of Oakland.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Now, was he teaching at the school when you were there?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, he was teaching at Arts and Crafts in the daytime.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And you didn't have a class with him, you didn't have any classes with him at all?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I never had any class because I always had a life class or a cast class.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Between the skin man and the... Well, what was Martinez teaching?

MR. SIEGRIEST: He was teaching a figure class, I guess. I don't know. It was in the daytime.

MR. KARLSTROM: That's right, you were there at night.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I went at night. I never went at daytime, but I used to go up in the daytime to visit other fellows who went to school there and became acquainted with a number of people there. So I'd go in the daytime just to see them. One fellow in particular, a fellow by the name of Gareths, a pretty good painter, he lived in Richmond and he had a studio out there and I used to go out and see him. He painted - it wasn't Impressionist style, not like Robert Henri, either - but as an average painter would paint. He did portraits a great deal - pretty good from what I remember.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Who were the big names in San Francisco at that time, I mean the painter's movement, the ones who seemed to be most prominent? Was Piazzoni part of that?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Piazzoni was a big name, yes, Martinez, Stackpole, the sculptor.

MR. KARLSTROM: What about Theodore [Wores]?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well Theodore [Wores], I don't think he lived around here.

MR. KARLSTROM: He probably did off and on. He went off to the Orient and to Hawaii.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Down south most of the time. We didn't think too much of Theodore [Wores].

MR. KARLSTROM: You knew about him, at least.

MR. SIEGRIEST: We knew about him but, Gile knew him; he'd met all these fellows. We used to call him the [lupine] painter. He always had [lupines] on the...

MR. KARLSTROM: Who did you call the [lupine] painter?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, he was one of the very prominent painters, I can't think of the name.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Of course, we're talking about a time when the art world was really limited, a twenty year difference between the enthusiasm for impressionism [and] the American impressionist painting, and so to be a painter at that time in Oakland or San Francisco was really an unusual profession. And I guess, as you went to school there weren't any real teaching jobs to kind of think about.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I don't think there was.

MR. OLIVEIRA: You thought maybe about getting into advertising art with Foster and Kleiser, or commercial art, or cartooning, whatever it is.

MR. SIEGRIEST: It was the only way to make a living. You couldn't make it on painting, I'm sure.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Or, on the other hand, you responded in a kind of naïve, genuine way, and enthusiastic way about

painting, and I guess that's the way Gile and Gay and [von Eichman] and you kind of got involved with forming the Society of Six. I mean, you just loved to paint. So we got to that point; you and [von Eichman] went up to Berkeley in Gile's studio...

MR. SIEGRIEST: That wasn't Berkeley, it was Oakland, on Chabot Road, and [at] that one, we used to paint every Saturday and Sunday or during the week. Gile - he was a pretty good cook - there's a picture of him right there, yes, that's him cooking over there. Anyway he prepared these meals that were loaded with garlic, everything had garlic in it.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Is that the guy who taught you how to cook?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, that's the guy who taught me. The salad was loaded with garlic and if you had potatoes, he'd chop up garlic with olive oil, then he'd put it over your potato.

MR. KARLSTROM: And nobody would talk to you for three days afterward.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, I must tell you about that picture, Dr. Caligari. Dr. Caligari came here, you know, it came to the...

MR. KARLSTROM: The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.

MR. SIEGRIEST: It's the German version, you know.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Eisenstein's film. [Robert Wiene's film]

MR. SIEGRIEST: Was it? Well anyway, we all went down to see this picture after a meal at Gile's that Sunday night. I think we went about seven o'clock and it was a packed house. We sat in the middle of the house and pretty soon people were moving. There were all kinds of seats around us. We drank red wine and were loaded with garlic, it came out of our pores. People were moving; they couldn't stand the odor, so we got to see Dr. Caligari.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Now, the four of you painting up there. This must have been beginning of the Society of Six. I mean, how did Bill Gaw get into that?

MR. SIEGRIEST: No. One night, I think it was Mr. [William Henry Clapp] - He came from Canada, you see. He was a Canadian painter and belonged to the Society of Seven in Canada. Gile said, "That's an idea, there's six of us here, why don't we have [the] Society of Six? And Mr. Clapp who was the director of the Oakland Art Museum at the time, thought that was a good idea and so we did. He said we could show at the Oakland Museum. And I don't have any clippings - very few - but I think [Terry St. John] found some someplace.

MR. KARLSTROM: Yes, Oakland probably has some.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Anyway, we'd show there once a year, at least, and then there was a fellow by the name of Ruthroth that worked for Southern Pacific - I think he was a claim agent or something that Gile had known. He used to go to Ogden, Utah and down [to] Arizona and he said, "If I arranged a show for you fellows, would you show there?" He worked through Gile, and I think this fellow took the paintings to Ogden and Flagstaff - I don't know - someplace in Arizona and we showed there, and then - Jesus, I'm awful on names -

MR. KARLSTROM: You're doing very well.

MR. SIEGRIEST: The woman who brought the Blue Four here.

MR. KARLSTROM: Galka Scheyer.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes. She had a place up on Telegraph Avenue. Gile got to know her quite well, and I'm rather hazy about the thing. I met her a number of times, but I didn't know who she was.

MR. KARLSTROM: You didn't realize she was that important or would become important.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, I didn't know she was that important, and we had shown in her gallery, and now whether I had wanted to, I don't know, I forgot. It wasn't that important to me at the time. But I know Gile had shown there and he became a quite good friend of hers. Then she showed at the Oakland [Museum] her collection [of]...

MR. KARLSTROM: German Expressionists.

MR. SIEGRIEST: German collection at the Oakland Museum.

MR. OLIVEIRA: When was that?

MR. SIEGRIEST: That was the time[…] it was Feininger, [you know how he tipped things around] and it impressed me. I really didn't know what it was all about, but it was the idea that the houses were all tipped and a lot of figures moving [around] and I started painting that way. I have a few things but I burned practically everything up a few years ago.

MR. OLIVEIRA: This was when? This was while you were painting with the Society of Six?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, I was painting with the Society of Six.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And was this maybe your first contact with a form of Cubism? Were you aware of Picasso before that, or Braque?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I think I might have seen them but I wasn't that impressed by them.

MR. OLIVEIRA: But Feininger impressed you.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, the Blue Four. So unusual, and they used very vivid colors, right out of the tubes, and that impressed me. I changed a great deal, but I didn't know enough about it to get any place. I was trying to imitate these guys but I didn't know enough, and that was it. I had seen all that work, but I didn't follow through. I painted for a while that way, and then I drifted back into the straight impressionist stuff.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Now you're talking about Gile and Gay, [von Eichman] and yourself, and you made up the Society of Six. Who were the other two people?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, there was Clapp, Logan, Gile, Gay, [von Eichman] and myself.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Okay. And then William Gaw was just…

MR. SIEGRIEST: William Gaw and his father used to come around and paint with us but they weren't members of the Society of Six because Gile said, "I'm going to keep it a 'Six,'" which he did. Because I think Gaw hit him to come in, I'm not sure about that. I remember him talking about it. Gaw was a great talker. As Gile said, his father painted better than he did. I don't know, but he did a lot of talking, I know that. He used to come at night and sort of take over, you know. So this fellow Gay was a Frenchman, about two or three years older than I was, and he lived in Alameda with his family, but he also lived at Gile's in a way. He'd come up there and paint and stay overnight and use everything around the place - he'd use Gile's paint - Gile used to laugh about it. Then he moved to Monterey, at the Robert Louis Stevenson home, he was a caretaker down there, and he lived with C.S. Price, the cowboy painter. And we used to go down there, Logan, Gile, and myself, to paint, and we'd paint marine scenes at that time. Price never painted with us but he was always around. He wore a big black hat and cowboy shoes, and we used to laugh about it because we never saw him take his hat off. Gay said, "I think the bastard went to bed with his hat on."

MR. OLIVEIRA: Well, didn't you used to send him out for wine, and he used to kind of go running errands for you people?

MR. KARLSTROM: Who did this?

MR. OLIVEIRA: Price, C.S. Price.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, he lived right there, and he kept to himself quite a bit because we'd raise hell. I don't know whether he drank or not, I didn't pay any attention to it, but Gile would cook down there. He would cook outside, see, they had one of those dutch ovens, and at that time things were cheap. They'd go down and buy a salmon for a dollar, you know, a big thing, and crab. Gile used to toss up a big salad, and [we'd get] a gallon of wine and have a great time. We'd go down on Friday night and stay until Sunday night.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And you'd do this frequently?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, yes.

MR. OLIVEIRA: It sounds like a great time.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, about twice a month. But we'd paint marine scenes and there was a painter down there by the name of [Ritchel]. Now, I don't know, but we heard he used to get ten thousand dollars in New York for his paintings. They were big things. He had a very lovely home on the point where he lived at that time and we'd see him out painting and he impressed me a great deal. He was an impressionist painter, but I guess a high class potboiler, I don't know. But he got ten thousand bucks.

MR. OLIVEIRA: A lot of money.

MR. SIEGRIEST: You're goddamn right, a lot of money.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Well, Price was part of that group down there and you didn't really know that much about what he really did. You say he kind of stayed on the…

MR. SIEGRIEST: He was kind of a loner. He stayed pretty much to himself. He never went out painting with us. He might have gone out with Gay, I don't know, because you remember the time [that] Mrs. Gay wanted to give me three big things of Price's, I think there were three, weren't there?

MR. OLIVEIRA: Right, there were two big sea paintings.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Two? Well, anyway, you saw the paintings, one of them is in the book, the catalogue, looking down a hillside on a house that was down there, and Mrs. Gay wanted to give me those. I said, "No, if you would write the Portland Museum, they would buy them from you." She never did. Well, shall I tell the name of the guy who was here? Well, Dr. Kantor was here from Atherton. He had bought some Gile's from me.

MR. OLIVEIRA: He's the brother of Paul Kantor who was then my dealer.

MR. SIEGRIEST: And I was telling him the story about [the seascapes] of Price's which I could have had for nothing and I turned him down. Well, he didn't say anything but he must have left here and gone right to the telephone and called Mrs. Gay, and he bought [them] - I thought there was three.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Well, there may have been three.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, he bought them for six hundred dollars, see.

MR. OLIVEIRA: All of them?

MR. SIEGRIEST: All of them, and I didn't know that until you told me. You told me they were down…

MR. KARLSTROM: I walked in and they were down at Paul's gallery.

MR. OLIVEIRA: I was interested in this, too, because we were talking about going down to see Mrs. Gay, Lou and I.

MR. KARLSTROM: Where is Mrs. Gay, now?

MR. OLIVEIRA: She lives over in Alameda now.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, she died. She lived in Alameda, but her sister and her brother are living. In fact, they call me up quite often.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Because I was a great admirer, and still am, of C.S. Price, as many other artists of this are were, and so this offered me an opportunity to - at that time I had some money - possibly buy a Price for myself. In any event, it turned out as Lou related the story. I was completely unaware of the fact that Bob Kantor bought these paintings, and so in '62 when I went down to Los Angeles to live for a year I walked into my dealer's gallery, Paul Kantor, and on the wall were these two beauties of C.S. Price's.

MR. KARLSTROM: What were they marked at?

MR. OLIVEIRA: Oh God, I think then, and this was a big price in '61, $1500 or $2000 a piece, you know. And the fact is that [neither] Bob Kantor nor Paul were going to keep them - they're really concerned with business. So, that's the way those things work out. From what I know about Price, I know him to be kind of a recluse, as Lou was explaining him, and he seemed to move up and down the coast between Monterey and Carmel and [Portland] and San Francisco.

MR. KARLSTROM: He was originally from the Northwest.

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, no. Montana, because in the catalogue he has pictures of cowboys.

MR. KARLSTROM: Isn't he in some way associated with the Pacific Northwest?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, yes, later on.

MR. OLIVEIRA: That's where he settled.

MR. KARLSTROM: I see. Did he know [Tobey], do you think?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, yes, he did. He knew Mark [Tobey] and Morris Graves. In fact, I believe that he ran a class up there, and I think Morris Graves and [Tobey] were pupils of his because you know those birds in the catalogue - they're quite a bit like Morris Graves. He's well thought of in the Northwest, see.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, Nate, let me ask you, you mentioned you and other students in the Bay Area, knew of Price and admired his work. What was it, really, that appealed?

MR. OLIVEIRA: He's really a West Coast abstract painter. As a young person, a young student, the influences of my youth were different than Lou's, in [the] sense that there are great numbers of publications and more emphasis on art. [We were] aware of what [was] going on. And when I came in contact with C.S. Price's work, I was a student and he was a West Coast artist. As Lou was saying, there was a possibility of his having had some direct contact or indirect contact or influence on Toby or Graves, and as a young painter, those two people were very important to me and also to friends of mine. Maybe more to the people at Arts and Crafts than the kids at the Art Institute who were at that time under the spell of abstract expressionism. But Price, you know, here was a genuine West Coast abstract painter who really painted very beautiful things that were abstract. His appeal, to me, was the fact that they were not just formal abstractions but they were abstractions that were based on…

MR. SIEGRIEST: The nature was semi-…

MR. OLIVEIRA: You could relate them to nature, directly to nature, or there were some mystical sort of overtones that one could pick up with Morris Graves, Mark Toby or such.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Do you think Diebenkorn has seen those?

MR. OLIVEIRA: I don't think so.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, he had a Diebenkorn feeling in the thing, in those two landscapes.

MR. KARLSTROM: That's interesting because this is something that, to my knowledge, hasn't been really explored. I don't think - I may be naïve or ignorant - but I don't think Price is [a] household world in the field of art history that a lot of other names are, and even in reading the little that's written about the West Coast art, it's not a name that comes up often.

MR. SIEGRIEST: [No]. That's true.

MR. OLIVEIRA: But [he was] probably [more] known on the West Coast a few years back than [he] is now. I think his work was taken to New York by Edith Halpert. I think she had an exhibition for him and it just wasn't received at all. Up to that point, there was attention being given to him and after that, I believe he kind of drifted off in light of the great developments in the current art world, great movements. And the funny thing about Price [I think] Lou was kind of hinting at this. Granted, he did a lot of so-called potboilers, just to live on. He'd sell from $25 or $30…in the area of…

MR. KARLSTROM: Whatever it would be, and he seemed to live off that kind of work.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I think all the artists did at that time - lived off the tourists - especially [in] Monterey.

MR. KARLSTROM: They'd do seascapes, landscapes, like maybe a better version of the Laguna Beach school of interminable waves washing the shore, this sort of garbage.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, the Monterey walk was a good one. Everyone went out to Monterey walk, and you'd see all these guys, Gay did too, down [there] painting the walk, because [it was] a sure seller.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Well, some of my first art lessons were given by a man who painted the sea very much like this. He was over at the Cliff House. There used to be a little green [house] on that big cement veranda back there, in back of the Cliff House and [it] looked over the rocks, and there was a little man who painted the sea. He gave lessons and I was going to high school, and I took some lessons from him. And so it was a fairly common thing, and I think it's still practiced today. But Price was one of those, and when and how he painted his more personalized things I don't know; but I do know that you look at Price and you see him somehow suggesting the Bay Area figurative painting period, don't you? The Diebenkorn's, as Louis suggested, the David Park's or things of that sort. You can also see a certain mysticism in them, but you see a certain natural phenomenon occurring…

MR. SIEGRIEST: Later, later.

MR. OLIVEIRA:…that repeats itself. I think that regardless of whether David Park or Dick Diebenkorn was aware

of this phenomenon, [it] all ties into a certain flavor of the Bay Area. I mean, with Maybeck, all those people in the early days that were very close to nature. There was an identity of a certain specific quality that became typical of the San Francisco area. Landscape painters - who was the furniture maker, the furniture designer/painter who had the show at the Oakland Museum at the same time - Matthews? There was a kind of rural, pastoral flavor that occurred. Price was also under the spell of it in a quite natural way, but then it's strange to think that years later, with David Park and Bay Area figurative painting [that] it was kind of picked up again - whether it was a conscious association or not, I don't know.

MR. KARLSTROM: What you're talking about, Nate, is really [an] indigenous sensibility in the Bay Area, and you feel that Price participated, or exemplified this at a certain time [and] to a certain extent, and that it tied in with something that is somehow native [to] the locale. This raises, I think, a very natural question because what really catapulted San Francisco to fame in the art world came with the California School of Fine Arts, or at least, it's billed this way, with the presence of Clyfford Still and some of the other abstract expressionists. It was almost, in a way, an import. There was a very strong figure who arrived on the scene, students studied with him, and then all of a sudden it was AE and nothing but AE. How do you feel?

MR. OLIVEIRA: Well, I wasn't part of that. I can only say that I was over at Arts & Crafts at that time, and this was all occurring at the Art Institute. It did occur with the coming of Clyfford Still and then kind of found its way to New York, or there were certainly sympathetic associations in New York. So there was a great enthusiasm about it in the minds of many, many young painters. This went on for a good bit of time, but then Clyfford left, [and] with the development, certainly, [of] David Park's ideas, it was a return back to this kind of natural identity, natural characteristic. After Still left and Park had started those figurative landscape paintings, then [Bischoff] kind of got into it, Diebenkorn, and after that everyone kind of gravitated [to] what I consider to be that kind of natural identity of the Bay Area, but hyped up with the experience, the awareness of [the] abstract expressionist language.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, you, on occasion, are associated loosely or firmly, I'm not sure which, with the Bay Area figurative school. Perhaps erroneously, I don't know. This is something I think a lot of people wonder about. There are certain names that come up, the ones that are most firmly identified [with it] would be obviously, David Park, Diebenkorn, I guess [Bischoff]. What do you feel is your relationship, if any, to this?

MR. OLIVEIRA: It is only in the sense that we, [meaning] myself and that group, decided to paint figures and to return to or deal with a vocabulary that was not at all current at that moment. And it was a matter of coincidence, really. My only actual tie with that group was, when I got out of the army in 1955 I drew [from a model] with Dick Diebenkorn, Bill Brown, David Park and Elmer for three or four sessions, that's all, in Berkeley.

MR. KARLSTROM: We have some photos in the Archives, probably, of those sessions. Wonderful photographs.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Great. But I couldn't share their enthusiasms and by this time I had just gotten out of the army and I was kind of taken up by the spirit of that moment and the war. I was in love with the German Expressionists, cultivating a real love for DeKooning and the possibility of an American expressionism, and also I was developing a real feeling for Giacometti and his concerns for the figure. My influences were from outside of the area, and I couldn't be satisfied with the immediate environment and [the] attitudes of David Park's and Elmer's and Dick Diebenkorn's. I found myself at odds with these people and would be at parties and get into arguments.

MR. KARLSTROM: And yet some of them are still your good friends.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Oddly enough, over the years they've become even greater friends. We were opposed to each other, we were in opposite camps at that time, but now we're - Elmer I'm very fond of. Dick Diebenkorn, I think, is a tremendous painter, a very important painter. I always have felt that. And there's something that develops with time, you know, in being associated with people, after you've traveled on the same caravan - time caravan - for a while, and you kind of look upon each other with greater tolerance and maybe with a greater need for association. And so I think this is what's happened to us.

MR. KARLSTROM: Certainly it's true, I think you would agree with this, that those who take an art historical overview and try to [create categories find] that you in one way or another are associated - it may be geography as much as anything else.

[MR. OLIVEIRA: Geographical, figure.]

MR. KARLSTROM: [But] the concerns are quite different.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Much different, yes. And I think the fact is that Dick Diebenkorn and I showed in New York about the same time. He showed in New York before I did, maybe a year or two before, but we both got attention at the same time. At least national, and that was in [the] *Image of Man* exhibition. And I think it was just natural to

tie us two together [because of] figures, regardless of analyzing the subject. Oakland, Berkeley, teaching at the California School of Fine Arts, that union occurred at that time, at least in the minds of the people in the East, and so this is a good bit responsible for the association. But in fact, we were not really very close at all. I used to come over here and complain to Lou about those goddamn figurative painters.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, really. Come, tell me about that.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Oh I'd always get into fights with them. I was teaching drawing over at the Art Institute in San Francisco - Elmer wasn't there, he was gone by this time - but Lobdell and Dick Diebenkorn, I guess, [were] there. Maybe Elmer was still there, I don't know. But then, there was a group of lesser Bay Area figurative painters. Well, they had developed a group idea, an attitude, a general concept, and this is where I was kind of irritant, because they were relating to the logic of a natural environment and how it could be used and interpreted - the solidity of drawing, the logic of light and the patterns that could be created by light and dark and color and associating it to the new language of the abstract expressionists and such. Instead, I would be doing and teaching my kids a more fragmentary kind of concept, more psychologically oriented, if you wish, or at least, [a] symbolic [use of the figure] more than anything else. So there was a conflict, and one morning old Gurdon called me into his office. I was teaching drawing and printmaking at that time. He pulled me right out of class, and he said, "I want to talk to you." And I said, "What do you want?" We went in his office and he said, "We decided we're getting ready for next fall, our next semester, and though we'd drop your drawing class and give you a beginning design class." And this was all a conspiracy, I'm sure. And that blew [the] top right off my head. I said, "Look, I'll tell you what, Gurdon, you can do that, but I'm not going to teach the basic design class." I said, "I quit, right here, right now." You know, this was in the middle of the semester. He looked at me and his eyes got very large; he expected something else, and I said, "No, I know exactly why this is occurring, it's a political move." It wasn't long before Getchoff and Ralph du Casse were pushed out of there, and they quit and went storming off. Suddenly Getchoff threw a glass of wine or something in Gurdon's face, for the same reasons, [for] what they were trying to do. I don't think it was Elmer or Dick but those who were ambitious politically. To affirm the concept of the school is to get everyone in key positions, to have a consistency of concept, and anything that varied from this or differed would...

MR. KARLSTROM: When was that?

MR. OLIVEIRA: This was 1959 or '60.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did you leave?

MR. OLIVEIRA: I quit.

MR. KARLSTROM: In the middle of the semester?

MR. OLIVEIRA: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: Good for you.

MR. OLIVEIRA: I had an obligation to my class, you know, so Gurdon called me - I think we had a couple of weeks before the end of school so I finished up - and he said, "Look it, why don't you give some second thought to it. We won't change your drawing class. You can teach your drawing class and you have that print class up there. Why don't you continue on?" Since I built that damn print shop up there, I kind of had a second thought. I said, "Okay, I'll tell you what I'll do, Gurdon. I'll teach the print class but don't expect me to teach drawing or anything else. I'll just teach the [print] class until the end of the year, since it was my baby - I grew that print department, but I don't want anything to do with drawing or painting." I think what had happened there was a great deal of pressure being exerted against Gurdon from the Board for the simple reason that I was getting a lot of attention in New York City and the association [with] myself and the [Bay Area] figurative group was very strong at this point, in 1960 and 1959. I gather that I had a certain amount of political weight that I wasn't aware of. So then, a good bit of pressure was put on Gurdon. I did protect my interest in the print class and just abandoned the other part of it and let them do what they wanted to with it. [And soon] I left and never went back again.

MR. KARLSTROM: And then you came over to rant and rave to Lou.

MR. OLIVEIRA: I'd come over and talk to Lou. Yes, because I lived two or three blocks from here and would do a good bit of drinking and I can never forget that night I went home, Paul, to tell Mona. You know, we had two girls and we were doing all right. [As far as] my own association with the Bay Area figurative artists, we had this kind of conflict. I think they kind of tolerated me, [but] I was an irritant. In some cases [the] serious painters painted, and they weren't worried about themselves or what figure painting meant, or what it was, [or] going to be, or who was in it. When I used to come over here and do a bit of drinking with Lou and complain about my conflict,

Lou would say, "For Christ's sake, forget it! Go down and get to painting, for Christ's sake."

MR. KARLSTROM: Good advice.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I'd get it from two sides, see. I'd get it from Gurdon Wood who'd gab around the Bohemian Club at one time. Gurdon Wood used to say, "Goddamn that Nate. I have a hell of a time holding that guy down. He quit yesterday, or threatened to quit, you know." Then I knew Nate's story.

MR. KARLSTROM: "Goddamn that Gurdon Wood."

MR. OLIVEIRA: That goddamn Gurdon. He wanted me to teach Basic Design, I [knew] what he was doing. He was degrading me, and I knew it was big political move. But that was an exciting time, a time when there was a lot of good painting going on and everybody felt very tense about what they were doing. When Gurdon presented this to me, I felt so strongly that I quit. You must understand that. Sure, I was getting attention from the art world and getting paid for it, but, I had no way of knowing how much I was going to earn from painting, and had a brand new house [in Piedmont] I was buying and two kids, and all that. But it was an intense time of intense beliefs and I think that now, just to conclude this so we can get on with Lou, the fondness that I have for, say, Dick Diebenkorn and Elmer [Bischoff] and even Frank Lobdell is the fact that we shared that time together in many ways. It was an important time in our youth [for] young and vital ideas, and all of us indirectly had a great deal of influence in terms of, not only [the] Bay Area but, throughout the entire country. So it was an exciting period, and now, even then, but now I'm even more fond of Elmer, and more fond of Richard and more fond of Frank or David Park or William Brown, whom I've always been very fond of and had very little conflict with - or none. The point of it was that having shared that experience, we had something in common, and that's the basis for the feeling. In fact, Dick Diebenkorn and I are going to do some monotypes together fairly soon. I'll let you know after it's happened, but we'll spend about three or four days together.

MR. KARLSTROM: Can one put in reservations?

MR. OLIVEIRA: I don't know if we'll get anything or not, but the interesting thing is that we are going to share this kind of activity, as Lou shares it with Terry and Lundy, going out and painting in the fields. But, to end with C.S. Price and the Society of Six. Here Lou is in his senior years as an artist after painting the deserts and the galaxy that he's been doing for years, and all the accomplishments and all the fantastic worlds, Lou's returning to the world of the Society of Six.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I'm going back again, if I can get back.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Which is quite beautiful.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, it's like John [Humphrey] said, "What the hell do you want to paint that stuff for? Why don't you keep on painting like you were?" I said, "It's a challenge." What the hell, I painted for so goddamn long, it's fun to go out and I don't give a damn if anybody sees them or not. It's just fun to go out and do. But I haven't hit it yet.

MR. KARLSTROM: Does it take you back to the days of the Society of Six?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, it takes me back.

MR. KARLSTROM: I don't want to use the word, 'nostalgia', but...

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, use it, because that's what it is.

LUNDY SIEGRIEST: Whenever we've been painting, I get a little higher up on the hill than where you're sitting and I watch, you know, and I paint. And to watch you hold the brush in your hand, which has been through a lot, and to see you, you were struggling with the - it has nothing to do with your physical body, the act [that's] taking place - it's coming from someplace else.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Well, that's what I was saying, it's been hard getting back, and I think of his complaining about his hands not being able to do it, or he can't work that paint, but it's something else.

MR. SIEGRIEST: It's not working the paint, see. I paint with my own medium, which is glue and dry color.

MR. OLIVEIRA: The desert painter.

MR. SIEGRIEST: It's entirely different. Now I have worked with oil for twenty-five years, I guess. I used to work in oil completely, but it seemed so strange to me because I would put something on and the goddamn thing would sink in, you know, but now I got wise to what I want to do.

LUNDY SIEGRIEST: It's such an act of will, a total act of will.

MR. OLIVEIRA: I have, you know, this affection for all those painters now; I think it's just grown because we've shared that time together. And I think it's the basis of our relationship, the fact that the older that our relationship becomes, Lou's and mine, the greater period of time we've had to share many things. That's the basis for my fondness for Lou, and I guess his fondness for me. But now we want to get on with it. We've gotten to Monterey and the Society of Six and all the things that happened down there and C.S. Price. There's only one more question. During that time did you have any association with Steinbeck?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I did. I didn't know who he was, [though].

MR. OLIVEIRA: Did you ever see him?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Because when I'd go down there, we'd generally stay at Gay's place at the Stevenson House or we'd camp out on the beach. I used to go down with Logan and Gaw and [von Eichman] and, I don't know, somebody else. [If] the house was too crowded we'd sleep on the beach because many times I remember going down there and we'd wake up in the morning and it was so damn foggy you didn't know where you were. We'd go to Gay's place to eat. There was plenty of room. The Stevenson House was a big place.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And Steinbeck would…

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, at nighttime, generally on a Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, there'd be all kinds of artists who'd come in. I can't name them, but John Steinbeck was one of them. But I didn't know who Steinbeck was - he was a writer, and there were a number of other writers who were there. They had a grand piano that they used to play - some guy would pump on the piano there, and sing and drink a lot of wine.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Now, what about Jack London? Did you hear of any…?

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, I never did, but Gile used to type for Jack London.

MR. KARLSTROM: He typed for him?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, yes. He knew him quite well and he used to go up to Jack London's home. He used to say, "That drunken sonofabitch, I was up there the other night." And they'd ride on a horse from the ranch down to that bar that burned up here just a short time ago. They used to go down there and drink and ride back up on the horses. But when Gile left Chabot Road he took what he wanted out of the house - a few pictures - and went to Tiburon. He went to Tiburon first, then to Belvedere. So he said to me, "Do you want to buy my house?" And I said, "Gee, I haven't got enough money for that." He wanted fifteen hundred dollars. Oh boy, it's worth fifty thousand bucks today. So I said, "No, but I think I know someone who wants to buy it, that's this guy, Jim Moss," and he said, "What I left in the house is yours." And here he had these paintings.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Are those the ones you had out here, Lou? I mean the ones that Charlie…

MR. SIEGRIEST: Charlie has and the Oakland Museum. Well, he had piles of paintings. I must have burned up at least that many.

MR. KARLSTROM: That's what he instructed you to do, though, is that right?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes. You couldn't give them away. Who wanted impressionist painters?

MR. KARLSTROM: Was anybody in the Society of Six selling anything at all? Except the potboilers?

MR. SIEGRIEST: No. Some of the paintings that Charlie had over there - did you see that show? Well, Dr. Meyers bought one, a damn good one. On the back: twenty five dollars for the painting.

MR. OLIVEIRA: That's not much different from being at the Paul Kantor gallery, seeing a DeKooning painting and turning it around on the back - it came from an early gallery, DeKooning's first dealer - with a price of three hundred dollars on it in the forties. Are you telling us that with Gile…

MR. SIEGRIEST: Let me finish on that. I forgot to tell you. When he said, "Everything is yours, do whatever you want, take [or] burn the rest of it." So I went up there with him and another fellow and I picked out what I thought I wanted, which was over a hundred paintings. I took [them] home and kept [them] down in the basement and I had [them] all [over] the bed - a terrible condition. One day I went over to Gile's when he [moved] to Belvedere, which was another block over. He said, "What became of my organ?" He had a little organ he used to play. [I said,] "I don't know, I think Jimmy Moss must have that." He's the guy that bought the place. And he said, "How about my books?" And I said, "I didn't take any books." And he said, "Do you know that I had all the first editions of Jack London, autographed by Jack London?" And I called up Jimmy Moss and said, "Hey,

did you find any books here?" Somebody got in the house before [he] moved in and moved out a lot of stuff. First editions, signed by Jack London! I don't know how many there were.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Now this, I assume, is [the] time when the Society of Six [was] kind of breaking up?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, it was breaking up. The reason for that was Gay went to Monterey, and he started carving wood instead of painting. In fact, he was quite well known as a wood carver. He did that altar piece for the Carmel Mission. And the story goes that Crocker built that marvelous home down on Pebble Beach, and he brought over two Italians from Italy to do the frieze around the room. Gay knew Crocker and he called Gay up and said, "I wish you'd come and see that frieze around the room. Do you think anything could be done about it, because I don't like it?" And Gay said, "Yes, I can help out." So Monday morning old Gay comes up with his chisel. He knocked out about half of it. And when Crocker came back that night, he was going to have him arrested. He said, "Jesus, I brought these two guys from Italy and here you come and knock out a whole bunch of stuff," [Armin] Hansen and the other good watercolor painter down there - I can't think what the hell his name is. Well, anyway they came in and said, "Jesus, Gay improved this thing, it looks wonderful." And they sold Crocker on the idea that Gay improved it. So Gay dropped painting almost completely except he and [Armin] Hansen joined together to do etchings. I don't have any etchings of his but maybe the family does, I don't know. But he went in for etchings after that and woodcarving.

MR. OLIVEIRA: What happened to [von Eichman]?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Von [Eichman] went back East, and I went back East. I went to Milwaukee.

MR. OLIVEIRA: [Then] you went into advertising art.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, I went into more or less poster art.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Now this is around what, the late twenties?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, in the late twenties.

MR. KARLSTROM: You'd been working for Foster and Kleiser?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Foster and Kleiser, yes. I got a letter from Wooley Cox and Louie Hughes who were commercial men but went to art school with me at Hopkins. They were working for the Admiral Oriental Wine [Company] in Seattle and they had a goldmine. Jesus, the stuff was just pouring in to them. So they wrote to me and said, "Come on up and do some posters." And so I thought, Jesus, I might as well go. And so I went up there and the first thing I did was a booklet thing for Admiral Wine, then I did a poster for Harlam Hat. I forgot how much money we got at that time. And the three of us lived together in a houseboat down at the foot of Lake Washington. So we had so damn much money we said, "To hell with these guys." We'd be hard to get, see. We were swimming all day and monkeying around up there and when they'd say, "Hey come on in, we've got a job for you," well, we'd be in on Thursday or something. We [got] high hat, see, and pretty soon they imported some other guys from Portland or someplace and we were out. So I came back in about '23. Yes, Lundy was born in 1923, [and] I came home.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And when did you get married?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I got married in 1922. So I had no job.

[MR. KARLSTROM: You went to Milwaukee somehow.]

MR. SIEGRIEST: I came back in 1923 and Logan said, "Hey, would you like to go to Milwaukee? I know an advertising company that would love to have you." And I got all my samples together, whatever there was, and I shipped them back. They said, "Come on back." Although they had a branch in Chicago, and so I dropped off and was there two weeks in Chicago. I knew some of the fellows back there from here. There was a guy by the name of Hayden Sondbloom who did Coca-Cola, and he painted in oil. Damn good. And I used to go to lunch with those guys and Sondbloom said, "Hey, would you like to go to work here?" Well, it didn't work out. The boss said, "No, we've got enough guys, things are bad right now, and you'd better grab your job that you have in Milwaukee." So I went up there and I stayed six or seven years in Milwaukee. I came back in 1931. Yes, that's when I hurt my hand, in 1930. But all the time I was painting out doors.

MR. OLIVEIRA: That's what I wanted to ask you. All this time that you were in advertising art, were you working on your own, too?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I painted all that time. See, I busted up my hand back in Milwaukee in 1930, I think, so I used to strap a piece of thing around and I could paint away.

MR. OLIVEIRA: How did you break your hand?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I had a studio that was an old carriage house and a Frenchwoman owned the place and she said, "We're going to have a party here tonight, would you come? You can help me act as bartender and so forth." Well, actually I didn't want to go, but she insisted on my going. I had been there maybe a half an hour and a great big guy and his girlfriend - he was going to announce his engagement that night. He went in the back room and there was a toilet off of there. So the Frenchwoman said, "I wish you'd go back there because I hear the woman screaming back there. I wish you'd go back and see what's going on." So I opened the toilet door and this guy hauled off and he rapped me on the chin and [knocked me] clear to the other wall. I didn't know the guy, so I thought, "Jesus, I'm going to get this guy," and I opened the door again and he started to make a run for the stairs, which were terribly steep. I hit the guy, Jesus, he went down the stairs and he rolled over. And I thought, after looking at him, "If this guy ever gets up he's going to beat the hell out of me" - he was a big guy. So I ran down the stairs. There was a showcase window there. He either dropped on me or I missed him completely. I went right through the window. That was the end of that.

MR. KARLSTROM: Too bad you missed him.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh yes. And I came to find out the guy was an Ohio State football player. And the woman won against me, see.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, what was he doing in the bathroom?

MR. SIEGRIEST: He had her by the hair and he broke the toilet. He was pounding so hard that he cracked the thing.

MR. KARLSTROM: With her head?

MR. SIEGRIEST: With her head.

MR. KARLSTROM: Didn't hurt her but broke the toilet.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Then she got mad at Lou.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, love excuses anything.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, she won against me.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Well, this is all in Milwaukee and then you were painting on your own all that time. And then you had come back around '31.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I came back in 1931; that was during the Depression. In 1929, in Milwaukee, the downtown, that would be Market Street, was all boarded up because of vandalism in the stores. When I came out here I saw nothing of that kind. Everybody had vegetables [out] and there was nothing which could compare with out there. So I went out to Foster and Kleiser. There were two departments, the local and the national department, but they were all in one big room. So I happened to come in to the national department. A fellow by the name of Otis Shepard, who was a damn good poster man, was the head of the department. And he said, "I see you're back, you're looking for a job." I said, "Yes, I sure am." So he gave me seventy-five bucks a week, which was good money at that time, and so I worked out there for two years, I guess.

MR. OLIVEIRA: You were living here.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I was living here in Oakland.

MR. KARLSTROM: In this house at that time?

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, I was living on Shafter Avenue. My mother and father lived here, but [I had] my wife and Lundy at the time. I found a house up there on Shafter which was a damn good one, right on the creek. It had a back porch and you [could] look at the creek.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And so you worked there for two years.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I worked there for two and a half years, 1931, '32, and part of '33.

MR. OLIVEIRA: I was still a little kid then, you see. I was younger than Lundy. When did the WPA start coming into being? You did work as an artist in the WPA project with a lot of other guys during that time?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I left Foster and Kleiser because things were getting lousy, and I heard about a job at the San

Francisco Chronicle which I think still paid seventy-five bucks a week-I forget. So I went up to the Chronicle and they put me in the promotion department. I did all the ads for the nightclubs and special editions which I have down in the basement. Howard Brody was there - he was only seventeen years old. He and I were good friends. In fact, [Faralla had] taken his place over at the Academy. Howard Brody [was] teaching over there, but he went back East and he put [Faralla] in. But I knew Howard quite well.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Then you worked there but you were also still painting on your own.

MR. SIEGRIEST: All of the time I was painting on my own.

MR. OLIVEIRA: What was it like during that time - I mean, during the Depression - for painting? Was there much going on? Did you see any of your old friends?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Diego Rivera came to town. He came in about 1939, maybe even before then. He worked at the Fair [and] he did murals down [on] the Peninsula, something down at the Stock Exchange. So everybody [started] painting the hammered-down figure, you know, the little short-legged guy with the pick and shovel - it drove me nuts.

MR. OLIVEIRA: These are all WPA kind of...

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, WPA type of things.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Federal project - Otis Oldfield up in Coit Tower and the rest of those people.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I met this fellow, Bill Gaskin, who was a damn good watercolor painter, and nobody knows the guy. But he was head of the WPA - one of the head men. He lived with Price and Gay in Monterey.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Is he still around?

MR. SIEGRIEST: No, he died, but he was an awfully good watercolorist. He was one of these guys who painted when they felt like it. His house caught fire some way and burned up most of his paintings. He married a wealthy girl and used to sit on the porch, drink martinis and tell about his days in Carmel. Then when the Federal Art Project came on, I met Gaskin on the street. He said, "You're a poster man, I have some posters for you to do, if you want to come." So I went up there, and he put me on. I have the posters right here, I'll show them to you.

MR. OLIVEIRA: They're beauties. Those are very good. You know, I never did get any of those damn pictures - do you have any more of those?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I've got the originals right here.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Well, what about those printed copies, do you have any of those left?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, they're upstairs.

MR. OLIVEIRA: He did some beauties on - wasn't it the American Indian - very beautiful designs. That's when you did the posters.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I worked for the WPA for the first poster. It was an Indian basket. Then Rene d'[Harnoncourt] - he was head of the Indian arts and crafts board - put on this show at the Federal Building in San Francisco. Well, he saw the poster I did, and he approached me and asked me if I'd come to work for him. He would give me three dollars and a half and hour and you could put in as much time as you wanted. The WPA was to screen process the poster, which they did. So I worked there from 1939 to 1940 - the Fair ended in 1940 - and when the Fair ended I was working on the river boat because the screen process was on the lower floor. What's the name of the French review they had with all the French girls?

MR. OLIVEIRA: Wasn't it in Moulin Rouge?

MR. SIEGRIEST: They were all living in the river boat. There was more raping going on... so, when the Fair ended, these posters were on the boat, and they abandoned everything, just pulled out and left. So I thought, I'm going to take those posters - they'd dump them anyway - which I did. But I always wanted to get in touch with Rene d'[Harnoncourt] to tell him that I have the posters, and I never did.

MR. KARLSTROM: His daughter is an advisor to the Archives.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Oh, really?

MR. KARLSTROM: Yes, Anne. I guess it is - there's a daughter-in-law...

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, he got killed - an automobile killed him.

MR. OLIVEIRA: What was going on in the City in late 1939? I know Otis Oldfield was painting.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, Lucien Labaudt, but all of those guys went to the Diego Rivera type of painting, which I hated.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Was it kind of Social Realism? That was happening all over the country at the time.

MR. SIEGRIEST: All over the West. Did you ever hear of Ray Bethers? He wrote a book on Cezanne, like the guy in Berkeley.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Loran, [Erle] Loran.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Loran. I was living in San Francisco on Lombard Street and there was a fellow named Lino Perra [Perrer?]. You know Lino? Well, he did seascapes - he's pretty good - and he had this studio which was an old barn on Lombard Street, and he asked me to come up and share the studio with him. I brought Ray Bethers up there, which I shouldn't have done, because he was one of these guys who would take over the whole goddamn thing.

MR. OLIVEIRA: You mean, that night, or that…

[END OF REEL ONE, SIDE TWO]

[REEL TWO, SIDE ONE]

MR. OLIVEIRA: And these are the things that you salvaged; you went back and you got them?

MR. SIEGRIEST: That was a wooden mask that [d'Harnoncourt] got for me. The University of California was loaded with stuff. I didn't go there but he told me about it.

MR. OLIVEIRA: That's a beauty. Yes, that's damn good…

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I took that from a painting. This is no good. That was the first one I made but I went over too far with the…I've got another one.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Did you do all the lettering and everything?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes. Jesus, I did it on the floor. I had a hell of a time doing the lettering.

MR. OLIVEIRA: I sure couldn't do lettering. I had to do it in the Army. I took [lettering] design. I mean there takes a great sense of organization.

MR. KARLSTROM: It's a part of the design.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I had quite a bit of training through Foster and Kleiser.

MR. OLIVEIRA: That's a beauty, too.

MR. SIEGRIEST: That was a wooden mask. You know, I've got to get those goddamn things - nobody knew I had them. And that one, painted on bark.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Damn good. Boy, that's a beauty.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, that's the first thing I did, but I changed the lettering. "M.H. deYoung"-I left the "M.H." out, and so I had to pull it together.

MR. KARLSTROM: For the sake of the tapes, this is a poster that you did for the Federal Art Project Exhibition, the one at the deYoung.

MR. OLIVEIRA: In 1939.

MR. SIEGRIEST: That yellow on there is rubber cement - the guy cut right through.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Stencil. These were silk screened.

MR. SIEGRIEST: That was taken from a blanket.

MR. OLIVEIRA: That's a beauty, too.

MR. KARLSTROM: You didn't have anything to do with the Coit Tower…the mural?

MR. OLIVEIRA: Did Del Pino?

MR. KARLSTROM: There were a lot of them.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I did this one here.

MR. KARLSTROM: But you didn't do any murals.

MR. OLIVEIRA: I know Del Pino, and Otis Oldfield…

MR. KARLSTROM: Stackpole - [there were] about twenty some artists.

MR. OLIVEIRA: [Were] there that many?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Quite a few, quite a few.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Oh, that's a beaut', too.

MR. KARLSTROM: Lucien Labaudt?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I have a lot of sketches that I'd submit to Rene d'[Harnoncourt] before I made an enlargement of it. At the Fair, I went out [to] the USO.

MR. OLIVEIRA: The USO. What for, [caricatures]?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I was sketching the veterans in the hospitals - I forget how many. Let's see, my first thing was over at the Naval Hospital. They were the psychic patients, you know. I lost fourteen pounds in two weeks. Those guys scared the Jesus out of me because you'd walk into a ward and most of the guys would be facing the wall and to get to talk to them was something. If they did talk to you they thought you were selling something and so I'd pick out one guy and make a quick drawing, generally, some guy who was easy to do so you could get a good likeness. And then they'd come around. Some of them would stand off in a distance - they acted like little kids - some of them would hold their hands up to their face and peek out - and [you] didn't know when one of those guys would bounce on you.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Now the war had started - this was like 1941 or 1940?

MR. SIEGRIEST: The early part of the war, yes, about 1941.

MR. OLIVEIRA: So you went from the World's Fair to…what did you do then?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I went with the Camouflage. I was with the Camouflage up to almost the end of the war. I don't know how many guys worked in there - there were about eight or ten of [us] - what they called camoufleurs. I worked generally north, from Bolinas all the way to Eureka, and that was the best job I ever had in my life. I had a lot of fun.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well what were you camouflaging?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, gun emplacements and radar, mostly gun emplacements. Japs could have come in here and blown the hell out of San Francisco. They had nothing, really. The had these little pea shooters. I was living out at the Marina at the time.

MR. KARLSTROM: Where did you live in the Marina?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I lived down on Scott Street.

MR. KARLSTROM: That's not too far from where we live, Greenwich.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I lived down near the end. Down towards the Bay. I was at the two-story house next to that building on the corner. There was a big apartment across the street. When the blackouts came they had these block wardens, and I remember one night somebody had a light going. Put that light out or I'll shoot the light out! Some poor old woman up in the bathroom.

MR. OLIVEIRA: But now, Lou, had you and Lundy's mother separated by that time? When did that happen?

MR. SIEGRIEST: She went up until I was with the Camouflage, the latter part of the Camouflage.

MR. OLIVEIRA: About 1944, somewhere around there?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, around 1944, and so that's how I happened to go to Virginia City. I went to Carson City for a divorce because I knew a woman up there, an old lady and her sister. Her sister wrote for me to come up and stay. I lived in Carson City but I was in Virginia City, sketching, practically all day long. What I did in Virginia City was documentary type things because they were tearing it down fast, during the war. Contractors would come in for the brick. I could have bought a shop right on the main street for five hundred bucks.

MR. OLIVEIRA: A place?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, yes, but it needed a hell of a lot of work on it. Louis Hughes bought it. And then he sold it and Lucius Beebe bought it. You couldn't buy that thing today for fifty thousand, or more, and I could have bought it for five hundred bucks. [Why] the hell am I getting into Virginia City?

MR. OLIVEIRA: You're moving now into Virginia City because you went to Carson City [for] the divorce.

MR. SIEGRIEST: For a divorce, yes. The war was on and all this time I made drawings of the buildings, but I never painted. I painted a little bit up there but I came home and painted from the drawings. They're [documentary] types of things.

MR. OLIVEIRA: At this time, Lundy was already in the Navy.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He was in the Seabees.

MR. OLIVEIRA: He was on those islands painting coconuts.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He was gone for four years.

MR. KARLSTROM: Naked women and coconuts.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes.

MR. OLIVEIRA: He wants to go back there.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I had been in San Francisco and came home.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Right after the war?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, right after the war.

MR. OLIVEIRA: You were living here?

MR. SIEGRIEST: I was living here. As I made the turn on MacArthur Boulevard and Telegraph, I saw this sailor standing there with a sea bag. Everybody picked up sailors and would take them back and forth, and I thought, "You goddamn fool, standing out in the rain." I knew he had to go from Fortieth Street up here, "somebody else will pick him up," and I let him go, I intended to let him go. So then I got to thinking about the poor bastard - it was raining like hell, you couldn't see out the windshield hardly - oh, the poor bastard, I'll give him a ride. You know, it was Lundy. I hadn't seen him for four years. He recognized the car, he said, "Jesus, I think they're going to pass me up." Well, it was raining so hard that I opened the door and I took a look at him. I knew it was a sailor. He threw the sea bag in ahead and he said, "Hello." Jesus, I looked at him - it was Lundy. It was around two o'clock in the morning.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Now we're getting into a time [when Jean] Varda was in San Francisco, and you were friends with Varda.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I knew Varda, not very well until Edna. But when I went to Virginia City, I lived down at the old brewery, down the hill. [Zoray Kramer - her son] was the guy who had the Sopwith Camel, [the rock group]. He comes here all the time. He's out of the business now because he went back East with the band and truck and they stole the whole goddamn thing - about forty thousand bucks worth of electronic stuff. It put them out of business. Anyway, I lived [at] his mother's place, down at the brewery. They had about thirteen rooms upstairs, and Eddy Almanito who ran a bar here. He said, "Hey, take me up to Virginia City. I've heard about the place and I'd like to go up there." So I took him and he liked the place so well, I introduced him to Bronco, one of the greatest characters I ever met. Bronco was an Italian who talked broken [English], but he had been a captain in the Italian army, so he was no dumbbell, but he made believe he was. He came in 1935 - he was with the Capone gang in Chicago. Something happened, [and] they told him, take it on the lamb, get out of town. So he

ended up there, and he owned thirty-five places. Whenever the [divorcees] would come up on Friday, he'd stand out and he'd say, "Jesus Christ, I got a whole busload - I get three dollars a piece for these [divorcées]." They'd come up for [a divorce]. He had Union Brewery up there. The dirtiest goddamn bar you ever saw. I don't think he ever washed a thing. Whatever you left in the glass, beer, wine, or anything, he put in a big glass and he'd drink this thing. Oh God, and he cooked underneath the bar. He had a little place down there and he was always cooking some kind of stew down there. So I said to him one time, "Are you married, Bronco?" He had been divorced, his wife lived in Reno in the summertime - and he said, "Yeah, I have two daughters." I said, "Well, where are they?" "Well, one's an opera singer in Italy and she's coming over here." And I said, "Jesus Christ, how old is she?" Twenty-eight or something like that. I said, "Jesus Christ, sounds pretty good, Bronco, I'll move right in." And he said, "She'll be here some time next month." I dropped in there every morning. Outside of the first day I was there, he never took a nickel from me. I [could] bring anybody in and give them drinks. He respected artists. He said, "The artists don't pay, artists don't pay." I'd try to give him money but he wouldn't take it, he'd throw it back at me. So, I used to drop in in the morning and have a brandy with him and then go out sketching. [One] morning he said to me, "Hey, my daughter's coming tomorrow. I'm going to take you to lunch with my daughter and Catherine [Hilliard] and Catherine Best who wrote for all [the] magazines and [Florence Edwards who] owned the hotel up there. So he ordered us lunch at a place up the hill, and it was a very nice lunch. He had paper bags in his pocket. I said, "What the hell are those paper bags for?" He said, "You'll see." And whatever was left on the plates and dishes the son of a bitch put in the paper bag and took it down to the place and [made] a stew. He smoked Italian cigars.

MR. OLIVEIRA: [Toscanno?]

MR. SIEGRIEST: [Toscanno], and he kept them in [a] pole outside. He'd smoke for a while and then put it in the hole, like a woodpecker. And so Catherine Best said, "Come on out with Bronco, we want to take a picture with the daughter." Oh, the daughter - oh, good looking Italian. Vivian Bellamonte, that was her name. She sang at the Opera House in San Francisco and Los Angeles. She stayed for two or three days and then she went to South America. That was the last I ever saw of her. She got married. And so Eddy Almanito, the guy I brought up with me said, "Jesus, I like this place up here. I wonder if I can get Bronco to sell me one of his places for a bar?" So I said to Bronco, "Say, my friend here was looking at that place up the street and he'd like to buy it." Well, he said, "Is seven hundred dollars too much?" Two story buildings! Well, he spent about eight or nine thousand dollars to put it in shape. Lundy came up there and worked for Eddy. By that time I had moved in with Eddy because he had that whole place on the main street up there - about six rooms upstairs - and he was the only guy living there. Bronco kept saying to me, "Why don't you buy one of my places, I'll sell it to you cheap. I've got one down the hill for three hundred bucks." Well, it needed a new roof on it and I said, "Oh, I don't want to live in Virginia City." By that time, all these bastards from Los Angeles were coming up there, you know, with all kinds of gift shops, and I was getting kind of tired of walking up Main Street and seeing all these phonies. I wanted to get the hell out of there.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Now during all that time, back here in the city, you knew all your friends, like Puccinelli, you had all those friends down here at Tosca.

MR. SIEGRIEST: You know, I saw old Puccinelli? He looks the same as he did in 1945. Puccinelli is a millionaire - he got to be a millionaire when he was twenty-some years old. But he's a thief, he was a crook.

MR. KARLSTROM: Aren't most millionaires?

MR. SIEGRIEST: When I lived down in the Marina, Willy Cox lived next door. That's the guy I worked with up in Seattle. He'd have Puccinelli over to the house and we'd go up [to] the corner of Scott, where all the stores are, [to] a delicatessen store. When we'd come out of the place Puccinelli's pockets were filled with all kinds of stuff.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Was it stuff he lifted?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, he lifted all the stuff.

MR. KARLSTROM: And turned it into a million dollars.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He was that kind of a guy.

MR. OLIVEIRA: He wasn't a painter, he was a bail bondsman, wasn't he?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, that's his brother. Puccinelli ran a bar in the alley off of Kearny Street. All the advertising men used to hang out there. He'd leave your change on the bar and he always had that wet towel. When you weren't looking, he'd pull your change. I've seen him do it many a time. That's an old San Francisco trick, see. He'd steal your money from you. I caught him one day. I said, "Hey, listen Puccinelli, put that goddamn change back." Oh, he laughed like hell.

MR. OLIVEIRA: All this time you were developing a whole group of people like Puccinelli, and certain things were starting to happen in San Francisco. You talked about the Tosca bar, and who was the cook there?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Al Morego [Armorego?]. That was about 1946, '47, '48, '49. I was teaching at the Art League of California at the time. La Tosca, you know, over on Columbus Avenue. Well, it's still there, but you can't park over there - that's why I don't go in. But Al Morego had a restaurant in the place. He was one of the finest cooks in San Francisco, an Italian, very high spirited type of guy. He had a waiter by the name of Joe at the counter and he had booze in the back. All the chefs in North Beach used to come in on a certain night and eat with Al Morego. All the chefs, from [Nugio's], Vanessi's, and all over. And one night I was in there when the heavyweight fighter, I forgot his name, he was in there. He sat at the counter and Al Morego always talked with a butcher knife in his hand, a big long butcher knife. He would always pound this thing, and he said to this fighter, Lou Nova, I think it was, "You're going to get knocked out tomorrow night." And Nova said, "Aw, not a chance." So Al Morego came around the corner and he got down on the floor. He said, "You're going to look like this," laying on the floor.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did he get knocked out?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, he got knocked out.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Now this is about the time when - where was that killing that happened - those killers [on Columbus]? Was this about that time?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, about that time.

MR. OLIVEIRA: What was the name of that...

MR. SIEGRIEST: Wait a minute, Alvarado [Le] King[?]

MR. OLIVEIRA: [Where] the hell was that? That was the place down there on Chestnut Street, that bar. Chestnut and...

MR. SIEGRIEST: Another guy on [Broadway], no, on Lombard.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Chestnut and Columbus.

MR. SIEGRIEST: [George] Zackery, Louis Hughes and I were sitting in the bar - Al was the owner of the place, and Puccinelli was in there. I was sitting next to this Italian young guy. He used to hang around there all the time. Puccinelli said to me, "Do you want anybody bumped off?" He said, "This guy'll do it for as low as fifty bucks." I said, "You're full of shit, don't give me that." This guy talked broken English, see.

MR. OLIVEIRA: This kid sitting next to you?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, he was about thirty-five, something like that, but I saw him all the time around there. Then we got talking about the [olive oil] guy. Somebody knocked him off and they found him in the trunk of the car. I said, "Who in the hell do you think did that?" And Puccinelli said, "I know the guy, they're right up the street." And I said, "That's a bunch of crap - up the street." And he said, "I'll take you up there." He took us to a bar on Broadway- that was Louie Hughes, George Zachery, Cox, Puccinelli and myself. Zachery looks like a policeman, he's a big husky guy, and Willie Cox was a big guy. Puccinelli introduced us to the bartender, and the bartender said to [him], "Are those two guys cops? Who in the hell are they?" Puccinelli said, "No, they're ok, they're friends of mine." But these two guys down at the end of the bar, I don't know who in the hell they were, and I don't know whether t hey were the guys or not.

MR. OLIVEIRA: They were the assassins.

MR. SIEGRIEST: We had a drink or so. That was the time of Brown, you know.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Oh, Pat Brown.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes. And somebody said, this happened before he was governor, "Where is Pat Brown?" Puccinelli said, "Oh, that drunken son of a bitch, he's in my car. He's sleeping it off in my car." Now whether he was, or not, I don't know.

MR. OLIVEIRA: What kind of painting were you doing at that time? I know you were coming back from Virginia City and you were doing those drawings.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I got in with Ray Bethers and Perra and they changed me around. I was doing San Francisco scenes and painting with black. I had a few in the retrospective show, [crummy] paintings.

MR. OLIVEIRA: But you were also teaching at that school.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, teaching at [the] school.

MR. OLIVEIRA: What was the name?

MR. SIEGRIEST: The Art League of California.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And that's when I met you. That's about 1948 or 1949, because I remember going over there one day and Jesus, I met Lou Siegriest, because all of a sudden he was a big name.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I think I met you before that, through Lundy.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Or shortly after, I don't know. You didn't know Edna at that time, in the forties? Now we're starting to speak about Edna [Stoddart] who became Lou's wife.

MR. KARLSTROM: And also a painter.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Yes, who was also a painter, a very fine painter, and became a very important part of his life in the past twenty-odd years. So we're getting into a [time when I'd] come to know Lou. And we're getting to that point where Johan comes in. How did you meet Johan Hagemeyer?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I knew this guy, Clyde [Seavey].

MR. OLIVEIRA: He's in [the] advertising business.

MR. SIEGRIEST: I went up to see him one day, and I always went in the back door. There were about twenty people and Johan was giving a talk on his photographs.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Johan Hagemeyer.

MR. SIEGRIEST: And I walked in, and I was just as astounded as he was. He stopped talking and he said, "Who are you?" I gave him my name, and he said, "Yes, I've heard of you, nothing any good." And I said, "Who in the hell is that old son of a bitch!?" I kept going and I asked Seavey, "Hey, who's that guy out there? He said he knows me, but nothing any good." He said, "Oh, that's Hagemeyer." I had heard of Hagemeyer but I had never met him before.

MR. OLIVEIRA: It might be good to include a little bit about Hagemeyer at this point. Johan Hagemeyer is a photographer, as we know, and Hagemeyer was Dutch, born in Holland. [He] was going to be a horticulturalist, he was an anarchist.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He and John Marin and Stieglitz…

MR. OLIVEIRA: He came from Holland to New York and that's where he met all these people. That's where he became involved in photography.

MR. SIEGRIEST: That's where he met Stieglitz. Stieglitz taught him how to use a camera, and he went to Palm Springs, or some place near there. He propagated dates [in] some way [so] that they got bigger or something, so he said. All the time he was photographing and he was in the agriculture end of it.

MR. KARLSTROM: When did he come to California?

MR. SIEGRIEST: 1912 or '13.

MR. KARLSTROM: So he was associated with Stieglitz in the very early days.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He said, "When I came over here I was an anarchist." I used to kid him all the time, what the hell are you packing that suitcase around with a bomb in it? He dropped the anarchist part; he was everything but.

MR. OLIVEIRA: He was a big talker about all those things. He did have all those associations, at least, so he said. He was a cultivated man and a fine artist, and he was interested in portrait photography. He went to Los Angeles, right? He became a portrait photographer and photographed people like John Carradine.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Many, many opera people, people in the theater.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And he did a whole series on Einstein. He became involved with Edward Weston down in Carmel.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, you know the story about that. He came to Carmel.

MR. OLIVEIRA: After Los Angeles, now.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, and he moved in the house with Edward Weston. He's the type of guy that will take over, see, he'd push Edward Weston right out of his own house. So finally, I think it was Edward Weston's first wife, and he was moving in there and Edward Weston threw him out. So he went to Carmel and he bought an awfully good place. As you leave Carmel the street divides, right there by the bank on the corner. There's a group of houses in there and one big house and a bunch of bungalows painted white. Well, he owned that property. I don't know how many years he was there, but a long time. He wore himself out in Carmel. He got so that he was a bastard, you know, he'd tell you off just like that.

MR. OLIVEIRA: He did it in style.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He did it in style.

MR. OLIVEIRA: He had such style about him - those kind of continental airs - he was a very tall, white haired, very distinguished man, always wore an ascot, dressed well, some real sophistication. And his manners kind of fit the image in a way.

MR. KARLSTROM: Sounds like Whistler, or somebody.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He was built like Whistler in a way, high cheekbones.

MR. KARLSTROM: Arrogant, a little arrogant.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Very Victorian man. He had this air about him and this style that no one that I knew of had, and I'm sure you, Lou, when you met him at that time were impressed with him because he just wasn't another guy down the street that you would run into. He played this great performance.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He was an actor, really.

MR. KARLSTROM: I gather that his initial remark to you when you walked into that place didn't prevent you from becoming good friends.

MR. OLIVEIRA: No, because I think the reason we're spending time talking about Hagemeyer is the fact that there were probably three people, aside from Lundy, in Lou's life that then became very significant from that point on. One was Hagemeyer and the other, certainly, was Edna. They were very, very close, this was the whole life. You can't mention anything about Lou in the fifties or Lou in the forties without having to refer to Hagemeyer.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He admired Nate as an artist, but as a person he always said, "That Nate, he's a very fine artist but he has four mothers." I said, "Four mothers, what do you mean?" Well, he said, "He's got Mona, he's got Edna, he's got is own mother," and somebody else.

MR. OLIVEIRA: No, my two daughters.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He said, "He's got too many mothers."

MR. OLIVEIRA: He was a very lonely man. He had this wife, or this…he lived with Jane.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, I asked him one time, "Have you ever been married, Johan? And he said, "Eight times, but never legally."

MR. OLIVEIRA: But you knew him with Jane. They were in an accident and she was seriously injured and died. Anyway, this woman died that he was very, very close to, and this is when, in my estimation, from listening to stories, he became a very bitter and lonely man. I mean, there was that part of Johan that was very, very cynical and bitter, and in a sense, it may have been a sense of guilt that pushed him to this point, because, indirectly he may have blamed himself for Jane's death.

MR. SIEGRIEST: It could be, because Lundy and I had preview up in [Bosko's] up there on Claremont, and he came and he wouldn't drink the punch. He said to [Bosko], "Hey, do you have anything in the back room, like brandy or something?" And [Bosko] took him back and gave him a few shots of brandy. He had that old Buick that he drove, he always wore a beret.

MR. OLIVEIRA: He'd signal for a left turn and turn right, or get into the right lane and turn left.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Well, he never hit anybody, but he and Jane hit a car over in North Beach, or a car hit him, I don't know what, and put her in the hospital. And after that she went right down the hill.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And then died. But anyway, it left him quite lonely. He was alone, by himself. And so that anyone who was a friend or of [the] family of his friends he immediately adopted as part of him. So he loved my wife, he loved Edna, [and] he hated Lou because Lou was part of Edna, I mean, a certain part of Edna. A certain part of him hated me because of my wife, my daughters, my mother, and Johan had none, you see. He also had this feeling that he was not given his dues and recognition...

MR. KARLSTROM: As a photographer.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And that photography was never considered an art, so every once in a while you'd get a nice little needle.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh boy, could he put that needle in.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did he know Imogen?

MR. OLIVEIRA: Sure.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Imogen is one of the only good words he'll have for a photographer. Oh, he hated Ansel Adams. He said that he liked Weston's work but he didn't like him as a person.

MR. KARLSTROM: Too many mothers frightened him.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Also, I think he told me once that the reason he kind of split off from Weston - he could have been involved in all that kind of modern photography - but he's rather just deal with the human figure and portraiture because he felt that that was it: photographing the person, the right light, one simple camera, one paper for printing. That was photography for him. And he was really an exceptional man, then, with this funny cantankerous personality, lonely, amusing, witty, always sharp and completely aware of what was going on. Along with all this there was always this cry for love or wanting some contact. Anyway, Lou and he developed a very close association, and the stories that Lou has that we'll try to draw are really fantastic because he maintains this position all the time. He finds himself in awkward kinds of situations, like up in Virginia City, that he just doesn't fit into. So that it's almost like a great Peter Sellers film. One of the stories you can tell [was] up in Virginia City when Hagemeyer was there photographing - he came up to photograph and he had the...

MR. SIEGRIEST: He had his camera...

MR. OLIVEIRA: The big view camera.

MR. SIEGRIEST: The big view camera, you know. He put the box and this thing over his head and then he pulled away from the camera and turned to the wall, and would say, "I don't see a thing." Nothing. Then all of a sudden, "I think it's coming," and he'd peek underneath the camera, underneath the hood, you know, and bag it, see.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Didn't he have riding pants on?

MR. SIEGRIEST: He had riding pants and high boots and a corduroy coat and a little beanie on his head. That was the night, I think I told you, he kept calling Butterfield Mr. Butterfly. Didn't I tell you about going to dinner up there?

MR. OLIVEIRA: Yes, you did. Well, isn't that the time that you told me that he was out there and the wild horses stampeded through and he was in the middle of them?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, I've got some of the pictures of that. Well, it was near the [Mackey] home, and he was photographing. And so I saw all these horses coming. They were wild and the dogs were chasing them. There were about thirty horses and going like hell down the hill. Jesus, here's a little lightning. They went right by old - Jesus Christ, pretty close - Johan had his whole camera out there, see, he couldn't get it down before all the horses went by. Oh God, he was quite thrilled about that.

MR. OLIVEIRA: He made a very dramatic thing about that.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He was quite thrilled. He took a photograph. I have it some place.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Now this is the same trip where he went into the bar and he was with Butterfield. Is that the same trip where you all went up to have dinner some place and you went back and stayed in the hotel?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, the same trip. We went up to, I call it the priest's home, the priests had the place, a big Victorian home, and we had dinner up there. There were about twenty of us. So I sat with [Zoray] Kramer, Roger Butterfield and his wife, and they put Johan at another table. Finally he came over to me, and he said, "Lou, why

can't I sit over here?" And I said, "I didn't set the table, there's only room for four." He said, "I'm sitting over with the dumbbells," out loud, you know. "I'm bored." So finally we made room for him to sit down and we had dinner and then we went back to the bar. There were two wealthy dames, Helen Townsend...a couple of last names that were very wealthy. [They] had a big ranch over in Wadsworth, Nevada, and they [had] all of us over there for lunch. It was a marvelous place. I'd been over there before with [Zoray] Kramer and so I said, "Johan, we're invited to Helen Townsend's place tomorrow." "I don't want to go over there." [Johan] So I didn't say any more to him. We were going over and left him in town. Oh, I'm getting ahead of my story! That night, after we left the place we had some drinks, and he was staying up with Eddy Almanito who I was staying with at the time. So Eddy said, "I'm going to put Johan in with this other guy in the same room," because he knew that they hated one another. Johan picked on the guy, so Eddy thought he'd have a little fun by putting them together.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And they had to sleep in the same bed.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Anyway, we heard old Johan come up. He stayed for the last brandy, and he came up by himself.

MR. OLIVEIRA: And you're upstairs in bed already.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Upstairs, very steep stairs going down. And, oh, Eddy hollered out to him, "Take No. 2 room," or whatever it was, and Johan goes in there and he said, "Hey, Lou, Lou, I can't stay in this room. This man is in here and he's snoring already, he's drunk already." And he kept hollering out and by that time I was laughing so goddamn much I had to stick the sheet down my throat - beaverboard walls, and so finally he said, "I'm going to go to a hotel, I can't stay in a room with a snorer like this." I said to Eddy, "Let him go," and he grabbed his old camera and he was going down these stairs and we let him go. So he went back to where we had dinner. They had boarders up there, a very nice place. The next morning I went up there, and here he was, propped up in a Victorian bed, and a big canopy over the thing and some blonde dame giving him coffee.

MR. OLIVEIRA: He didn't even know you.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Christ no, he mumbled something, my name...

MR. KARLSTROM: "Get lost, Lou."

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, "Get lost, get lost." So I said to him, "Johan, do you want to go over to Helen Townsend's today?" "Why should I go over there, I'm having a good time here in bed." So I said, "Okay." When I came back I went up to see him. I got worried about him because I brought him up, and I was going to take him home the following day. So I went up there and here he was, still in bed, but the blonde wasn't there. So I said to him, "Who was the girl you had in here?" "I don't know," he said, "I haven't seen her for hours." Anyway, I told him about the good time we had over at Helen Townsend's and he said, "Why didn't you insist that I come over?" I said, "Why should I insist that you come over, they asked you, and I asked you to come and you wouldn't come." "I should have gone." [Johan]

MR. OLIVEIRA: He was kind of a Groucho Marx kind of personality, you know, "Why didn't you insist that I go with you?"

MR. SIEGRIEST: One of the greatest stories on him was after we got home - he had the snorer with him, sitting in the back - no, he sat with me. At that time he lived out on Anza Street, he was renting. He and I had an exhibition at [Fenner Fuller] Gallery in Oakland - it was a restaurant - and I went over to see him, to bring him over the night before the preview so he could meet the art critic from the Oakland Tribune and so forth. Well, he came in on his high horse right away. Esther Fuller and this girl sat down at the table [with] Johan and I, and she introduced Helen Clement, her name was. She introduced them to Hagemeyer, and he said, "Who are you?" And she said, "I'm the art critic for the Oakland Tribune." So he said, "Oh another dumbbell, huh?" She hadn't even seen the show yet! Oh Christ, I damn near fell through the floor - I didn't know Helen Clement from Adam, either. She said, "If we can't talk about it we might as well leave." So she beat it, she went out and talked to Fenner, I think. The next night was the preview, and there was some guy at the door that let you in. Hagemeyer took a dislike to the guy right away. I don't know, he said something like, "Oh Mr. Hagemeyer, you're one of the great photographers..." Hagemeyer didn't like that. He said it wrong, or something, and they had an argument at the door.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Was he wearing his cape with the red velvet lining?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Yes, and I beat it in the other room, to hell with him. There were a lot of people. Mrs. Labaudt was there, Mrs. Salinger...

MR. KARLSTROM: Let me ask something. Hagemeyer obviously was an important presence in your life, certainly as a friend. Obviously he had his own ideas about aesthetics and so forth. Did you talk about art? Was there any exchange of aesthetics?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did it affect your work in any way?

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, sure. He was a great admirer of artists. You know that portfolio he had at home? I don't know if you ever saw it. There were some very fine prints that he bought when he was in the chips. He was in money at one time. He had a portfolio about that thick that he kept in the other room, a big thing. Very fine prints he had in there. What ever happened to that, I don't know.

MR. OLIVEIRA: His nephew got it.

MR. SIEGRIEST: He might have it, I don't know, but there were excellent things in there.

MR. OLIVEIRA: But Hagemeyer was a critical man in that he wasn't taken in by anyone that just merely painted.

MR. SIEGRIEST: Oh, no.

MR. OLIVEIRA: Hagemeyer insisted that painting or anyone that was a painter had to be responsible to painting, as much so as a photographer had to be responsible to photography, and to those qualities that were somehow identified with those particular mediums. He was a cultivated man. He was well read and fundamentally he was just a cultivated person so that on confronting art, whether it was Lou's or whether it was mine, or whether it was somebody he didn't like, he had a certain standard that was set. At this point I can't really tell you exactly what that standard was outside of the fact that it was based on these values [which] were difficult to obtain. He felt that an artist, whether he was a photographer or painter, had to give completely and question himself. Those qualities of art, as Lou was saying when he was making that photograph of Virginia City, are not easy to come by. So I'm sure that when Lou would talk to him, they would talk about these facts and his sense of self criticism. He would criticize Lou, you know, and he would search a painting for presence and if the presence didn't occur in the painting or photograph or literary work or whatever, it wasn't any good. It was then shallow. So he was really a demanding man and I imagine this is probably what you and he would talk about. You would talk about art that did exist and great art...

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...March 5, 2008