



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Fred and
Edith Nagler, 1979 Dec. 14

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. This interview received support from the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative Pool.

Contact Information

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Edith Kroger Nagler and Fred Nagler on December 14, 1979. The interview took place in Dallas, Texas, and was conducted by Lisa Laughlin Ferguson for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This interview was recorded on two sides of one sound tape reel. Side 1 of the reel was transcribed in the 1980s. In 2024, Side 2 was transcribed, and Side 1 was retranscribed and reconciled against the original transcript in an attempt to create a verbatim transcript of the full interview. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

[00:00:01.93]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: I'll just say that today is December 14, 1979. And I'm Lisa Laughlin. And I'm talking with Fred and Edith Nagler. And I wanted to get some brief background on both of you, for instance, where you were born, when you were born, and what you had done before you met each other at the Art Students League. And then we'll go on from there.

[00:00:27.58]

EDITH NAGLER: Fred thinks it was a dreary life I had before I met him.

[00:00:32.05]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: What was your maiden name?

[00:00:34.77]

EDITH NAGLER: Kroger.

[00:00:35.22]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Kroger. That's what—

[00:00:37.02]

EDITH NAGLER: Only we were supposed to have used the umlaut over it and pronounce it "Krayger."

[00:00:41.47]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Oh.

[00:00:43.24]

EDITH NAGLER: Which is very hard since we lived in Spikendaigle at the time. You spell that out to spell Spikendaigle.

[00:00:52.09]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: I couldn't do that.

[00:00:53.83]

FRED NAGLER: Well, that's just off Manhattan.

[00:00:55.60]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Uh-huh.

[00:00:56.20]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah, still there.

[00:00:57.40]

EDITH NAGLER: Even the brakeman on the New York Central didn't know how to pronounce it, Spikendaigle.

[00:01:03.71]

FRED NAGLER: Well, you might—yes, well, I was born in West Springfield, [Massachusetts]. And I went through high school at the Springfield High. And then I worked for—my father took me to a famous German woodcarver when I was 12 years old. So he must have thought I had talent. And I worked with him. And in fact, that table you see in there, I made when I was 17 years old. I carved it.

[00:01:33.92]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: I remember seeing that.

[00:01:34.94]

FRED NAGLER: And at that time, there was much carving done. All the egg and dart molding and beading and everything, that was carved too. But then—and into homes, there were so many homes that had beautifully carved—what would you call them? Smoking rooms or dens in the lodge.

[00:01:56.12]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Right, I saw an exhibit at the Frick last week—

[00:01:59.76]

FRED NAGLER: Oh, you did?

[00:02:00.42]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: —of a master carver who had done the over-mantels and mantels of the Frick mansion.

[00:02:06.53]

FRED NAGLER: Oh.

[00:02:07.28]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: It was a beautiful little show.

[00:02:09.20]

FRED NAGLER: Well, you could get an idea then of how much of that was going on at that time.

[00:02:14.06]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Yes.

[00:02:14.24]

FRED NAGLER: I know he often had had these long benches, and sometimes ten men carving. And he did other things too—what would you call them? Plaques. He modeled clay and portraits and plaques, and ornamental plasterwork, too. I know one thing we did was the—he did the library at Smith College, all the ornamental plasterwork in that and all.

[00:02:41.09]

EDITH NAGLER: And all those big mansions up there.

[00:02:43.67]

FRED NAGLER: Oh, yes. In Springfield, the Wesson Revolver people. And they all had—but anyway, he said, "This has come to an end. There's no more future in carving." And so I had met an artist by the name of Cariani who had been at the National Academy in New York and Springfield. So I was asking him about the art studying.

[00:03:25.59]

But I picked the Art Students League, and I went there in 1914. And I guess I always—as I look back at it now, I think I probably—there was a lot of—what would you call it—shenanigans going on at an art school. And I think not all the students were serious. But I guess I was a very serious student. I always liked to read the best poetry and best—all the philosophers I could read. And in fact, how I got interested in religious art, which I think is the great art and probably the basic of the Renaissance because it just makes you work harder. Whatever you do is illustration.

[00:04:20.29]

And I thought the life of Christ, the reason the Renaissance painters did it because of the love of Christ. And they weren't hired by the church, too. And the church employed them after they had. And I thought it was the love of Christ in their heart, and that subject matter that made them produce the greater art. I think even probably Rembrandt, his greatest pictures are religious works. So anyway, I painted landscape and portrait. And I won a scholarship—a Bridgman scholarship at the Art Students League. I was monitoring every class there.

[00:05:06.03]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Who were some of your teachers there?

[00:05:07.82]

FRED NAGLER: Well, I studied with Dumont and Bridgman mostly, and some with Henri. But I don't think the teacher made much difference with me. The enthusiasm—it was between me and the models and all that. And well, anyway, I got on the Board of Control there, too. And I won the annual Portrait Prize. And won—before I was 35, I sent a portrait of my father to the National Academy and won the Hallgarten prize for a man under 35.

[00:05:53.76]

And then—Edith, I met Edith at the Art Students League. And I just—my seriousness vanished for a little while when I looked into those beautiful blue eyes. And so we were married. And we lived the first year in Woodstock in the Catskills. Edith was on the Board of Control also. And in the Catskills, why, we had a studio on the mountain side that belonged to—what is it—Rinkin. Was he the son of the Rinkin [inaudible]?

[00:06:39.11]

EDITH NAGLER: No, I think he was a nephew.

[00:06:40.56]

FRED NAGLER: A nephew. And he was also a cellist with the—

[00:06:47.71]

EDITH NAGLER: Metropolitan.

[00:06:49.35]

FRED NAGLER: Yes, with the Metropolitan. No, the opera.

[00:06:55.44]

EDITH NAGLER: Yes.

[00:06:55.92]

FRED NAGLER: Metropolitan Opera, yeah. And we had his place for the first year. But then we thought maybe art colonies weren't for us. They were too social and too much interruption. So I knew the Berkshires. And my opinion was that I had the woman's point of view and Edith had the man's. And that's all we needed. And if we got away by ourselves—so we went into the Berkshires where it was—Huntington, and built ourselves a stone house, which we did most of the work ourselves.

[00:07:34.56]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: What year was that?

[00:07:35.75]

FRED NAGLER: That was in—it must have been 1918.

[00:07:39.19]

EDITH NAGLER: Yeah.

[00:07:39.64]

FRED NAGLER: We were married in 1918.

[00:07:43.27]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: About 1920, went into the house, I guess.

[00:07:46.59]

FRED NAGLER: Yes, I took two years to build it because at that—but I think it might be interesting to know. We did need some help, though. I could do masonry. My early training made me know how to build in a moderate way. And so I think this is interesting. We heard of two people that could lay fieldstone. And the first one that came, he hitched his horse. That's from the horse days. In fact, there wasn't a truck in Huntington, [Massachusetts] when we built there. All our sand had to be put into sandbags and brought up on a hayrack for the cement work. Of course, labor was—but I heard of two men. And I wrote them each a card and had them come on different days.

[00:08:38.90]

And the first one came along. He said—well, we introduced ourselves to each other. And I said, "We'd like to build a stone house here." And he said, "Are you good?" And I thought first he meant morally. [Laughs.] But I thought I was a little bit—what? A little bit set down by that. And I thought he might have waited a week and find out anyway. But then, the next man that came—

[00:09:09.82]

EDITH NAGLER: He meant, "Can you pay?"

[00:09:11.02]

FRED NAGLER: Oh, yes, and oh, I said, "What do you mean, good?" And he said, "Good pay." And I said, "Well, I guess so."

[00:09:18.70]

EDITH NAGLER: So far.

[00:09:20.62]

FRED NAGLER: The next man came along, his name was Elijah Sampson. And he had built stonework for Joe Jefferson, the old Rip Van Winkle actor, down on Cape Cod. But he had moved from Cape Cod and had a farm on the hill there near us. And when I saw him come down the road with that big, easy stride—and I liked the man from the distance. And I said, "Mr. Sampson, I'm Fred Nagler. And this is Mrs. Nagler. And we want to build a stone house here." And I said, "Would you like to do it?" And he said, "I'd love to." And it was a work of love ever after. But I think that's interesting. So that's our Huntington studio, anyway, where we still go.

[00:10:03.87]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Right.

[00:10:04.65]

FRED NAGLER: We had, of course—we went in the winter. In the winter we went—we were well-established there at Huntington and worked there a couple of winters, and liked the winters just as well as the summer. But Edith's family, which she can tell you about, they married and left home. And her parents were lonely. And they knew artists could work anywhere. So they said, "Come down and spend the winters with us". So we did that there ever after.

[00:10:36.47]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Tell me where your family home is, and about what it was like to spend the winter there.

[00:10:43.78]

EDITH NAGLER: Well, we had three or four acres. And it was a growing suburb, you might say. But we also had horses. And I had a pony, which I had coaxed for a long time. And I had seven sisters and one brother. It was quite a household. It was a 20-room house. And Sundays, always lots of guests. Everybody had friends that wanted to come there. It was very popular.

[00:11:16.39]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: It was right on the river, is that right?

[00:11:18.07]

EDITH NAGLER: Well, it was within sight of the river. One of my paintings here—it isn't around—shows the Hudson and how the Hudson looked from the house. We could see the Palisades. As a child I used to think that the whole world was like that, just a river and a hill. A river and a hill, it must be that way. [Laughs.] But I learned later.

[00:11:50.46]

And let's see. Oh, I was always very handy with crayons and pencils. And I could make paper dolls. And my younger sister would order just what she wanted. She wanted a grown-up lady in an evening dress, and so forth. And I could draw it for her, make it in paper and cut it out. And to this day, she feels a little teased about it, that once I made a whole lot of paper dolls

and I buried them. But my idea was to have buried treasure. But she thought I was just teasing her, you see, not giving them to her right away. Well, anyway, I went to Mars High School. And I—

[00:12:43.37]

FRED NAGLER: Valedictorian.

[00:12:45.08]

EDITH NAGLER: Not there.

[00:12:45.92]

FRED NAGLER: What? At Mars?

[00:12:46.67]

EDITH NAGLER: At elementary school. [Clock chiming.] I was valedictorian. But that didn't amount to much. But anyway. Um—[inaudible] the clock strikes.

[00:13:01.29]

FRED NAGLER: But when did you go to—you went to the National Academy first, before me.

[00:13:04.22]

EDITH NAGLER: Yes, I went to the National Academy.

[00:13:07.14]

FRED NAGLER: When was that?

[00:13:07.77]

EDITH NAGLER: Well, first I took some private lessons by a woman who was a minister's daughter. And she had been trained in Germany, I think. And she knew how to teach me. So I enjoyed her. She enjoyed me, I guess. But then I went to art school at the National Academy. And first, it was kind of a dreary routine of drawing from a plaster cast models. You weren't allowed to see a real model at all. But then, after that, I painted. I got some [inaudible] and prizes. Not as much there. But when I into the Art Students League, I got—

[00:14:00.83]

FRED NAGLER: I think it would be of interest to tell who you studied with at the National Academy.

[00:14:05.43]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Yes.

[00:14:06.29]

EDITH NAGLER: Douglas Volk and George de Forest Brush.

[00:14:13.82]

FRED NAGLER: And did you study with Kenyon Cox too?

[00:14:16.67]

EDITH NAGLER: Well, I went to some of his classes in composition. And I absorbed what they had to give. But then I somehow felt a little confined there, because it was all—there's too much dictation, I guess. Oh, Francis Jones, he was an academician, and he was very kind. He'd always come along and carry his own chair and sit down next to you and say, "That's pretty good. Go right ahead."

[00:14:52.05]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: That was nice.

[00:14:52.68]

EDITH NAGLER: [Laughs.] Oh, he didn't have much to say. We met one of his nephews here in Dallas. And I immediately recognized one of his paintings on the wall.

[00:15:11.48]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Oh, you did? How exciting.

[00:15:14.48]

EDITH NAGLER: Well, anyway—

[00:15:15.68]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: So you decided to move on to the Art Students League?

[00:15:19.49]

EDITH NAGLER: Yes, and the first year, I survived without knowing Fred at all. But after that, whenever I set up my easel, he set his nearby. See, and Mr. Dumont, he would always put a "D" in the corner of his work.

[00:15:44.27]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: The students' work.

[00:15:45.11]

EDITH NAGLER: Who had his highest approval. And that person was allowed to take the first choice, right. So I could take first choice. And he could take second choice as the monitor of the class. So he seemed like the same view that I liked, near me. So after that, I was there several years. And then I had a studio in New York.

[00:16:19.21]

FRED NAGLER: Well, I think it was there—I don't know. It must have been 1917, I summered in—My sister had a cottage. All I knew of Berkshires, my sister had a cottage there. And I summered there and painted landscape. And Edith came to visit me. And we were married there. We were married there.

[00:16:44.87]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Did you elope?

[00:16:46.49]

FRED NAGLER: Yes, we did.

[00:16:47.60]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Yes, you did.

[00:16:49.21]

EDITH NAGLER: Shocked my parents, because they had been so busy providing [laughs] six daughters with fine weddings. I thought, oh, I wouldn't want to go through that again, the embroidering and sewing and all that. I said, "We'll just go ahead and get married. Let them know and save some labor."

[00:17:13.13]

FRED NAGLER: There was no minister in Huntington. We had to take a trolley car down ten miles near Springfield to find a minister. Anyway—

[00:17:23.84]

EDITH NAGLER: It stayed, I think, almost 62 years.

[00:17:27.74]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: I think it did.

[00:17:28.55]

EDITH NAGLER: Without all the embroidery and bridesmaids. So—

[00:17:35.18]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah, well, I don't know. We wanted it simpler. And somehow we were—the arts, they don't make you hate society, but somehow it's the hardest thing to enter into. We were just—well, I would say, too, when we started out, we were poor. But we didn't know it. We didn't know it. We were just happy.

[00:18:07.82]

EDITH NAGLER: My father had more understanding for you than another man might have had, because his elder brother was Frederick Kroger, who was a designer for another sculptor.

[00:18:28.72]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Oh, he was? Hmm.

[00:18:29.05]

EDITH NAGLER: And he met my father when my father came to this country, met him at the boat. He died before we were born. But my old aunt said Fred resembled him. And so we thought it was reincarnation. [Inaudible] [Laughs.]

[00:18:55.92]

FRED NAGLER: Well, I think it's interesting to know. I think he was, in a way, a good sculptor at that time. We have samples of his work that he did. And he also did the bear—the California bear.

[00:19:10.56]

EDITH NAGLER: Yes, the symbol.

[00:19:11.19]

FRED NAGLER: He did the California bear for California.

[00:19:14.39]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Oh, he designed it?

[00:19:15.15]

FRED NAGLER: Yes, he did. [Cross talk.]

[00:19:18.50]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Oh, he did?

[00:19:19.80]

FRED NAGLER: Yes.

[00:19:22.60]

EDITH NAGLER: He did heads of Christ and heads of Lincoln. Lincoln was a hero of his, and made little medallions, which sold pretty well, and also heads of Christ.

[00:19:31.65]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: So when did you turn from landscapes in the Berkshires to religious subjects?

[00:19:37.16]

FRED NAGLER: Well, I think that was some time later. I like to say that when I won the annual Portrait Prize, George Bellows and John Sloan were the jury. And of course, they became both well known. What was your question?

[00:20:04.34]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Well, you had said that you were painting landscapes in the Berkshires when Edith came up and you eloped.

[00:20:10.79]

FRED NAGLER: Yes, I painted landscapes, and showed with Wren Gallery in New York, and showed with Macbeth Gallery in New York, landscapes. Then I showed—I did etchings too, a lot of copperplate etchings. And I studied with Ernest Haskell.

[00:20:36.03]

EDITH NAGLER: I had studied etching with Mr. Milat at the National Academy. And at the Art Students League, I also studied with Henri. And he used one of my portraits to illustrate his class in an annual book.

[00:21:04.68]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Oh, really? Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:21:05.12]

FRED NAGLER: Yes, you were in the annual book.

[00:21:09.63]

EDITH NAGLER: And then I did some showing, too, in public exhibitions.

[00:21:16.32]

FRED NAGLER: But you wanted to know why? Well, I painted landscapes and portraits for some years. And I showed in all the big shows in the country. In fact, I think I gave you letters from Saint-Gaudens from Carnegie.

[00:21:39.50]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Yes, that's right.

[00:21:39.98]

FRED NAGLER: He always came to New York and asked what I was going to show. Well, as I say, I was very serious in my art. And I wanted to express a human document. I thought that portrait and landscape wasn't exactly what I wanted to do. So then when I began to think of what I did want to do, well, having read all the philosophers and then reading the words of Christ—"Only believe, only believe," and so he gave me great belief. I think a lot of people were telling me, oh, you can't be an artist, and it's too difficult, your families, and your way of government, and your way. But Christ said no one is in your way, just self-criticism, so he could rise above that.

[00:22:40.63]

And then having loved the Old Masters as I did, I might say, first off, that subject matter was always secondary to me. What I wanted to do was make masterpieces. And I thought that the Renaissance painters were all too sentimental, too ornamented with their figures. They made them too—they didn't make them belong. I wanted to make them, if possible, more rugged, more simple, and stronger.

[00:23:09.65]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: What Renaissance painters did you admire most?

[00:23:12.33]

FRED NAGLER: Well, of course, I went to the Renaissance first, like Titian, well, and of course, Michelangelo. But then, later, I went back farther I thought that Giotto and Cimabue—And I thought the Renaissance painters were really, that was decadent. I mean, that's where the sweetness set in. And of course, that's what I saw most of my—

[00:23:43.52]

Well, I might say that I belong to Artist Equity. And when I started the religious canvases, I never cared what anybody else made. At that time, many of them were making social conscience pictures and making pictures of Stalin or something else. And I knew, oh, many of the—well, Kuniyoshi and Reginald Marsh, and of course, all those artists, they belonged. And they said, "Oh, Nagler, he's got softening in the brain. He's reactionary." So when they began to say that thing, well, then I thought, "I don't care what the subject matter is. If a man makes masterpiece in it, that's what I wanted to do."

[00:24:35.94]

But when they began to say that, then there was no way I'd give up because I didn't want mass opinion for what I was doing at all. But I did have a success. And I think the Midtown Gallery handled my work from the very beginning. And now it's over 45 years, and they still do. But I had success with these religious art. And a great many times some of the juries were not sympathetic toward that subject, I realized that. But I won several prizes. I won, at the Corcoran Gallery, second prize. I think at that time Max Weber won the first prize.

[00:25:20.39]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Was this in the '20s, around or later?

[00:25:22.46]

FRED NAGLER: Well, later. No, I think I painted landscape and portrait well into the '30s—fifteen years or so. Yeah.

[00:25:34.34]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:25:34.52]

FRED NAGLER: And then—well, I still painted landscape after that, some, and still paint portrait too. In fact, three summers ago I painted a portrait of Colonel Joe Bates, who is a—oh, he's a pro in the salmon fishing—fisherman. He writes many books on outdoor life. In fact, he just wrote for the Atlantic Salmon Club, a book for them, which sold for \$125. And there was only a thousand of them printed. And they were oversubscribed. But I painted a portrait of him.

[00:26:22.14]

He knew I could paint portraits. And he asked me. He wrote to me here in Dallas, in fact—he lives up in Massachusetts—and said, "I want you to paint my portrait." I never answered it. But then, when I got to Huntington, he said, "Hey, Fred, I want you to paint my portrait. But if you don't want to, don't say anything about it anymore." "Well," I said to him, "I'll paint your portrait. But I want you to come when I want you, and if I want you every day, I don't want you to say, I'm coming this day and next week I may come give you a couple of hours more." I said, "That'll interrupt my work too much." So he did. He came every day and for eight days.

[00:27:05.38]

EDITH NAGLER: And that was all the way from the other side of Springfield. Forty miles.

[00:27:11.40]

FRED NAGLER: He did more than 50 miles a day. Now, I can paint portrait. And I found it very easy. It's very different than—

[00:27:22.98]

EDITH NAGLER: Different "from."

[00:27:25.05]

FRED NAGLER: Different from. Thank you. Edith is the brilliant one of the family. [Laughs.]

[00:27:30.37]

EDITH NAGLER: Well.

[00:27:31.80]

FRED NAGLER: She won't make mistakes in—

[00:27:34.74]

EDITH NAGLER: We're still teaching each other.

[00:27:35.62]

FRED NAGLER: But anyway, he likes it very much. And I can paint portraits, and found it very easy to do because you have your model. But when you compose, and like some of the figures that I have done and put together, that you really got to use your inward vision. You've got to see. And it's a different method entirely. I thought I could sing painting portraits. But painting compositions, that is where I curse and swear.

[00:28:11.64]

EDITH NAGLER: I had to sing sometimes when I was painting children.

[00:28:16.14]

FRED NAGLER: Yes.

[00:28:16.41]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Keep them occupied?

[00:28:17.28]

EDITH NAGLER: Yes, I thought I'd try my hand at a little colored boy whose mother was working in our neighborhood. And he posed for me. And he was honored by it. And he got tired after a while, so I began to sing a song for him about—what was it?

[00:28:41.42]

FRED NAGLER: Well, there was the one song you used to sing for him was amusing. When we were at Woodstock, we knew Ergie and Ila.

[00:28:48.86]

EDITH NAGLER: Oh, no, don't go into that. That's not the song.

[00:28:51.68]

FRED NAGLER: That's the song you were singing to him, "Brooklet Mary."

[00:28:54.32]

EDITH NAGLER: "Brooklet Mary."

[00:28:55.46]

FRED NAGLER: Well, Hylick composed it.

[00:28:56.23]

EDITH NAGLER: But he said, I want you to sing "Brooklyn Mary"—"Brooklyn Mary" instead of "Brooklet Mary."

[00:29:03.73]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Oh.

[00:29:04.07]

FRED NAGLER: [Inaudible] confused.

[00:29:04.70]

EDITH NAGLER: I knew what he meant.

[00:29:06.44]

FRED NAGLER: But when we were at Woodstock, we did meet people that—well, [inaudible], he did the music for Maeterlinck's "Blue Bird" when that was on Broadway. And Dasburg and McFee were there of course. And well, we said, we—

[00:29:23.17]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: At Woodstock?

[00:29:26.36]

FRED NAGLER: Bellows was there. And Brook—

[00:29:29.45]

EDITH NAGLER: Spyker.

[00:29:31.25]

FRED NAGLER: Spyker, and, well, many of the artists that became pretty well known after that. Kuniyoshi was there.

[00:29:40.40]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: When was this? In the '20s?

[00:29:42.47]

FRED NAGLER: No, that must have been 1918, early 1918. Before, yeah.

[00:29:46.97]

EDITH NAGLER: We stayed there only a year.

[00:29:48.62]

FRED NAGLER: We were there a year. But I'm still interested in religious art. And when Saint-Gaudens used to come to me and ask me what I was going to send him, I'd say, "Oh, I'm going to give up religious art. The church isn't interested in it. And they're not interested in anything new in it anyway. They're too sentimental about it. And I think I'll give up, because I like to paint anything. It isn't a question." But he said, "Fred," he said, "Don't you do it. No one can do it like you. No one has the spirit for it." So I thought sometimes one voice telling you something can mean more than the whole masses. And so he said it with such a strong sincerity that, well, then I just kept on doing it. And I still am.

[00:31:12.42]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Were you working on specific commissions, or just in your studio on whatever you please?

[00:31:17.55]

FRED NAGLER: No, I worked on whatever I wanted. And of course, many of these things that I painted, I made etchings beforehand or woodblocks. I've done a lot of that. And made, of course, many drawings. But I might say that when you paint a subject matter like that, it demanded more of me, anyway, because it's sort of something that you really idolize. You don't just pick it up like nature painting. But where you try to get into the human document with a love for the man, you might say, that it makes it more difficult.

[00:32:02.84]

And I can say this, that if anybody gets any joy and any love out of what I've done, I have gone through hell to do it. That's true. You go through hell. You go through hell to give heaven. And I think even Christ did it, too. What else did he do in this life? He went through hell to try to make men peaceful and he got crucified for it. You do it today too, especially if you went into Iran. You say, let us have peace. Where would you wind up? With your throat cut. And I can tell you another thing, that the reason I've been very much in love with this U.S. is because they made no limit on your subject matter. I could do that. But if I went into a communistic country, I would be murdered by my next-door neighbor, maybe. And that's the truth. It's not fiction.

[00:33:02.07]

EDITH NAGLER: Well, my religious feeling goes into my love of nature. And I really get a big thrill out of the looks of things [inaudible] paint things that other people enjoy.

[00:33:20.50]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:33:20.83]

FRED NAGLER: Yes, well, I was pleased that Edith didn't want to do what I did because we're very different. You can see we paint differently, too. But one thing, I think that we've been married now 62 years next summer, and I think one thing that's made it successful is because I always consider what she was doing as important as my own.

[00:33:43.42]

EDITH NAGLER: Yes. I think, in fact—

[00:33:45.70]

FRED NAGLER: I am, in fact, the first woman lib of the century. [Laughs.]

[00:33:53.15]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: I think you are, too.

[00:33:53.38]

FRED NAGLER: If you don't believe it, ask some artists that have had six and seven wives. [Laughs.]

[00:33:57.55]

EDITH NAGLER: Well, in some ways, I've been the leader. You know that picture that Mrs. Ruud took of Truth entering the room with all these people around? Well, I think I was the first one of us two to paint allegory.

[00:34:14.35]

FRED NAGLER: Well, anyway—

[00:34:16.66]

EDITH NAGLER: And that was Truth entering the room. And some people would go this way. And some people would welcome, so forth.

[00:34:27.26]

FRED NAGLER: That's right.

[00:34:27.86]

EDITH NAGLER: But that was a study that was on bad canvas and all crumbled. But this woman in Massachusetts, she took that. And what will become of it?

[00:34:41.48]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: That was an early work, then?

[00:34:43.26]

EDITH NAGLER: Yes.

[00:34:43.70]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Allegorical painting. Do you ever do that anymore?

[00:34:47.28]

EDITH NAGLER: Yes, I still do. Not as much in painting as in drawing such things.

[00:34:54.14]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Do you do as many drawings as you do paintings?

[00:34:58.37]

EDITH NAGLER: No, I wouldn't say I do as many.

[00:35:03.46]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: But you're still drawing a lot. Are you still etching?

[00:35:08.13]

FRED NAGLER: No, I don't etch anymore. I do some woodcut. In fact—

[00:35:11.54]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Right, I've seen those wood carvings.

[00:35:12.80]

FRED NAGLER: Yes, but my prints are in many famous collections. And in fact, the Springfield, [Massachusetts] museum, they did have a Nagler room of all my etchings. They have all my etchings that I ever did. And I think Donald Vogel here, the Vogel Gallery in Dallas, he's been a great admirer of mine for many years. And he wants to get a book out of my prints.

[00:35:44.57]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Right, that's a good idea. When did you start coming down to Dallas?

[00:35:51.23]

FRED NAGLER: Well, I'll tell you, we had a studio in Riverdale. In fact, I'll start off by saying I was a kind of country boy. And coming from Springfield when I did, it was very provincial there. And when I got into New York, boy, I fell in love with it. And that still is my love city. What is it? It isn't only big in numbers. But it's big in the people too. I mean, you meet them there.

[00:36:24.59]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Yes, that's right.

[00:36:24.83]

FRED NAGLER: They are there. And we did. We had many, many famous friends there. In fact, I think we probably knew intimately and were very most friendly with the best artists there, the best painters—Nadelman and Orozco, who we knew very well, I think. And Carl Milles, the Swedish sculptor. And Zorach, who I think was a fine sculptor.

[00:36:51.78]

In fact, I want to say here that I think—I haven't been in New York for ten years. I don't know what the Metropolitan has now, if anything new. But I think the Zorach "Mother and Child" sculpture that they have there, I think is probably one of the better works of sculpture. It's humble and strong. And, well—So, we knew—

[00:37:19.80]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: So you socialized with all of the artists when you were in the city?

[00:37:22.59]

FRED NAGLER: Well, not much. Not much. You don't much with the great. I mean, I considered Orozco—I don't know whether you know his Dartmouth murals, but I think they're just heroic. They're marvelous and strong. And he was such a simple man. And he often invited Edith—he says, "Come down to Mexico and see us." But you get busy as an artist. And you don't want to interrupt. The invitation is sufficient.

[00:37:55.27]

EDITH NAGLER: We were giving—at my father's house, we were living there in the winter, giving a sort of musical evening. And we invited Orozco and the woman who had his gallery, Mrs. Reed. And I never knew he had only one arm. It was a complete surprise to me. We knew another man who had worked for the popular side of the Spanish rebellion. And he had one arm. And he always flourished his empty sleeve to show everybody how he had suffered.

[00:38:37.64]

But Orozco was very quiet about it. And I passed around some beverage. And he took a glass. And then I came around again with sandwiches or something, and he just looked sort of helpless. And Mrs. Reed took some for him. I thought, well, what's this? And I noticed his empty sleeve tucked in his pocket. And when we saw his murals, I thought the most touching thing was, over the door, there was a little strip of plaster where he could try them, whether it was the right substance and make a little sketch. And his little sketch was a man looking at his own hands, two hands.

[00:39:27.28]

FRED NAGLER: Beautiful.

[00:39:27.30]

EDITH NAGLER: I guess that to him was wonderful, what he could do with one. Man was given two, you know.

[00:39:39.53]

FRED NAGLER: He was a man I loved. And I must say here that I think Tom Benton mentioned once in something he had written—I think I saw it in *American Heritage*—that Mrs. Reed, who brought him to America, really, and got him these commissions, he said that she was his mistress. But I do not believe that. I can't believe it. He was just too involved in art. I would say she was just like a big brother to him. And I don't believe there's anything other—no mistress in it at all. That's my opinion. I'd like to—

[00:40:24.94]

EDITH NAGLER: Makes a good story to say it that way.

[00:40:27.47]

FRED NAGLER: Well, yes, I could tell, when they were together, I mean, there was no mistress relation. It was just pure—she loved his art. And she published a book about him, of course, and all that. But anyway, when he was making the Dartmouth murals, our son wanted to get into Dartmouth. And so I wrote up to Orozco. And I said, "Dear José, our son wants to get into Dartmouth and maybe a recommendation by you would help him." And he wrote back. And he said, "Dear Fred, I don't write English very well. Please make your own recommendation and don't make it too modest." And he sent a blank sheet with his name at the bottom. And I never could get myself to use them. In fact, my son has them now.

[00:41:21.21]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Really?

[00:41:21.80]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah, and Orozco wanted to etch. He'd seen my early etchings. And he bought some of them. And he wanted to etch. And he was in Mexico and he wrote up and asked me to send them down. So I sent him down a—well, I forgot, an English book on etching, and some materials, whatever he would need. And the first two prints that he pulled, he autographed to me, which our son now has.

[00:41:49.98]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: How wonderful.

[00:41:50.76]

FRED NAGLER: Yes. And I think we have a couple other things that he did, some of his lithographs. But I think, as collectors, we were rather stupid because we could have gotten more of those things. I'm the same way with Louis Eilshemius, who we knew very well. Louis, he's now being revived.

[00:42:16.75]

EDITH NAGLER: He gave me a very nice watercolor because I had written something about him.

[00:42:24.64]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah, Edith recognized him.

[00:42:26.89]

EDITH NAGLER: And that was nice.

[00:42:30.19]

FRED NAGLER: He was a very dear friend, too. And I think we have three or four of his nice works that we bought. And we bought them through the Ferargil Gallery, too, not from Louis.

[00:42:45.71]

EDITH NAGLER: No, at Dudensing, it was.

[00:42:47.36]

FRED NAGLER: Dudensing. I beg your pardon, Dudensing, yes, he had them. We bought—which our son has.

[00:42:53.92]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: In Riverdale, where you were at that time, were there other artists there? Were they all in town?

[00:43:01.51]

FRED NAGLER: Well, I think Nadelman, of course, was a sculptor. And he was a very close neighbor.

[00:43:07.66]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: He was.

[00:43:07.99]

FRED NAGLER: Yes, yes. And you know, I realize now that we could have gotten one of those Nadelman sculptures ourselves. But in the same—well, I mean.

[00:43:18.68]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: So lovely.

[00:43:19.60]

FRED NAGLER: Yes.

[00:43:21.55]

EDITH NAGLER: Isabel Bishop was on—

[00:43:23.17]

FRED NAGLER: Oh, Isabel Bishop, oh, a very dear friend.

[00:43:25.78]

EDITH NAGLER: And we used to go to her house.

[00:43:28.63]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: In Riverdale?

[00:43:29.32]

EDITH NAGLER: Yes. And she came to ours. And she also has some of Fred's paintings, and probably mine too.

[00:43:37.20]

FRED NAGLER: Yes, she has.

[00:43:38.49]

EDITH NAGLER: But we never took one of hers.

[00:43:40.74]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Oh, you didn't.

[00:43:41.58]

FRED NAGLER: No, we never did. Well, we weren't that affluent. We just couldn't buy paintings. But I think it was also you don't know. But Bishop has been a very dear friend of many years. She has visited us at Huntington. In fact, she—

[00:44:03.37]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: And you corresponded a lot.

[00:44:05.23]

FRED NAGLER: Yes, we corresponded a great deal.

[00:44:07.00]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: You did.

[00:44:07.15]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah. I guess I gave you some letters from her. Yeah, and she was in the section called Fieldston, which is—the Riverdale section off Manhattan there is down overlooking the Hudson. But then the Riverdale, the highway there—what is that? It's the new highway. And Fieldston is on the right, on the east side of that. But it's very adjoining, within walking distance. But they had a beautiful home. And she has two Renoirs. [Cross talk.]

[00:44:46.99]

EDITH NAGLER: That to me would be punishment to travel. Did you ever—

[00:44:51.55]

FRED NAGLER: Of course, I mean, Archives will be after her because I think, just recently, as one of the women with Georgia O'Keeffe, she was entertained in Washington by—

[00:45:01.18]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Yes, she was.

[00:45:01.93]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah.

[00:45:02.27]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Exactly, yes.

[00:45:02.90]

FRED NAGLER: That's right.

[00:45:03.47]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: I'll have to look in my checklist to see if she's—

[00:45:05.51]

FRED NAGLER: If you haven't, you should. You should. So, yes, I think we—

[00:45:12.58]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Well, did you ever sit down in the evenings and discuss your work, or theory or anything like that with—

[00:45:20.26]

FRED NAGLER: Well, we did.

[00:45:21.28]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: —Isabel Bishop or another one?

[00:45:22.54]

FRED NAGLER: Oh, with art, with Bishop, did we?

[00:45:26.17]

EDITH NAGLER: I don't think so.

[00:45:26.50]

FRED NAGLER: Maybe some. I don't know. It was generally dinner parties. And she'd have other artists. I think, well, the last time, Leon Kroll was there.

[00:45:38.06]

EDITH NAGLER: It always shocked me that the artist was so untrained. And one of them, I think it was Leon Kroll—"We want to have some salt here. I can't eat this. I need some salt." And then we went to another party that was given for artists, and entered the contest. And they wanted their drinks. And they began to—there was a little cubbyhole where they put the drinks up. And they began to beat on that door to get their drinks quicker.

[00:46:15.01]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah, well, of course, the artists are always hungry. I could understand that. But I'm going to tell you here, which I don't care how anyone else lives. But early in my days in the Art Students League, when it would be in the subway, I'd see drunks with their eyes all bleary. And I said to myself, those men are ruining their eyesight with that liquor. And I need my eyesight. So I've been a teetotaler practically all my life. I might take a little sip of something. I'm not against it.

[00:46:55.48]

And I can still, at my age, which is—well, I was born in '91. And this is '[79]. So I guess I'm nearing 90. I can still read without glasses. And another thing—I had a very dear friend by the name of Alex Singleton who died. But he was a great inspiration to me. He was the one that introduced me to all the good, modern writers. And he was a Southerner. And we had him at our Huntington studio one summer to paint. And if he ran out of cigarettes, he'd have to walk five miles to get them. And then he'd be always interrupting himself painting with cigarettes. And I said to myself, regardless of whether they're good for your health or not—which of course, I didn't believe they were—It couldn't be, to put all that junk in you. So I said to myself, he's losing a lot of time. And he's slave to those things.

[00:48:04.73]

EDITH NAGLER: Ashes all pressed into his paint.

[00:48:05.33]

FRED NAGLER: And I thought to myself, even when he's painting, he must think, "I need another cigarette." So I think Edith tried a cigarette in her early life. And she decided—

[00:48:18.05]

EDITH NAGLER: It was just a dirty taste in my mouth.

[00:48:23.33]

FRED NAGLER: So, anyway—

[00:48:23.57]

EDITH NAGLER: In order to decide whether I really liked it or not, I wasn't going to be influenced, you see, by Fred or anyone else. So once a year, I made myself smoke a cigarette to see whether I liked it. I decided it was just a dirty taste my mouth.

[00:48:38.24]

FRED NAGLER: But anyway, I think that we tried to simplify our life in every way that way. And regardless of what we've done, I mean, you can always be better, and you can have greater artists, maybe, that do those things.

[END OF TRACK AAA_nagler79_5749_m]

[00:00:05.00]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Say that again about how you would win a prize, and it would last you for a long time, and you were very conscious of being economical.

[00:00:16.88]

FRED NAGLER: Well—

[00:00:17.88]

EDITH NAGLER: Also, our families were very good to us—Fred's—

[00:00:20.27]

FRED NAGLER: Simplicity.

[00:00:21.28]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Oh, that's nice.

[00:00:23.24]

FRED NAGLER: Well—

[00:00:23.81]

EDITH NAGLER: Fred's sister and mother would send packages with things to eat in it. And—

[00:00:31.91]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah. My sister was an advertising head of Milton Bradley company. She worked there, the game people. And she was editor of *That American Childhood*. And so she helped us with much. But anyway—

[00:00:54.22]

EDITH NAGLER: I don't think they ever paid us for anything.

[00:00:56.53]

FRED NAGLER: No. No. I would say, I would say, all right. I'll say if you are making an effort in the right direction, and don't dissipate yourself, always enough is given. Always enough is given so that you can carry on. I believe it. It all—I mean, I can believe it now, because it happened to us. It just happened. When we had that summer studio, we—gee, we lived off the soil. First off, we did—we—I was a country boy. And I said, we're going to make this land yield for us. So we put in trees, pear trees, which you could buy maybe for a dollar and a half. And I tell you after 60 years, those pear trees are still bearing bushels of pears. And we had peaches, and pears, and peaches—

[00:01:55.22]

EDITH NAGLER: And raised a garden. [Inaudible]

[00:01:56.63]

FRED NAGLER: And raised a garden, and ate from it. And what would you need? A little bit of meat. I mean—and most—in fact, most of the farmers themselves, what were they having? They had potatoes and meat gravy. I think the—and then you knew how to live through the soil for many native things.

[00:02:16.82]

EDITH NAGLER: We canned pickles and fruit.

[00:02:17.74]

FRED NAGLER: Dandelions are a marvelous healthy green. Milkweed is a marvelous, healthy green. So we had—we lived from the soil. And I like to fish, I'd take—and we'd have trout to eat. So anyway—

[00:02:38.47]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: When did your life begin to change, then? When did you become more successful, or more renowned?

[00:02:48.51]

FRED NAGLER: Well, yes. We'd be—

[00:02:50.31]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Showing more exhibitions.

[00:02:53.48]

EDITH NAGLER: It was so gradual.

[00:02:53.94]

FRED NAGLER: Yes, it was gradual. And if we made a little money, we invested it, and I think, wisely. And so that we put some into—well, we put some into CVS way back, which—way back, which is—and General Electric way back.

[00:03:16.89]

EDITH NAGLER: Our father—he was well-to-do. He did well. And he always gave us the same that he gave every one of his children.

[00:03:26.25]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Yeah.

[00:03:27.54]

FRED NAGLER: Which wasn't too much.

[00:03:29.07]

EDITH NAGLER: They'd spend it for a mink coat or something. But that was—it would just carry us on a little bit. And we built our house that way.

[00:03:37.10]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah, your money. But yeah, we still—listen—

[00:03:46.27]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: So there was—

[00:03:47.05]

FRED NAGLER: I'll tell you a good piece of philosophy.

[00:03:50.62]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Okay.

[00:03:51.43]

FRED NAGLER: When I began to look around at nature, and see how full it was, and people began to tell you, this was created by God, all right, say God, or the master, or—they're all equally the same. Or you can—when it was created, anyway. It was work. And I could see work. So I said to myself, "Fred, God is work. So you just work, and you'll know God." And it's as simple as that. I think I found out that most—well, preachers who preach, who preach religion, they're always too complicated. They're not simple. You can't have those things.

[00:04:32.35]

It's got to be as simple as, well, "work is God," or "God is love," or—and I think that relationship has to be—it's very difficult for anybody to live with anyone else, for Edith to live

with me, I know that, and me with her. But I think you've got to have something as simple as "God is love," and a quick forgiveness. And I think you've got to have that to have victory in anything, even in art. I'm talking as though I was a great artist. I hope I am. But I mean, I wanted to be. That's what I wanted to do, create great art, and different. But I think I did make some pictures that will have—be—that will last, and religious art. I think I've made some. I've often thought, well, Babe Ruth never hit a home run every time. And an artist doesn't make a great picture every time either. But if you make—

[00:05:37.40]

EDITH NAGLER: You've been asked to teach many a time.

[00:05:40.37]

FRED NAGLER: Oh, yes.

[00:05:41.03]

EDITH NAGLER: You always would say, "No, I've talked myself out."

[00:05:45.53]

FRED NAGLER: Well—

[00:05:45.95]

EDITH NAGLER: And I couldn't paint.

[00:05:47.36]

FRED NAGLER: But—

[00:05:48.10]

EDITH NAGLER: But if I was asked to teach, and I did teach for a while, but I found I was teaching myself, too, at the same time.

[00:05:59.45]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Of course.

[00:06:00.51]

EDITH NAGLER: I said, well, what would I say to my pupils if they got in a fix like that? I'd know what I would say. But Fred loves to teach. He's teaching now. He's teaching through that.

[00:06:17.18]

FRED NAGLER: No, I mean, you can see that I love to talk. I really do. And I love to inspire young artists, and tell them, believe in self, and go at it. But what more is there to say? Like when Grant Wood died, they asked me—Longman I think, wrote on. He said, "We'd like you. Could you take his place?" And I wrote out there. And I said no. And so he wrote the next year and he said, "Fred," he said, we want you. "Name your terms." So I talked to them, you know I said, "Well, they'd probably give me a good studio." And okay.

[00:06:53.09]

So I said, "All right. I'll take it. I'll talk to the students one hour a week. And I guarantee you they won't want to see me the rest of the week." I was going to say, "Just develop self." What was Christ? He was self-development. There was never one before him. What was Shakespeare? What was my great love, Beethoven, and Wagner? I love Beethoven and Wagner. They're my great—But I mean, who was before them?

And so he wrote back and he said, "Well, he said, that's wonderful. But it's against all the college regulations. You have to attend all the meetings with the professors, and listen to all that blah." And a creative artist doesn't belong there. So I said to Edith, "Okay, my audience, if I have one, is going to be the future. And it'll be bigger because most of the artists, you

pick them. They were very little known in their lifetime. And they struggled. But afterwards is when they had a audience."

[00:07:57.89]

Let me tell you about Van Gogh, which you already know. When he died, his brother's wife inherited his pictures. She was repeatedly asked to destroy them, because they were absolutely worthless. Now, if they're shown, what happens? Millions of people go to see them. So I said, if they don't want me in my terms, I've got to—I possibly can have an audience in the future. And you don't miss an audience. It wasn't that I didn't want to give, but you know when you go to a—When you go to teach like that in a college and these students, maybe there's only one or two out of the hundred—out of the hundreds that'll ever want to do anything with it afterwards. And those two are geniuses anyway. And they don't care what I say. In fact, I used to think like I'm doing now. I used to think that Henri when he came in, he talked too much. He just looked at me.

[00:08:57.31]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Oh, really?

[00:08:57.91]

FRED NAGLER: Sure. It's a lot of philosophy, which you don't need. I just—my battle was between me and the model. And just being with other people that worked there. So, no. That's how I didn't want to teach. And then I was offered when I was asked—when I first got out of the Art Students League, they asked me if I would take the head of the Art Department of Connecticut College for Women. But I think at that time, I felt, oh, I didn't feel qualified somehow. It wasn't the same feeling with that.

[00:09:34.42]

And then the Midtown Gallery asked me not too many years ago if I would take the head of the Eastman School in, where is it, Rochester, New York or something? And the man that took that, I knew very well. Bill Palmer. He said, "Oh, Fred, it's a good thing you didn't take it. They don't want you to hang the pictures if they have an exhibition. But you say, put this one there, and this there, and all that."

[00:10:03.77]

So but I think now, that tradition has changed. I know when our son went to Dartmouth, Robert Frost was the Poet-in-Residence there. But he had nothing to do. If you saw him walk across the campus, you'd probably run home and write a poem. It's just that—to have that spirit there, and let him work. So that's the reason I never taught. But we might have been—at that time, we needed it. But Edith was always—Edith—I figure this way. I believe in angels, and I had one in Edith. She really supported me when I—when she would believe in me, and things like that. She really did. She believed in me when everybody else—and I always felt like—

[00:10:53.85]

EDITH NAGLER: Even when you wore a beard.

[00:10:55.02]

FRED NAGLER: Yes.

[00:10:55.80]

EDITH NAGLER: He was one of the first—

[00:10:56.88]

FRED NAGLER: I was the one—that's where it was hard doing it.

[00:10:58.98]

EDITH NAGLER: "Why don't you tell him to cut off that beard," my sisters would say.

[00:11:02.91]

FRED NAGLER: Yes. That was when it was hard. Now, they're a dime a dozen and no one cares. But I really took a lot of rashing. But to me, rashing from the multitude never influenced me. I wanted to raise above it, above the masses. [Cross talk.]

[00:11:21.76]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: I think it makes you stronger.

[00:11:22.51]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah. You want to raise above the masses. Or you're nobody.

[00:11:25.72]

EDITH NAGLER: I think you're retiring this point.

[00:11:27.46]

FRED NAGLER: I don't know. That's up to you.

[00:11:29.89]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: No, no, no. I just—one question that, was there any particular exhibition that you had at Midtown or at a museum that sort of changed the direction of your career, you know, that—

[00:11:46.99]

EDITH NAGLER: The first one we had together was the Ainsley Gallery.

[00:11:51.25]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah. We had a joint show at the Ainsley Gallery. I had some work at the Downtown Gallery, too when they were down there. But—

[00:11:59.74]

EDITH NAGLER: We got good reviews.

[00:12:01.63]

FRED NAGLER: What?

[00:12:01.99]

EDITH NAGLER: We got very good reviews.

[00:12:04.03]

FRED NAGLER: Oh, always. Never got anything but good reviews. That—always got good—I can show you. Always got [inaudible].

[00:12:15.22]

EDITH NAGLER: Who was the man that you used to [inaudible]—

[00:12:16.84]

FRED NAGLER: Well, it was Henry McBride.

[00:12:18.52]

EDITH NAGLER: Henry McBride.

[00:12:20.05]

FRED NAGLER: He said "Fred Nagler's works," he said, "They are museum pieces. But first,

they'll go to the churches, like the old masters did." That's what he said, and you can read it.

[00:12:31.03]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Oh, what a wonderful compliment.

[00:12:32.95]

FRED NAGLER: Well, it was because he was "Mr. Big." And all, and—you can look them up in all the papers. Never got it. And when—Yale University had a show of mine and Dalí. They said that—

[00:12:53.03]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Together?

[00:12:53.66]

FRED NAGLER: Yes. They had some works out there to choose from.

[00:12:56.91]

EDITH NAGLER: Well—in different galleries.

[00:12:58.13]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Different galleries.

[00:12:58.46]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah. But anyway, they bought my painting, which is at—it's at Yale University. What is the name of that?

[00:13:13.17]

EDITH NAGLER: [Inaudible]

[00:13:14.16]

FRED NAGLER: Yes. But I mean, the church.

[00:13:17.26]

EDITH NAGLER: Oh, Dwight Chapel.

[00:13:18.03]

FRED NAGLER: Dwight Chapel. And they picked that above Dalí's. And they said that I—well, they connected me with the true spirit of Giotto and Cimabue, and that, well, they implied that Dalí's may be—

[00:13:45.15]

EDITH NAGLER: He's a showman.

[00:13:45.90]

FRED NAGLER: Wasn't as deep or a little more of a showman. Yes.

[00:13:49.53]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: That's true.

[00:13:51.18]

FRED NAGLER: But you—

[00:13:53.59]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: So those were—

[00:13:54.39]

FRED NAGLER: You probably got those criticisms, I mean, because you would—the Archives keep such things.

[00:14:01.23]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Right. So that was an important exhibit for you, the one at Yale.

[00:14:04.17]

FRED NAGLER: Yes. It was. Yale. And of course, the Midtown.

[00:14:06.73]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: [Inaudible] purchase—

[00:14:07.72]

FRED NAGLER: Yes. I could give you—I could give you clippings. There's are clippings if you would want them. I have some. I brought them from Huntington.

[00:14:16.19]

EDITH NAGLER: I have a lot of them too.

[00:14:17.32]

FRED NAGLER: Edith has a lot.

[00:14:19.60]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That might be good to document.

[00:14:20.85]

FRED NAGLER: Edith—I want to say that Edith in those early periods, she sold more than I did. She was the breadwinner. Because the religious art was not popular.

[00:14:30.94]

EDITH NAGLER: I think even last year, I think I sold—

[00:14:33.58]

FRED NAGLER: Oh, you had a good year. Well, I did too.

[00:14:35.86]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Do you sell at Midtown also?

[00:14:37.98]

FRED NAGLER: No.

[00:14:38.56]

EDITH NAGLER: No. They have in the past. I used to show with them. But a couple of young women up at—in Massachusetts that make it a business of theirs to sort of promote my things, and take them around to their friends. In fact, I had a surprise of my life one time last summer, Fred was driving my grandson to the plane. And they made a mistake. It was—it was six p.m. time instead of six a.m. They got down there six a.m. down to Hartford. Well, and Fred didn't come home and didn't come home. And it started raining very hard. And I was afraid some flood had kept him. So I called up the police at the state police—

[00:15:35.79]

FRED NAGLER: State police.

[00:15:36.39]

EDITH NAGLER: Well, in the next village. And I said, "Could you tell me—could you try to help my husband, if he's in a fix somewhere?" I thought he may have gotten into a flood. And he said, "Well, where is he—where is he? And what's he been doing? How long has he been gone?" And I said, "Well, I expected him home by this time. But he isn't home." And he said he'd be glad to do whatever he could. And then he began to call me "Edith." I thought, well, that's funny. [Laughs.] State trooper, you know.

[00:16:13.89]

And I didn't connect it with anything I had done wrong. But I found out later that he was one of the policemen who had brought back some of the things that had been stolen from us. And we—Fred tried to do him a favor and give him one of my watercolors, because he thought they deserved a reward. Well, they couldn't accept it. It was against the rules. And he said, "Well, if I give it to your station, would it be all right?" "No. No. The ones higher up would take it away from us anyway." So he got to know me that way. And pretty soon, he began to buy my paintings.

[00:16:57.33]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: He did?

[00:16:58.20]

EDITH NAGLER: And he—they own a few.

[00:16:59.61]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Great.

[00:17:01.23]

FRED NAGLER: Yeah. Edith has sold very well. She was with the gallery on Madison Avenue, and the Grand Central Gallery had her watercolors. And she had the Cornell Gallery in Springfield did very well for her. So it's different. But you did show early at the Midtown Gallery.

[00:17:22.23]

EDITH NAGLER: But you see? Now, our problem is the way the government treats us. They would tax our heirs in hard cash for—

[00:17:32.69]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: For the works. Yes.

[00:17:33.15]

EDITH NAGLER: The assumed value of our—

[00:17:35.32]

FRED NAGLER: For unsold ones.

[00:17:35.89]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Yes.

[00:17:36.31]

EDITH NAGLER: They were—but in Europe, they take the work itself, part of it—

[00:17:43.45]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Right. Exactly.

[00:17:43.96]

EDITH NAGLER: And see what they can—if they can sell it. So now, I've been sort of letting my things go for a song, I might say. And I sell a great deal.

[00:17:56.25]

FRED NAGLER: Well, but less commission.

[00:18:00.93]

EDITH NAGLER: I don't want to make trouble for—

[00:18:02.05]

FRED NAGLER: She just belongs to the American Watercolor Society.

[00:18:04.81]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Yes.

[00:18:06.34]

FRED NAGLER: And the Audubon.

[00:18:07.03]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Do you exhibit there? Do you exhibit annually?

[00:18:09.66]

EDITH NAGLER: Not anymore.

[00:18:10.26]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: No?

[00:18:10.89]

EDITH NAGLER: No. Because they—

[00:18:13.39]

FRED NAGLER: Well, it's too far away.

[00:18:14.77]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: That's true.

[00:18:14.95]

EDITH NAGLER: It's hard to send if you send it under glass. One thing was smashed up.

[00:18:21.10]

FRED NAGLER: They sell [inaudible] You can do better selling [inaudible].

[00:18:24.95]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What made you decide to move down here? Was it your son?

[00:18:29.86]

FRED NAGLER: Well, I'll tell you that. I loved—I loved New York, and Edith did too. I must tell you that our son is, well, all right. I'll say he's one of the best engineers in Texas. He's been on the Board of Governors of Texas, of which probably there's ten or twelve. And the steel industry has asked him for advice. He built the World Trademark here in Dallas, and the hotel next to it. He works for—

[00:19:00.88]

EDITH NAGLER: Trammell Crow.

[00:19:01.81]

FRED NAGLER: Trammell Crow. He's his engineer. He did much for him. He did the thousand-room hotel next to the World Trademark. And he did, recently, the new Anatole Hotel. And for that, he was given a medal, beautifully engraved, for his engineering of it.

[00:19:25.18]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: My gosh.

[00:19:26.24]

FRED NAGLER: So our son has been a great blessing to him. And for the record, we have—he has two grandsons. His eldest grandson—

[00:19:36.04]

EDITH NAGLER: He has two sons.

[00:19:38.01]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: He has two sons. You have two grandsons.

[00:19:38.22]

FRED NAGLER: Two sons. Our grandsons. Our grandsons. The eldest is finishing TCU this year, probably go on to take some more education. He was—he was elected to the student foundation, which I understand is quite an honor on campus. And the youngest son, who goes to Greenhill, he just got a medal. I ought to get that and read it you. He got the—

[00:20:10.68]

EDITH NAGLER: Not a medal. It was a plaque.

[00:20:13.29]

FRED NAGLER: Plaque.

[00:20:14.70]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Commendation.

[00:20:15.15]

FRED NAGLER: She ought to read that to us.

[00:20:16.45]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: So your son moved to Dallas and—

[00:20:18.21]

FRED NAGLER: Well, anyway—

[00:20:18.85]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Convinced you—

[00:20:19.89]

FRED NAGLER: Yes. He's down here an engineer. And he said, "You're getting old, and get out of that New York rat race, and get out of the cold winters." So—and he began to put pressure on us. And I said to him, I'll say, "Joe, when I get old, put me in an old home and forget me. I don't want to interfere with your young life." And on that—that, of course, he became very incensed by that.

[00:20:47.31]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Really?

[00:20:47.91]

FRED NAGLER: Well, I didn't see incense. I thought it was proper. But so one—so I said—we finally said, "All right. Get us a house down there." And so—but then, Edith, we had been in New York, of course, many years, and had many dear friends there. We could name a few. Clyde Fisher, who was president of the Explorers Club, was a very exciting man. And John Kieran, who was sportswriter of the *Times*, a very dear friend—saw him almost every day. And he was information police program. And he written several books, of which I'm mentioned in them. But—

[00:21:36.72]

EDITH NAGLER: Bill Carey.

[00:21:37.91]

FRED NAGLER: When Bill Carey, SHC, who has my works. I painted a portrait of Kieran. But anyway, I loved New York. And I didn't want to get out. But I thought, maybe we'd better. We are getting old. And—

[00:21:56.39]

EDITH NAGLER: Now that I don't admit. [Laughs.]

[00:21:57.90]

FRED NAGLER: All right. But you are. And the thing is that when you get old, you get—the body gets cold. You have no blood. And an artist needs to be warm to paint. You need warm, because it's not physical. So we decided to come down. And so we said bye. So when we finally decided one morning at four o'clock in the morning, Edith came into my studio up there, where I always slept with my work so I could be near it, and look at it in the night. She came in with tears in her eyes. She said, "I don't think I can go through with it." Because we did have a lot of friends. And when you get old, you don't make friends anymore. And we like people.

[00:22:41.98]

EDITH NAGLER: It wasn't the friends so much as just that rigamarole of deciding.

[00:22:47.22]

FRED NAGLER: But we did. So our son bought us this house unseen. And we had the furniture shipped down. And it's just about like it is as you see it now. And he had put food in the refrigerator. So turning the key, everything was here.

[00:23:02.79]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Everything. That is amazing.

[00:23:03.45]

FRED NAGLER: And he's been a very devoted son, very devoted son. But—

[00:23:08.16]

EDITH NAGLER: He was here this morning. Last night, he had an office party at his home for 50, I guess.

[00:23:15.92]

FRED NAGLER: Well, yes. Yes, his—

[00:23:17.96]

EDITH NAGLER: Twenty-five were workers, and their wives.

[00:23:20.36]

FRED NAGLER: For his staff.

[00:23:21.47]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Staff.

[00:23:22.07]

EDITH NAGLER: But we didn't—don't need it.

[00:23:24.14]

FRED NAGLER: But we have been greatly blessed in that boy. I tell you. Greatly blessed.

[00:23:28.97]

EDITH NAGLER: He comes nearly every morning.

[00:23:30.02]

FRED NAGLER: Oh, yes. Greatly blessed. He's—he says we live in an ivory tower and that—

[00:23:36.98]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Well—

[00:23:37.97]

EDITH NAGLER: But he's still trying to educate us.

[00:23:39.59]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Yeah.

[00:23:40.64]

FRED NAGLER: It is true, isn't it? Yeah, art is. It's—art is. And yet, they tell you it's the most important thing when you go back into history. What do people go to Europe to see? They go to see the art, namely. I mean, the bulk of people do. [Clock chiming.] So, but anyway, there is opposition to the artist and their belief. But we have—Edith and I have always believed that we should be honest and work, as I say God is work, and just work for it. Work at it. And we do. We still work every day.

[00:24:20.88]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: You certainly do.

[00:24:21.54]

FRED NAGLER: Work every day. Still hoping to make the supreme piece.

[00:24:26.85]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Yeah.

[00:24:27.42]

FRED NAGLER: I think the—if anyone who would be interested, I think the St. John—the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York have two nice works of mine. But in the religious art, trying—besides trying to make them without the ornament, and stronger, and more rugged, I've tried to give new interest in the subject matter. And the one that saint—the Cathedral of St. John the Divine has—is called "At One With The Rope." They all have halos, excepting Judas, who is dangling a rope that makes a circle down above. And I meant by that that, if you don't behave yourself, you don't hurt anybody else mainly, you just—you

ruin yourself.

[00:25:11.45]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: That's right.

[00:25:12.72]

FRED NAGLER: And so I tried it—and what else did I make? And I made "Adoration Of The Man." I made—and I made Christ carrying himself. And I meant by that that good comes out of good. Christ was wholly self-developed. And he—Christ came out—came carrying his infant self. And I mean that he was—came out of his self. He was wholly self. And a church in Reading, Pennsylvania bought that out of a show of the Midtown. And they—he said, "Oh, I'm going to get a lot of servants out of that." So and I made many other pictures with different subjects, of which I can't remember now. Always trying to get something new.

[00:25:57.42]

EDITH NAGLER: And Fred's sportsman friend—

[00:25:59.37]

FRED NAGLER: What's that?

[00:26:00.21]

EDITH NAGLER: I say, your sportsman friend, the fisherman. He bought some of my paintings.

[00:26:05.16]

FRED NAGLER: Yes. He did. A nice painting. Edith painted beautiful portraits. She did.

[00:26:10.83]

EDITH NAGLER: But I [inaudible]—

[00:26:11.64]

FRED NAGLER: But she could paint more children. She could paint beautiful children. And I have many portraits around of children.

[00:26:17.43]

EDITH NAGLER: Children are very hard, because [inaudible] come and hang around your neck. [They laugh.]

[00:26:22.68]

FRED NAGLER: She studied with a good master. And she painted a portrait of Judge Brewster, who was—I think he was the uncle of Brewster, who headed Yale. And that Judge Brewster portrait is down in the courthouse in Boston, I believe.

[00:26:39.75]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Oh, my gosh.

[00:26:40.68]

EDITH NAGLER: And she painted many, many nice women portraits too. She could paint a good portrait. But she didn't paint holy portraits. I mean, she liked to paint landscapes, as you see, and other things.

[00:26:59.64]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: I think we can just about wrap it up with those philosophical statements.

[00:27:06.84]

FRED NAGLER: Well, okay. That's it, then.

[00:27:10.20]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Unless—

[00:27:10.77]

FRED NAGLER: There's nothing more.

[00:27:11.76]

LISA LAUGHLIN FERGUSON: Unless you can think of something to add.

[00:27:14.25]

FRED NAGLER: Oh—If I'm asked a question—I can say this, that the body is getting weaker, but the old mouth still works just the same. [They laugh.] That never runs out. So I could still teach if I was asked. That's for sure.

[00:27:33.28]

EDITH NAGLER: You know what you ought to do?

[00:27:34.49]

FRED NAGLER: What?

[00:27:34.95]

EDITH NAGLER: What our hired hand [inaudible] did. He chewed tobacco. And he didn't have to talk as much.

[00:27:40.65]

FRED NAGLER: No, he chewed tobacco and never spit. He had a tough stomach, which I didn't have. [They laugh.]

[END OF TRACK AAA_nagler79_5750_m]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]