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Oral history interview with Aris Koutroulis, 1976 Jan. 10

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Transcript

Interview

JC: JAMES CRAWFORD
AK: ARIS KOUTROULIS SIDE 1

JC: I'm interviewing Aris Koutroulis in my home in Detroit. Let us start back in your childhood, Aris. Were you born in Greece?

AK: In Piraeus.

JC: Where is Piraeus in Greece?

AK: It's next to Athens.

JC: It's close to Athens then?

AK: Well, it's sort of like adjacent to it.

JC: Ah, it's the port there?

AK: Right.

JC: When were you born?

AK: May 14, 1938.

JC: What were your parents doing at that time?

AK: I guess they were having a hard time. My father wasn't able to work or something in those days. He also had some problems at the time with his in-laws, my mother's brother and the whole family. My father was, I think, very intelligent and he threatened everybody. That's what happened.

JC: Well, Piraeus is a shipping port.

AK: Yes. But he wasn't in that kind of business or anything. He was just -- as a matter of fact, I remember a story that one of his jobs was selling ties on the street.

JC: That's pretty much when the Depression was going on in America and pretty much all over the world. AK; Right. Also World War II was beginning at least in Europe around 1940. But I think my father left Greece about six months before the war began there.

JC: Had both families lived in Piraeus for a long time?

AK: My mother's history goes back to... She was born in Smyrna which is in Asia Minor. It was a Greek village in a Turkish country. I guess that dated back to Alexander the Great when he conquered that area and all the Greeks remained at the time. Greece was occupied by the Turks for four hundred years or something. They were the last ones to be rid of that, you know, to be freed from that because they were finally thrown out of Turkey. That was in 1921 as a matter of fact.

JC: Was that when your mother came with her parents and brother?

AK: Well, her parents had died a long time ago. She had eleven brothers and I think only tow of them survived that exodus. So she and two brothers survived the exodus. And then I think they moved to Crete and then from Crete they moved to the mainland of Greece. My father was born on the island of Lesbos -- Mytilene. He left his home town when he was thirteen. He started making it on his own in Athens at the age of thirteen.

JC: In Athens? He went to the mainland and --?

AK: Yes. Even before he was twenty-one. I think he was born in 1906 or something -- I'm not sure. So he would

have been in his late teens or early twenties that he went to the mainland.

JC: Was it a super-protective thing between your mother and her brothers?

AK: Yes. In Greece in those days, and even now, women are always being protected by brothers or fathers or whatever.

JC: So there were your mother and her two brothers that survived?

AK: Right.

JC: In 1921 they came to Crete and then came to the mainland?

AK: Right.

JC: And eventually then your mother your father?

AK: Well -- yes. It was a weird thing. I think they way the story goes -- I don't know whether I should be saying all this --

JC: What's the story?

AK: Well, my father was a Bohemian in his early days. He was with all the intellectuals and stuff.

JC: In Athens?

AK: In Athens. In fact, I think he was even with the Communist Party early when that was the thing to do because they kind of showed hope for the lower classes and for the masses and all that sort of thing. But then I think he was quickly disillusioned. He was put in prison and I think in prison he was with Kazantzakis??? They became kind of friends there although Kazantzakis??? was much older than he was. I guess they didn't stay in prison very long. But he left the Party.

JC: That was in the middle twenties?

AK: It must have been in the twenties, yes; it was right after World War I. It was when he was very young in his late teens or early twenties. The way my father explains it, supposedly he had a fantastic love affair with some woman who apparently died from TB or something. It was a very romantic kind of thing. After she died I guess he was pretty down in the dumps or something. In Greece at that time I guess they would marry you as a proxy. And somebody kind of introduced... At about the same time my mother was about to be married to somebody else. And for some reason my mother left the marriage right at the altar sort of thing. I never did get it exactly straight. So I think under those circumstances they both kind of got together and got married by proxy somehow.

JC: But those events are not real clear? I mean whether she left the marriage because --

AK: No, they are not clear. It would be interesting sometime to actually... But I don't think she would even ever say. I think she just said that she left the marriage at that time.

JC: That marriage was -- when? -- at the end of the twenties?

AK: It must have been around the late twenties because I guess my brother is about six years older than I am and I think he was born in 1932 a year or so after they were married. So they must have been married in about 1930 or something.

JC: This intellectual milieu that your father was into, was that poets, musicians, writers?

AK: Yes, right.

JC: Do you know much about that?

AK: No, not very much. I really would like to go back and find out about that. I mean all I know is that because he never had an education because he left at the age of thirteen but I think he was the most uneducated educated person I have ever met.

JC: Well, the whole marriage thing for him did it domesticate him?

AK: No, not at all. I mean obviously it didn't. And also my mother's side of the family was extremely religious, an ignorant religious kind of a circle. My uncle used to sing in the church. The church and God were constantly

around.

JC: What religion was that?

AK: Greek Orthodox.

JC: Was your father religious in that way?

AK: No. My father was an atheist. So that certainly didn't go very well with my mother's brother -- his whole intellectual thing. So they always used to fight. In fact, since he couldn't find a job and had no way of supporting us, since he couldn't afford to support my mother and -- I think my brother was born at the time, -- my father left home so that my mother's brother, feeling the responsibility of her brother, supported them. The story is told that he used to sneak in at night to visit them and my uncle would come in and my father would hide under the bed or something so as not to jeopardize their support.

JC: Then your mother and brother lived with her brother. Was he employed? Was he married?

AK: Yes, he was married. And he had a business. I think he used to go around peddling men's accessories, socks and so on. He was quite successful in his business. He had a nice house. After my father left our home and for my whole time in Greece for fifteen years we lived in my uncle's store. It was adjacent to his house and he gave it to my mother for us to live in.

JC: Did he operate his business out of that store?

AK: No, it was just a storefront kind of thing as you would call it in America. That's where we lived. Most of my memories are connected with that house. Although we lived in other places before that, that's where I actually grew up after the war. It was from that house that I left for America.

JC: Your father left for America much earlier than you did. What were the circumstances of his leaving?

AK: He left because he couldn't find a job so he decided to get on a ship and join the merchant marine. A lot of people used to do that at the time. The only problem about that was that he did come to American and then of course World War I broke out and there was no communication at all during that time. As he said, it was like we were dead and he was dead, as there was no communication.

JC: So the family situation that you grew up in was something that happened actually between 1938 when you were born and then he left in 1938 or 1939 after you were born -- right?

AK: Yes. I have a sister in between my brother and me.

JC: There is your brother and your sister?

AK: Yes. There was my brother and my sister and myself. I was born in 1938 and my father left in 1939 or 1940.

JC: And your mother stayed on?

AK: Yes, she stayed on and saw us through the war which was very incredible that we survived.

JC: Actually then even your family left for America in -- what? in the late forties?

AK: No, we left in 1953.

JC: You left Greece in 1953?

AK: My brother came in the late forties. My father had to bring my brother first because he was old enough to be drafted in the Army so he brought him before he was eighteen. I think he left there in 1949. In fact, I think my brother was in the Korean war. I guess he came in 1948 because it was five years before we came and we came in 1953.

JC: So your father left in 1939 with the intent of bringing his family to America?

AK: Yes. That's a long time to fulfill your promise -- fifteen years. And he did. He did bring the family over. Although my mother and father never got along but still he brought us here. The kind of life we have now we owe to that commitment of his to bring us here.

JC: Did he correspond during that whole period?

AK: He corresponded after the war. The only memories I have of my father are through letters.

JC: You remember your mother reading the letters to you?

AK: By that time I was old enough to read. The thing about my childhood is that I really have to think hard because most of it was more of a blank for a long time.

JC: What was your mother like?

AK: My mother ___ is a peasant. I think she is a good woman and a very independent woman. But she has no use for any kind of intellectualizing or anything. Her thing is to survive. She is a very practical person. She and my father were totally opposite. Although my father, too, survived very well. His success in surviving was very real. At the same time he was a very intelligent man. He was a very real man in that sense.

JC: What kind of maternal or mother feelings were there? Were there distinct memories in childhood --?

AK: I think it was a very tight relationship and I think it became tight because of the war situation. I think one good thing that war does is it bring families very close together. I mean there is no other choice. All you have is the immediate family. There is no society. It's just the immediate contact within the four walls of your house. So if you are all afraid of something outside those four walls then you become very close. I think in that sense the family was very close because everybody tried to protect everybody else.

JC: Well, you were right into the war when you were two and so --?

AK: Yes. I kind of grew up from two to seven which are supposed to be the most important years.

JC: The formative years, yes. Do you remember that closeness within your uncle's family or your other --?

AK: Yes, there was always... We were close but there was always this -- There was always a feeling of resentment on their part or on our part. I had two cousins there that we always used to play with. But like I remember times that the -- because we were supported by the family pretty much. During the war there wasn't even much support from anybody. But still there seems to have been some kind of resentment on their part, at least on the part of the ___ and the cousins, because of the uncle's having to support us for all those years. But everybody has been paid off now so it's no big deal. But at that time you always felt kind of subordinate to this --

JC: Did they get luxuries that you didn't get? or was there a real sense of common sharing?

AK: Well -- yes. No, there was never a sense of common sharing. There were no luxuries in Greece then anyway. I mean they had a house and they had a bathroom and that sort of thing. They were comfortable. Where we always had to kind of struggle.

JC: Where did you go to the bathroom?

AK: It was an outhouse. They had a bathroom in the house.

JC: What impressions do you have of Athens of that time? I mean what was the war like? And what were just the other physical impressions of Athens itself growing up there?

AK: Well, I wouldn't know much about Athens. But I guess it was about the same as Piraeus. WE didn't travel in those days. It was devastating in a way. I mean I think I did blank a lot of stuff out for a long time because there were very horrible experiences.

JC: Was there bombing?

AK: Oh, constantly.

JC: Were there troops that came in?

AK: Well, Greece was occupied. Athens and Piraeus were the most occupied cities in the country. Occupation means constant shooting of people, constant patrolling of German uniformed soldiers with guns, constantly looking at gun barrels. I had nightmares for twenty-seven years and all those nightmares had to do with killing and being killed. I never remember any faces because being a child all I could see was up to the belt or the belly button and then a gun barrel. That was my vision of what grownups were about.

JC: A belt and a barrel.

AK: Yes, a belt and a barrel. And of course everything below that was people that had dropped, that had died, people that had died of starvation. So you could see those things. Or people that had been shot, machine-gunned, and would fall. As a kid I was able to see those things. I remember those things very vividly.

JC: What about other children? Obviously there were no street games or --?

AK: I don't remember any children in those days.

JC: There was total kind of isolation?

AK: Yes, there was total isolation within your home. Besides, there was the British and American bombs falling. You could have no lights at night. Sometimes in the middle of the night you would be awakened and you'd be carried out and thrown into a black hole, you know, this thing in the ground.

JC: Bomb shelter.

AK: Yes, I guess it was a bomb shelter. All I remember is it was a big black hole and it was very claustrophobic there.

JC: With lots of other people?

AK: No, because I think every household or every family had its black hole more or less in the backyard, I just remember its being somewhere near.

JC: But they weren't like in London where they had underground shelters where there would be hundreds of people? They were more or less family-built ones?

AK: They were more or less individual ones, yes. More like a family just dug something; or maybe it wasn't a hole that was dug; maybe it was some kind of basement -- I don't quite remember exactly what it was. But I think all those things damaged my growth for a long time. I don't consider myself having grown up until I was twenty-seven so no I'm only eight years old.

JC: There was no school going on?

AK: No, nothing.

JC: Was there any internal education? Your brother or your older sister?

AK: Well, all I remember... Well, you know, Greece had all this background of being occupied by the Turks and was only freshly freed from that. And I think we read a lot of things about that occupation more than we were confronted with the present occupation, you know, a few old stories and that sort of thing that survived Greece. I think that's probably what made people sustain themselves through those war years because they had somehow dealt with all that previously.

JC: Did your mother read that to you? Or your older brother and sister?

AK: No. I don't remember exactly who would read that. I remember gatherings around the stove at night. WE didn't have any heat or anything like that. And the stories were told and some of them were very horrible. Which didn't help matters any as far as --

JC: But it was like a minimum diet and a minimum amount of --

AK: There was no diet. In fact, at one time I almost died from starvation. My skin started to swell and peel and my belly was bloated. I think that's the time my mother decided to take whatever was left in the house from her dowry or whatever to take to the villages in Greece and try to sell it. I think she was gone for at least two weeks and we didn't even think she would come back. But anyway she did come back and she brought a bushel of hazelnuts and some oil. I think that's probably what saved my life. I remember it was a huge bushel and I wondered how she could carry all that stuff on her back. But she did bring those lifesaving things. That more or less pulled me through and pulled the rest of the family through for a while. I remember many nights our dinner would be just five olives and tea and a few crumbs of maybe bread or something. I remember how vividly those moments stayed in your mind because they were so delicious and you savored every olive and you'd pick every crumb. I remember my mother crying watching us going to bed still hungry. That went on for a long time.

JC: It went on until 1944?

AK: It went on until 1945?

JC: And you were seven then. So it was like year in and year out that that went on.

AK: Yes, it was a daily occurrence. Other things I remember are standing in soup lines that they had and trying to get some soup. But I don't believe food was the most important thing. At one time the house we lived in faced

a park which the Germans used to use as an execution ground. I guess the most weird thing I remember was looking out the window and seeing maybe five or seven or maybe ten Greeks being marched and stood against this wall and being shot down. And later on the wives would go and pick them up in a cart and I would see them passing under the window with all the blood and their legs sticking out of the cart. I think the worst problem I had with my life was the fact that at that early age I was easily confused about the whole problem of good and evil. It was very confusing because although I think I would identify with the dead man, but at the same time I also wanted to identify with the living and the living was the guy who had killed the other guy. So the whole contradiction screwed me up for a long time.

JC: So then you were thrust into some early sense of what life and what death was about --

AK: Well, more than that, life and death wasn't so bad because we were always faced with that even after the war in Greece. I had seen so may dead people. I can't even count all the relatives that kept dying. But I think the whole idea about the values of who has a right to kill and who gets killed, the whole value thing about good and evil was the worst part of it.

JC: Then from the point of view that, you know, and this whole thing of ethics and values that you were concerned with life and death and good an devil, what was your sense beyond that? I mean obviously during that time there was no sense of community life, people weren't meeting in the square or walking on the streets, there was no music -- or was there music?

AK: No, nothing of that sort. I think what it really did -- and I can only speak for myself -- as a kind of made me get into myself, into my own fantasies, you know, into my own little world. For the longest time I was the most frightened child that there could possibly be. Even at the age of sixteen or seventeen I was still afraid to go into a dark room. I could never stand to be alone anywhere.

JC: Well, when you say it made you fantasize or get into yourself, and if you did then with people and in the context of people, how did you fantasize about it?

AK: Well, I'm not quite sure at that age. As I said, I did blank out a lot of things during that exact period except the obviously horrible things that we were presented with. But the effects of that came out afterward in my formative years from seven to fifteen or whatever. It had a lot to do with my being totally a very withdrawn kind of child, very withdrawn from people. I couldn't play with people too much, with kids. And when a sexual kind of fantasy became aware I would have a lot of sexual fantasies to escape from the horrors of having to confront this good and evil sort of thing.

JC: What about other kinds of creative fantasies?

AK: Well, I think the only thing that I was able to do was I started to draw at a very early age. Drawing was my shelter in my waking hours. That was one thing that somehow I loved to do -- I don't know how or why -- I was never encouraged by anybody but somehow there was something I could really do.

JC: How did you even have the materials to draw?

AK: That was after the war. It wasn't during the war. I was probably eight or something when that started, when I had a pencil in my hand. I do remember very, very vividly my first drawing lesson. There was this great friend of my mother's. She wasn't an artist or anything, I don't think I even knew what the word meant at the time. I was fooling around with a pencil one night. I was trying to make a profile of a face. She was the first one to make me aware of what a face consisted of, you know, what a profile consisted of. I sort of remember exactly at that time becoming aware of the outline of the profile of a face. Instead of doing this sort of thing, scribbling kind of thing, I started to be aware of the nose and the mouth. That was the first awakening moment that you could actually draw something that you see. From that time on even in school or anywhere the only thing I was good at -- I used to fail in everything: math and Greek and old Greek, French, whatever, you name it -- the only thing that I could really do well was in art and in _____ which had to do with drawing flowers. I remember as a kid there used to be a line of kinds outside my house waiting for me to draw the flowers for biology class.

JC: Was that in Greece?

AK: That was in Greece.

JC: So after the war then school did start?

AK: Yes. Certainly.

JC: What happened? -- I mean what kind of sense or flavor --?

AK: I think there might have been school during Greece but I just don't remember it. I think maybe this soup line

had to do with some kind of -- maybe not -- I don't quite remember. All I remember is going to school like after the war. My sister keeps telling me that I was more like a real schizophrenic when I was a kid. She said I used to get into those trances of no movement.

JC: Catatonic state?

AK: Catatonic state, that's right. I really don't remember exactly what went on except some very obvious things. I'd keep waking up in a state of fright or something.

JC: Out of sleep and then taking you to shelter?

AK: Yes. The waking hours would be kind of horrible because the bombs would fall sometimes without warning or with very little warning. Once my brother and I were sleeping in the same room. My brother had just woke up and was about to say his prayers or something. A bomb fell and shattered the whole glass right in from of his feet. My mother rushed into the room and grabbed him. She only had time to take him and put him under the kitchen table or something. And those few moments that it took her to come back and take me from the bed where I was screaming and yelling, it was like an eternity. I remember this vividly. But anyway she did come back and picked me up and put me under this table. We stayed there waiting for the bombs to stop falling. But the bombs were just falling all over the place.

JC: Was she religious? I mean --

AK: Yes.

JC: And your brother obviously from that had some sense of religion?

AK: We were. We all were. I always had doubts about religion but there was no way you could possibly voice those doubts. You'd get the stick if you said anything at all. I practically grew up in the church. I was an altar boy and constantly went to Sunday school and was constantly fed into all this.

JC: Was that even during the war? Or did it come along after the war?

AK: I think that came after the war.

JC: Do you remember the end of the war? Was there any sense of --?

AK: As I've said, I very rarely remember anything during those first five or seven years except I do remember the beginning of the war when I was two: I still remember that. That consisted of bells ringing from the church and rumors that the Greeks had said, "We will not surrender" and they beat the Italians. But then the Germans came in. Again, the Greeks said, "We will not surrender," but they got beaten by the Germans. That was the beginning of the Occupation. I remember those awful things that happened in between -- you know, the periods of starvation and the moments of horror and all that sort of thing, the things that you would see on the streets. And the very, very close calls that you would get. Like for instance, I think we were in Piraeus one time -- although my mother insists that I was not with her -- yet I remember this incident so vividly that either I must have been with her or I was told about it. You know, sometimes when you're a kid fantasies and stories that you're told and reality sort of mix together and you're not quite sure. But I remember that so well because we were in Piraeus and the sirens came on in the town and my mother grabbed me and my sister by the hand intending to head for the church for shelter. For some reason or other my mother changed her mind and turned around and went somewhere else for shelter. As she turned around the church behind us was totally bombed. There were thousand of people in there and it was totally destroyed. And talking about churches, another most weird experience happened once when we attended a mass funeral for a lot of people that had died. This was held at a church that was closer to the house of some of our relatives. Greece was full of funerals then. There was a crowd in church, the candles were lit and sad songs were being sung. In the meantime nobody knew that the Germans had set up machine guns on the roof of a building across the street from the church. That was supposed to have been against the law or something. -- I don't know for what reason. As the procession was coming out of the church the machine guns were fired killing everybody that was coming out of the church. Fortunately, we were among the last ones coming out and we remained in the church. I remember that very well. That was a horrible thing to kill all those innocent people while they were attending the funeral of loved ones that the Germans had killed. But apparently they didn't want that sort of thing to happen or something.

JC: The whole cultural thing at funerals then was probably the only time when people got together during the war?

AK: Yes, right. That was incredible, I guess maybe my doubts about God and the church must have really been taken care of in those days. I just could not understand what was happening, how something like that could happen and then somebody tells you to pray to your God or whatever.

JC: How did you come out of the war? I mean how did it change? What were the changes like?

AK: You mean with me?

JC: Yes.

AK: You mean mentally? physically?

JC: I mean more environmentally. When you came out of the war of course people came together. They met in homes and on the streets and --

AK: It was still a very poor life but it was relatively more or less a happy time -- well, not right after the war because then there was the Communist revolution. Of course that wasn't for another three or four years. That was worse than the war. The were trying to draft people. My brother was only sixteen at the time but they almost grabbed him. The revolution was so bad I used to watch people hanging by the lampposts on the streets. It was incredible. I still remember their kappa kappa epsilon which were the initials for the Communist Party. I mean that was a horrible thing as well.

JC: That was a civil war?

AK: That was a civil war, right. That's right, it wasn't a revolution: it was a civil war. And that probably was even more horrifying because Greeks were killing Reeks. It wasn't like Occupied Greece being dominated by a German army or something. It was even worse. And that went on for a while. So all I had actually was maybe about five years between the ages of maybe ten or eleven to fifteen that it was relatively peaceful. Some of my fondest memories may be of having a togetherness with friends and family going on picnics and that sort of thing once in a while.

JC: Who were your friends then? I mean you were old enough then --

AK: No, not I; I mean family friends. This was before television in Greece. People used to sit outside in the streets at night, all the neighbors would gather together and the kids would play games and the neighbors would play games with the kids. And about once or twice a year they'd have those weird rituals of jumping on the fires and that sort of thing that killed a few people around them.

JC: From that period then you can remember Greek dances and Greek songs and --?

AK: Not very much. You have to understand that my family although they were Greeks they were not real Greeks. I mean they were Greeks but the language that was spoken in my home was Turkish, not Greek. You see, the Turks used to cut the tongues of the parents so they wouldn't teach the children Greek so they had to speak turkish and most of that generation was a Turkish generation in a way. I mean in a way they were Greek in that they had sustained their religion and whatever, but the language was Turkish. I don't speak any Turkish. My mother would never teach me Turkish because they hated the Turks, but their language was Turkish. I would meet with my aunts and they would all speak Turkish. Another weird thing about my childhood was being in places where I didn't understand what people were talking about. They all spoke Turkish. So the culture was a little different than the typical Athenian-born or Piraeus-born. So those dances -- although there were some occasions -- were not really very much part of our culture it seems to me. JC; Was that culture ostracized from the Greek --?

AK: I'm not sure. I don't really think so because the Greeks knew they were in that situation. It's just that in the mainland they were liberated a little bit earlier so they were able to get back to their thin a little faster. The other set of I guess you might call it ghetto was the Armenians. There was also an Armenian kind of ghetto there because the Armenians, too, had suffered a lot from the Turks. I mean they didn't have any country. But they were allowed to come into Greece and they settled in Greece. My father was a real Greek in a way. My mother is Greek and yet she's a mixture of a Turkish culture certainly in language, certainly in some of the food, certainly is some of the mores I guess whatever the culture gives. And this was not because they wanted it but it was certainly pressed upon them.

JC: Did you continue to draw after you --?

AK: All the time. All the time.

JC: What did you draw? How did you see --?

AK: I think the happiest moments I remember were when we were staying at my uncle's house. They had the luxury of an electric heater, a space heater that points at your head and it's warm. After dinner the grownups would be talking and I would be drawing. One of my cousins was also quite good at drawing although he never did anything with it. He would be drawing with me. I continued to draw. I used to copy mostly from magazines or

whatever I could find. At this time I used to send drawings to my father and from his letters and cards I knew that he understood and he expected... whereas my mother and uncles always tried to discourage my drawing because there was no money in it.

JC: So you had encouragement then? The encouragement was coming from you father?

AK: the encouragement was coming from my father. And there was the threat to my mother to allow me to draw although actually I don't think he threatened my mother. As a matter of fact, he threatened my mother to the point that I even started playing musical instruments. Right after the war I think, after the civil war, when I was about eleven I started playing the piccolo or the flute in the city band in Piraeus. I was the shortest and youngest of them all. I was right behind the conductor as we were marching down this little thing and then the band would file -- and I was in front. But music and art were very, very closely tied with me. They grew with me up to now.

JC: But how did you learn?

AK: I learned through him.

JC: Through this conductor?

AK: Yes. But then I had to stop that because of my heart; I had a heart problem. So I picked up the guitar. So he taught me that too; he gave me private lessons.

JC: Was he a central person then at that time in helping you express yourself?

AK: Yes, I guess so. He was kind of... I barely remember him. But I think the fact that I could escape also into that world was a tremendous help.

JC: Then it wasn't soon before you left for America? Do you remember any of the context of that move?

AK: Yes, I remember the context of the move. But still, you see, we were brought up very strictly. And then we had all those insane relatives' problems. The war kind of made a few people insane. So I had years of that because I would always go and visit nut houses and stuff like that.

JC: You mean you would visit relatives?

AK: Well, one of my cousins was taken from Greece and put in a concentration camp when he was eighteen. I think the concentration camp was just liberated when he was about to be put in one of those ovens. So when he came back he wasn't quite right mentally. He tried to kill his mother. This is interesting -- she was lighting the fire in the fireplace and he came up with a knife. I guess he must have thought the Germans were going to put him in the oven or something. So they locked him up. As far as I know he's still there. One time after he came back from the concentration camp he took me out to a movie. He used to laugh all the time. I was still a kid. I asked him, "Why are you laughing?" I guess he just didn't know why he was laughing. I remember he used to play the radio for the static only, not for the music. That was his music. And then I had another cousin, a female cousin, who was given electrical shocks. I witnessed those. In those days parents used to take their kids everywhere and I saw those things.

JC: This was for treatment?

AK: Yes, it was treatment in a hospital. I was there because I couldn't be left alone or something. It was aa horrifying thing to watch a girl I used to like. I remember she was naked and she was beautiful and she was being given this shock treatment. It was horrible. But, you know, that kind of thing... And then being on the street we used to be beaten a lot for everything that we would do. I think at the time I did develop -- not a hatred for my mother -- but a tremendous fear. And obviously fear always turns into aggression. She used to beat my sister more than she beat me. But I used to identify with my sister because we were very close. I used to be seized by the desire to get up in the middle of the night and really hurt her, kill her, for that matter I don't know. And then of course I was totally seized by the guilt of that as well. And, talking about the good and evil thing, this really bothered me for the longest time. And the whole fear of that -- that you were actually going to hurt somebody before they hurt you or whatever.

JC: Whether it was right or wrong?

AK: Whether it was right or wrong?

JC: House of guilt?

AK: Absolutely. I had a nervous breakdown. You will remember I was talking about this. A long time ago when I was at Cranbrook all this stuff came out. I mean it was just an incredible amount of catharsis of dying actually

and being reborn again somehow. It was incredible. It lasted a long time. Then in 1953 my father finally got the money together, borrowed it or whatever, and brought us to America. I remember leaving on the ship and thinking that I would never return to Greece. I didn't want to return. Even now I haven't been back for twenty years. Now I want to go back but I always have this ultimate little fear in the back of my soul what is it I'd go back to.

JC: So there was a good feeling. Your brother was there so you were leaving with your sister and your mother. And it was a good feeling?

AK: Yes. I was going to meet my father. I used to ask my mother "how my father could walk into a room, he must be so tall that he couldn't get under the door." And he was even shorter than I was. It was the shock of my life when I came off the boat and there was this little man. But he was a big man. Yes, I was very excited. But life here wasn't happy when I came here. But nevertheless we did come here and that gave me a chance to do something with my life.

JC: You came then to the South? Was that where the boat came?

AK: No. The boat landed in New York.

JC: Your, father met you there?

AK: Yes, he met us there. But I was still so frightened of everything. I was very frightened of him and of practically everybody.

JC: When did you go to New Orleans? Had he just come up to meet you?

AK: We stayed in New York for just a week. He took me to Radio City and to the Natural Museum of Science and he took me to the places that people take children visiting in New York for the first time. I saw all this stuff for the firs time. It was an amazing kind of thing to watch. Then we took the train to New Orleans and settled there for ten years I guess.

JC: How did you deal with a new language and a new culture? I mean you said it wasn't easy.

AK: Well, I didn't really deal with it. Well, I guess I dealt with it but I think things just happened. I don't really remember. Certainly I couldn't speak the language. I was very well accepted in the first school I went to. It was a junior high school. I was accepted by the kids and the teachers. I was like their mascot.

JC: Did they put you into junior high school right away without your even speaking English?

AK: Right away, yes. I already had a lot of grades in Greece, you know. I was supposedly a little educated. I got into the ninth grade. I was sixteen which is pretty old for a ninth grade. And I don't even remember how I passed courses. I think they passed me instead of my passing the courses. The kind of liked my looks or something. I was kind of cute when I was a kid. The teachers took a great deal of interest in me. An English teacher used to come early every morning at seven o'clock. She told me to come at seven before school started and she would take me around and point out things to me and tell me what they were and sort of try to teach me the language. Which was really great. And of course the friends -- the kids -- would always protect me. I was sort of like someone to protect or something. I had real good friends. They were all low class people but they were real good friends, they were very loyal friends. I mean it was not a... But somehow something had gotten indented in me, I think, to really do something because I would never... Actually I had a very terrific life in New Orleans. I mixed with every class you could possible imagine, street gangs and the rest. My education as aa kid -- and for some reason or there I used to really think of that as an education. Although I had serious fights with my father about it. But somehow I knew what I was going to do and what I was going through then was an education. Like I spend five years in bars. I hated bars anyway but I always felt that I was really learning about the American culture. I would never mix with Greeks. I wouldn't even have anything to do with them when they came here. I mean maybe that had something to do with being Greek and I just wanted to forget about the whole thing.

JC: You didn't even live in a greek sub-culture then?

AK: Not at all. My mother said "we'll try" but my father didn't want to have much to do with the Greeks anyway, I don't think. He didn't care about the church so it wasn't like we were going into a Greek community and getting into the church. We did go a little bit at first but then I left very quickly and got into my own way of life. I was very young for that. I actually left my house in a way too because I would hardly ever be at home. My father was gone traveling all the time. He would be home maybe only one day a mont or a couple of days every couple of months or something.

JC: What do you mean traveling? What was he doing traveling? What was he doing?

AK: He was chief engineer with United Fruit Company so they were traveling all over the world. He was still traveling. The reason we went to New Orleans to live was it was a big seaport and he would be stationed there when the boat would finally come at least a couple of times every couple of months or something so he could see us.

JC: But he was then ever since he left Greece involved with --?

AK: Yes. He promoted himself from nothing to chief engineer without schooling or anything. He took the exams. He did pretty well for himself toward the end. But then he died.

JC: Did you continue to draw? I mean was this something that was part of the life there?

AK: Yes, that was just part of my thing. I would never do anything... You see the thing that really... When I was still in Greece I wrote my father a letter one time, I think I was eleven or twelve, I sent him some drawings and I told him that I wanted to become an artist. I didn't even know what an artist was but I had heard about them. And he wrote me a letter which really did screw me up for a long time. My father was very romantic -- in those days everybody was I guess -- and in his romantic way he wrote, "Son, there are only two ways for an artist. He will either die in glory and fame and riches or he will die in the gutter." So it seems I turned out in the gutter. I think I made up my mind then that I was not about to die in the gutter. I think that was the tremendous driving force throughout all the influences that I went through. I mean I could have become a gang leader or gone into dope or anything you can think of because I mixed with all those crowds. But the point was that basically underneath there was this thing that was driving me.

JC: Yes, but let's get a little bit at that. I mean was that the fact that you enjoyed even as a child and it was the recognition that from your father? Or your own determination?

AK: Well, you see, it was the only thing... The things that I did were like a mystery to a lot of people. Because in Greece kids didn't draw like they do here now. They didn't have the freedom to do this and that. It wasn't like everybody draws now, every kid does his thing. There were no crayons then, nothing like that. So what I did was a mystery. And it was something that people respected regardless of whether they liked it or not. There was an aura about it. There was a magic about it that they called talent. I'm not even sure if there is such a thing.

JC: But did they recognize it? Of course

AK: They recognized the quality of it. They recognized the fact that you were able to do it, and that I was able to do it well. And being able to do this well I had a certain status I guess among my peers. Even though they wouldn't accept me at games -- football and stuff like that because I was too short -- they used to call me "nanos" which means midget. I didn't understand it. Most Greeks are short. But anyway my ace in the hole was my art.

JC: And did that give you confidence?

AK: That gave me confidence about that particular thing, not about anything else. I was a total mess about everything else. But that thing sustained and made my life because that was a thread that was never broken.

JC: Yes. And it was reinforced?

AK: And then it was reinforced.

JC: It was reinforced not within the family but generally within --

AK: Well, even within the family. I mean they would acknowledge the fact but they would say, "Well, that's nice but what are you going to do with it?" that sort of thing. But my father understood because he was the most read man I have ever know. He read everything under the sun. He knew about art, about artists, about philosophy, about poetry, just name it he had read it and could talk about it. He discussed, he was constantly talking. My father was constantly talking and he never talked about the weather.

JC: Well, when you were in New Orleans and he would come in, infrequently as he did, he played a more important role. You said you had a lot of fights with him.

AK: Well, the fights, unfortunately, were family fights. He never got along with my mother. You see, the thing is that my father must have created a lot of fantasies on the sea for fifteen years about his kids. When we came here he thought we were still kids and that he could mold us. But we were already molded, we were already sixteen, seventeen. My brother was thrown out of the house because my father couldn't deal with him either. I mean it was nothing like he could say I'm going to educate my child from age one because our characters had already been formed. But my father couldn't understand that. We had a hard time trying to make him understand that we were not babies any more, that we were already grown, that he had lost his chance if that's

what he wanted to do. But he couldn't understand that. And yet his constant conversations, which lasted until four or five o'clock in the morning, were about life, about philosophy, about music, trying to introduce us to -- which was great, too -- because for the first time in my life I experienced this feeling about music, hearing really great music. I had never heard classical music or opera before. He was the person who introduced me to all that sort of thing. I think he did an excellent job, although I'm sure he died thinking that maybe he didn't. My sister was always his favorite and of course since she never did the things he wanted her to do like becoming a concert pianist or whatever... And I was always being rejected by him. His attention was always directed to the girls as in the Greek tradition. They always feel that a man can take care of himself but women need to be protected. Maybe he was right -- I don't know. Maybe not any more. But in those days certainly it was true. But the fact is I always wanted to be accepted by my father because I was the one who was doing what he really wanted me to do. And I think that was a tremendous strain on me. And I rebelled and did all this stuff. But nevertheless everything that he said, regardless of whether or not I accepted it at the time and that was it.

JC: And it started with the letters after the war?

AK: Yes, it started with the letters and then he really put his mark. There is no doubt about it. I was a very sensitive child and I'm still a sensitive person and maybe that's my problem. My sister and my brother lacked that kind of sensitivity which was to their benefit because I think when you are sensitive, you are sensitive to good as well as bad -- right? So my struggles and problems and sufferings through out my life have been because of that delicate sensitivity of having accepted all this stuff, having absorbed good and evil, having absorbed greatness, and having absorbed even the whole cancer of society maybe, New Orleans lower class society

JC: Did you live out some of the fantasies then? I mean was there a time in your life when you socialized? I mean that you were trying to go out and grow up kind of, you know, street gangs, playing --?

AK: I would never do anything myself. I mean the friends that I had were into the situation but I would always be an observer. I always remember myself even as a kid just like watching the Germans shooting those other guys -- I was always being some guy in the back watching. Like I never got into a fight although my friends were always in fights. I would just stand in the middle of it and watch the fight. There was always blood splattering around you and all those punches going around. But I was always observing, observing, constantly observing.

JC: You were very objective then?

AK: Very objective. Even in bars. I hated to drink beer. The worst thing I could ever think of was going to a bar and drink beer. That's what those guys used to do. But I would go and sip on one beer and just go to kind of watch them. I wasn't really consciously saying: I'm here to watch. But nevertheless that's what I was doing. I was there to watch. I was just an observer. I kept observing those things, I kept absorbing all those thing. There is no sociological state that I can't get myself into. I can adapt myself from the lowest to the highest society as far as I am concerned.

JC: At that point you were in ninth grade, you started in high school, and you were older that the other people in high school, so you could go places, you could move through society a little bit more --

AK: Well, not really because I didn't have the knowledge. I lacked the knowledge and, in a way, I lacked the courage too. I mean I always had to have --

JC: You sort of went where things would take you in your milieu?

AK: Yes. They would just take me out and I would never reject that and yet I would never go out myself and look for it. I would just fall into this.

JC: Okay. Well, let's talk about that. Now these are the years that you are in high school and eventually you get into college. Let's talk about how you did that, how you get through those four years, what might have happened in some depth, and how it led -- if it led at all -- to your going to college.

AK: Well, yes, I think college -- END OF SIDE 1 SIDE 2

AK: Let's see, we were talking about going to college or something. I think I was trying to say that the other thing that my father kind of indented into my mind... Well, he had a couple of interesting things that he used to say a lot. One was about constantly talking to people, to anyone that wanted to listen. He always had a little gathering around him talking. He used to say that the only way that any kind of improvement is ever going to happen in the world is if you can reach five people and each of those persons can reach five people and with that kind of multiplication thing perhaps you can get some kind of real message across. The other thing is that he talked about college. Of course college in those days wasn't as it is today. In his day it was an impossibility. In Greece it was practically impossible to get into college. Actually it was ridiculous. So going to university was a

big deal. He would say that he would rather spend five years in prison and the rest of his life free, than five years free and the rest of your life in prison meaning that if you go to college it's going to be hard and be in prison more or less, but it would free you for the rest of your life. I mean that was an attitude that they had in those days. I don't know if that's -- I'm sure it's not true; it doesn't seem to apply any more. But anyway so I really was very determined psychologically and subconsciously, everything, to go to college. I think I must have made up my mind very early about what I wanted to do because it was a one-track mind all the way no matter what situation I would find myself in, no matter what bad company, good company -- well, I never considered them to be bad, they were all great guys -- my father considered them to be bad "those communists" he used to call them. We used to fight about them. But no person would influence me although the did try. Like when I was playing in this rock and roll band they would say to me, "Why go to college? You can be with us and we can just play around the country." I always said, "No, I've got to go back to college." I used to kind of commune, my communion time began then.

JC: So your father put in your mind this thing about going to college? And the other thing would be that he also reinforced the thing in your mind that you could be an artist?

AK: Yes. All those things had already been established I think somehow, somewhere.

JC: In your own mind it was established?

AK: In my own mind, yes. Also there was the fact that I was always curious to find out about things. I really wanted to find out about things. So college was a very natural thing for me to go into after I kind of went through four or five years of hanging around and going out in the streets and all that sort of thing.

JC: Did that all happen right after you started to go --?

AK: Yes, it started practically in the ninth grade.

JC: It started right when you got --?

AK: Just about. Because, you see, I experienced something there that I had never experienced before. Which was a certain type of freedom. It was freedom from family restriction. Once we came to the United States my father took over and my mother became like a lamb. She was not that aggressive, possessive -- well, she was never really possessive -- but that aggressive woman who would dominate a situation and restrict you in this and that, and hit you or whatever if you didn't listen.

JC: She didn't discipline?

AK: No, there was absolutely no discipline once we came to the United States. We became totally subservient to my father.

JC: He was the authority?

AK: That's right. And although she really didn't want to my father was such a strong person that nobody could help it, I mean when he walked into a room it was like a hurricane was coming through.

JC: Well, when you started then in school and the sort of street life and friends, how did that happen? Was there any identity in street groups that you were with? And did that lead directly into your becoming a drummer? Was it the same group?

AK: I was playing the piano.

JC: Oh. Drumming on the piano?

AK: No. Like I said, music and art did continue underlying those things. I used to paint landscapes. Even at the age of seventeen or eighteen I was doing things that are considered super-realist more or less. I used to blow up things on the screen and really copy them extremely well and very nicely with oil paint and all that sort of thing. I continued that because I really loved to do it. And I continued the music.

JC: But you changed instruments?

AK: Yes, I changed instruments. When I left Greece one of my cousins gave me a really nice guitar. But just before I got on the boat I didn't want to take it with me. Maybe it was fear or whatever that I might not be good enough or whatever the hell the reason because I was pretty good at it. Before I left I gave it to the porter to give to his children. It was a beautiful guitar. If my cousin ever found out he would never forgive me for doing that. But somehow I just wanted to totally dissociate myself from where I was coming from. It was just like a total break. In the meantime my sister was going to a Catholic school and was taking piano lessons there. My

father bought a piano for her. When we went to the piano store or music store to look at pianos I had never seen a piano before. My sister was trying this piano and that piano and playing chopsticks or whatever you do when you first start playing. While my father and sister and the salesman would be somewhere on the other side of this huge room where there were all these pianos and organs and so on, I remember I would wander around on the other side of the room. I approached a piano and got my hands on it. Of course I knew music, I mean I had played music but I had never seen a piano before. All of a sudden my hands sort of fell in the right places and I started to kind of play this piano. My father heard it from the other side of the store. He walked all the way over to where I was and said, "My God, what am I doing?" From that time on he wanted to give me the work, he wanted to give me everything. He started giving me private tutors in piano and all this kind of stuff. That was kind of interesting because he realized at that time that I had what he was looking for or something.

JC: That was a couple of years after you came to New Orleans?

AK: Yes, that was at least two years after I came. I was maybe about seventeen or something.

JC: In other words, that period when he was encouraging your sister --?

AK: Yes. That was the period when he still wasn't quite sure... I think he knew but I think he also knew that since he didn't have much time to ____ his influence on his children he really concentrated on Kathy because Kathy was a girl and she had to take care of herself, she had to really be protected. I mean I don't think it was his fault, I don't think he was trying to reject but I think when he realized the kind of talent I possessed or the sensitivity about music and art and all that sort of thing, he really began to become interested in my well-being. So he got me a private piano teacher and I started playing the piano. In the meantime I continued playing in the school band the piccolo, you know, the flute. And through that I had a great time. I remember marching in the Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Those were wonderful times for me, in a way, although it seemed like I was asleep all the time. But at the same time somehow through your sleep you did get a lot of things that come into you.

JC: But they were free of all the oppression of the war and all the --

AK: Absolutely. It was just like a garden opened up somehow. I was just taking everything in from the worst to the best. I was just getting into a situation where it was heaven for me. It was the first time I ever had friends; and they were great people even though the were gang people or whatever. They weren't thieves or anything like that. They were the New Orleans gangs. They were really great people.

JC: You were accepted more or less.

AK: I was accepted by them and protected by them. Which was great.

JC: In the school?

AK: Yes. When I was about eighteen or nineteen a woman who worked in a bar picked me up and asked me to go this bar where she worked. I went there and she spent the whole time with me even though she was working there. The owner didn't like that so they took me out and were beating me up afterward. I called up my friends for protection. And, my God, they were so upset they were getting ready to go up and burn the place down. They were really very upset and they waited out for the guy to beat him up. I mean I stopped it all. I told them not to do anything. But it was an interesting experience that they really felt so protective of me and so close to me. They were all Spanish though they were born in New Orleans. So maybe they felt some kind of what's the word?

JC: They were part of an ethnic group.

AK: Yes. An ethnic group more or less I guess. And there was this one guy - Leslie ____ was his name. And his brother who was much older than we were; it was a very close, tight family and the brothers always protected each other. So when I came in as a real good friend of this brother I was part of that whole group. Leslie played the saxophone. I met him in the band in the ninth grade actually. That's how we became friends. He also liked to draw. And he was awful in school. He was older than I was and he was still in the ninth grade. He was the oldest person out there. But I liked him a lot so we bummed around a lot. We used to go out painting. And then he formed this band which I joined. We played all over New Orleans, we played in the bayous. It was a good experience for me because we were traveling to all those little villages where I had never been before and I heard _____ that I had never heard before.

JC: Well, what was the South like? I mean did it have any impression on you? It was sort of like the Garden of Eden in some ways.

AK: I liked New Orleans a lot. I don't even consider Louisiana as part of the South in that sense -- especially New Orleans. It's not like the Mississippi redneck or the Alabama redneck kind of the South.

JC: It's a central culture.

AK: Yes. It's like New York. There are so many ethnic groups and there is so much intermixing. Even with blacks in some way. Although when I first went there I did have some very strange experiences about the black situation. I couldn't understand it. I felt very close to the blacks. I had just come back from a depression kind of situation and here I am now in a situation where I would go into a bar and I would sit behind this piece of wood. I would be sitting next to this black woman and people would be looking at me strangely. She would say "Are you sure you want to sit here?" I would say, "Why not? What's the big deal?" I couldn't read or understand English so I couldn't read what that piece of wood meant which had to be carried in front of those poor people. So I didn't quite understand it. Finally I was told that the blacks sit behind this piece of wood and I was supposed to sit in front of it. Well, those kinds of things I couldn't understand. I did begin to feel a little resentment about the South that was presented in that way. But I don't really remember being in contact with any kind of racial --

JC: What about the music, you know, the jazz?

AK: You see, that's another thing. We played at events where we alternated with black bands and we loved them. There was this well-known band at the time. They were called the Frogmen. They acted like frogs. They would play a half hour and then we would play next for a half hour. He was from the Moulin Rouge in Algeria. Of course we were from New Orleans. I mean I felt very close to black people. So did the friends that I had. There was really no big deal about it. And as I progressed and traveled through the United States and I bummed around with blacks for two years during my Tamarind career, I realized what the situation really was. But still those times were not times to be disturbed by any of that in a way. I just got into a more or less free situation. Fortunately, my father wasn't there all the time to be in control. Thank God for that; that would have been another disaster. My mother couldn't even say anything. So I was out till all hours of the night. I was out on my own. Then I left for college.

JC: Now how did you get into college?

AK: That's a good question. I got into college on a scholarship as well. That was funny. It was a music scholarship. That was the funny thing. The high school band gave a concert one time and I was playing the piccolo. The bandmaster from L.S.A. -- Louisiana State University -- was present. I was playing this little solo. He came up and asked my band leader if I would like to go to L.S.U. and if so he would give me a scholarship to go there and play in his band as a by-product of going to school there. It was really funny.

JC: Sort of like being drafted like a football player.

AK: Yes, in a way. But, you know, it wasn't that I was that great. I never really did master any of those instruments. But, you know, I was good enough, competent enough.

JC: Did you improvise the things?

AK: Some. But I guess I improvised more with the piano. This was still in the rock and roll era and "bang, bang, bang, bang" was very easy for me to do. You know the rock and roll piano is fairly easy to play if you know the chords and if you have an ear for improvising.

JC: Rhythm.

AK: Rhythm, yes. I was very well-equipped for that. I really had wonderful years of my life during those three years of playing. You were popular, the girls would fall all over you; I was just in heaven. I would get into trouble because I never disallowed myself experiences in one way or another. I would always get into situations knowing very well that there were risks involved. But then I never really think of the risks maybe because I had been through so much that I thought: well, if I got through so much, you know, who cares. Plus the fact that I think I've always had a guilt complex for having survived during that whole time when a lot of people didn't. But, as I say, somehow I've always had those protectors. I guess most of my life I've been sheltered by people who more or less took over the peripheral things so that somehow I could grow. It's kind of an incredible thing.

JC: Do you have then a sense of fate?

AK: Absolutely. Absolutely. I really don't like to talk about that too much because I also have a sense of not surviving for very long. So I really don't like that. I begin not to like that more. I used to think it was kind of romantic, but not any more. But at the same time I think that fate -- the thing is to live as much as you can. God, you can accumulate a hell of a lot of years in a short amount of time.

JC: I mean that period in America -- the late fifties -- was really a heavy period; it was sort of a heavy, gray period. It was sleeping period. Things were going on. On the horizon things were sort of gray. Television finally got into everyone's homes.

AK: Yes. Actually I learned a lot of language from television.

JC: Did you have one in your own home?

AK: Yes, we had a little Motorola, this funny-looking thing, an old set that my father had bought with the rest of the furniture or something. I mean he did an incredible thing. He bought a whole houseful -- a whole house in the suburbs, the first suburb of New Orleans -- Gentilly Woods -- a huge house with all this furniture. And he borrowed all the money to do this and had borrowed the money to bring us here and put us in this little palace. I mean it was the first house I had ever seen. It was incredible with grass. I mean I used to watch those things in the movies in those days "they're cutting the grass." , you know, all those incredible movies we used to see at the Plaza about what America is about. I was literally told that you could shovel gold out of the streets. I came here really believing that. But it was interesting. My experience in the bands and the mobility that the bands had playing at football games and that sort of thing was really nice. I really enjoyed going with the band to various places, to various cities, various states. At the time I was at L.S.U. their football team was number one and we used to travel with the team. Although I didn't know what the hell football was about.

JC: Did you take formal visual arts classes in high school?

AK: In high school, you see, I was always a star in art.

JC: So you took art?

AK: Yes. That was the only thing that I could do well. For the rest of it I couldn't speak any English. I'm surprised that I passed through anything. I mean I was shocked. I remember when I was in the ninth grade my civics teacher was trying to give grades. He said, "Well, I'll call up the rest of the teachers and find out what they gave you and then I'll give you credit." That's how I passed. One time in the English class the teacher asked for a few students to go up and write this -- what do you call it? -- "I am, you are, he is", you know, that sort of thing --

JC: The verbs.

AK: The verbs. I don't think many of the students could do it. I raised my hand and went and did it. Now that one simple thing impressed the teacher and I passed on that and on that alone kind of thing. It was incredible. And then in math I didn't know what the hell was going on. I used to fail in math like mad. My uncle was in business and was constantly thinking that math was the most important thing that you could possibly have in education; that was his thing. But I hated math. I just couldn't stand math. Only recently I'm beginning to be kind of fascinated by it.

JC: The figures add up.

AK: In school in Greece I used to beat my hands until they were bleeding from learning the multiplication tables. The college experience also was more or less a sleepy experience although there I got into another kind of group that was really a great group.

JC: Before we go into that, was there any of your teachers in the visual arts in high school that have made any impression on you?

AK: No. The teachers liked what I did and they gave me high praise and I used to do various projects for the school for them. But I never... You see, I was always more or less ahead of that, of any teacher as far as art is concerned. Except when I went to college. The college then started this new experience for me of what art is. That experience began then.

JC: All arts? Or the visual arts?

AK: The visual arts, what art is about. In high school it was still drawing. But in college came the first realization that there is such a thing as art outside of -- you know, the difference between illustration and art became more or less clear at that time. Before that I was just a prolific drawer; I would draw a lot and I would be doing a nice job of drawing. I did portraits and landscapes, any sort of thing. I used to paint paintings for my father's bosses and that sort of thing.

JC: It was more sort of like the difference between seeing and copying?

AK: Yes.

JC: At the same time how did this whole thing that you had about being objective, outside of, you know, other people, seeing things from a third person point of view, I mean did you continue that all the way up until high school or college when you started to get involved with group?

AK: I don't think that ever stopped. But one other thing happened when I was in high school. I was so good in art that I was asked togo to a commercial art school at the same time. Which I did.

JC: A special commercial school?

AK: Yes, a special school. And there I learned the tricks of the commercial artist, you know, the projection, copying from projections and that sort of thing. And there I did some very nice work. My teacher was a man who didn't have any hands. Which was interesting.

JC: He was a thinker?

AK: No. He was a painter. His hands were cut off. When he was a youngster he slept in a train or something and his hands were cut off right at the elbow. So he used to paint with his elbows, attach the brush to the elbow. That was my teacher. He held the pencil like this and he did fantastic things with that. But I went there for only about six months in my senior year at college.

JC: Did you ever visit the New Orleans museum? You never went to galleries?

AK: No. You see, the New Orleans museum didn't have much anyway; as far as I know, they still don't have. At that point I had never seen an original painting anywhere. I never really felt anything existed at that point. The only artists I had ever heard about were Rembrandt and da Vinci because my father talked about them. He always felt that that was the highest ideal of art.

JC: That was high art?

AK: That was high art. I mean I had some idea but certainly I had never seen any. I hadn't seen any original things actually until I left L.S.U. at Baton Rouge more or less outside of my own work and what my friends were doing.

JC: So when you went to Louisiana State University did you live on campus?

AK: At first I lived on campus and then after that I moved out to some little dinky room on top of a restaurant for twenty dollars a month. You see, I had gotten into a fight with my father so he even stopped giving me that sixty dollars a month that he used to give me to support me through college. So I really got through college on my own. We didn't speak to each other for two years.

JC: And you had a scholarship so --

AK: The scholarship wasn't very much. It was like the tuition, which at that time at a state university was like nothing. It was fifty dollars or something like that. It was just a way of somehow getting me into that situation.

JC: Well, what do you remember -- you know, you are still playing in those bands, you are still moving about, and obviously that had some kind of effect -- you know, the mobility, seeing new things and learning new things. And you started to talk about a new group of people. Were they other students? or were they teachers?

AK: They were students. There were some instructors. But most of them were students. Well, the way it was -- as I've been saying, I fall into things. And although I never used to talk much I remember talking to D'Aquila, a friend of mine, when I first met him I used to wonder why the hell he even bothered with me because I really didn't talk any. He was such an intelligent person he was like the Encyclopedia Brittanica. He was surprised when I told him that because he though I was such an intelligent person and he wondered why the hell I put up with him. But in those days I was still very ignorant about everything, very sleepy about everything. But I think that once I became aware of art and artists through art history or whatever as a freshman in college I became very romantic about it. The Bohemian kind of life and then of course I began to attract people within that realm, you know, friends and groups that were totally into philosophy and music and art and literature. My roommate was a fantastic little guy -- Luigi Galiano -- a little Italian who was also very brilliant. He wanted to become a writer, though nothing ever became of it as far as writing goes. I don't know what else became of him. But he certainly introduced me to literature. For instance, to read Shakespeare and all those people. I never really did enjoy reading in those days. I would always only listen, I would much rather listen to people talk than actually read. Probably this was mainly because I still couldn't understand the language very well; I still had a hard time understanding the language that well.

JC: But you took your first art history at that point when you were a freshman or sophomore? You got a much broader perspective on serious art?

AK: Oh, absolutely. Sure. My favorite artist at the time was Salvator Dali. I guess he's everybody favorite artist when one is young. Then I moved to Picasso and finally went to Mondrian where it _____. But that took quite a few years, you know, with Klee and all those people in between. But, again, the nice thing about college was not

so much that I learned anything in classes, I don't even remember anything about classes. I don't remember how I passed the courses, I have no idea how I got my grades, I just don't even remember anything about actually being in class. I felt very isolated at times. The only vivid memories I have about college -- and that was only about fifteen years ago -- is this fantastic group of people that I used to meet. We met for lunch as a group and I would take in everything that was talked about. Of course in those days we were wrestling with religion and all that sort of thing, and identity. I went through a series of roommates. One was a very strict Catholic and we used to argue constantly about religion. One time it was a triumph for him because he made me get up at six o'clock in the morning and go to Mass. He just felt fantastic. And I went and found out what he was talking about and it bored me and I got up in the middle of it and left. I tried all those churches of various Protestant denominations -- Baptist, you name it. when I was in school I used to go to every church on Sundays, to different churches, to find out what they were about. And I did find out and finally I said "oh, to hell with it." I think it was Luigi Galiano, the guy in the bar, who finally convinced me of the absurdity of everything, even though I still had my doubts about the absurdity. He was a very intelligent little buy. And there were a few other people that were writers. Unfortunately, I don't think they really ever did anything with it. They were all sort of sick kind of human beings somehow.

JC: What do you mean -- they were sort of tucked into complacency of life in the South? Or --

AK: Yes. Also they were mentally screwed up. But they were really very brilliant and very intelligent. I think quite a few of them now more or less just drink themselves to a slow suicide or something.

JC: And do people games with each other and with other people?

AK: Games? What do you mean"

JC: Talk but not produce or --

AK: Well, they were writing a the time, they were producing. But it was the youth of the moment that was... You know, the late fifties was an interesting period. That's when the hippie -- not the hippie but the -- what was that thing? -- it wasn't bohemian any more -- it wasn't hippie. Beatnik, right?

JC: Beatnik, yes. It was sort of the Beatles.

AK: It was the beatnik way of life. It wasn't the Beatles quite yet. It was the post-Elvis Presley kind of thing I guess. But it was the beatnik kind of life that we kind of lived in those days and kind of loving it. We were all poor, no money, and we resented everybody that had money.

JC: Well, were there any instructors -- I mean you had formal classes --?

AK: I really thought I had some terrific instructors. they were very influential to my development.

JC: Who were they?

AK: Well, there were three specific ones. One was the design teacher Paul Dufour who came out of the Albers school at Yale. A lot of it -- he was full of shit but he really did make you work hard and when he talked he talked in such a nonsense of words that you couldn't understand and you've have to spend your time with the dictionary to find out what he was talking about. But he did make me see a lot about color and --

JC: Did he present formal problems?

AK: He presented very formal problems in a very traditional kind of way but at the same time it was necessary. Another influential teacher was a sculptor. I think his name was Shields. He was German and foreign like me so he kind of adopted me a little bit as well. With him I did some very good pieces in stone and --

JC: He was out a very academic, traditional --

AK: He was out of a tremendously academic tradition. Well, they all were in some way or other. And of course the major person who had a lot to do with my life was Caroline Durieux, the printmaker there. She was fantastic. I learned from her not only about art but also learned about life. She was just absolutely amazing in her way of life and her way of thinking, the clarity of her mind and her presence of knowing what is and what isn't, what's real and what is illussionistic. They were great people, they really were.

JC: Well, in her case was that the first experience with printmaking that you had?

AK: Yes. And I used to model for her. You know, I used to model at school to make money for classes when I was a freshman. I learned a lot from her. She used to teach anatomy as well. I learned a lot from her by being a model. And from that slowly she asked me to take a class in printmaking. Which I did. She took so much interest

in me that I just stayed; not that I loved it so much. She took the time out --

JC: What mediums of printmaking was she teaching?

AK: She was teaching all of them: not very well, but all of them anyway. She would give us a good introduction to all those mediums from etching to lithography, you know

JC: And she was involved with those technical processes?

AK: Yes. She was involved with technique but not that much. I mean lithography was not a big technical thing like it is today. You used to do the stones and she used to give you the basics and if it worked it worked, and if it didn't work it didn't work. But her thing was more art than technique.

JC: And her approach to art -- I mean what she imparted to you about kind of life and art -- was it based on a school of thought, or a kind of way to observe or see things?

AK: Well, I'm not sure. I don't think the teachings of those days had anything to do with -- well, it did have something to do with observing and all that sort of thing -- but I don't think teaching then was getting into -- like I mean when I started teaching she was one of the persons who advised me not to get involved with peoples' psychologies. She said that by the time they get to you their character has already been formed. But I kind of disagreed with her for a long time because you know how emotionally involved I used to get with students and try to help them out. I identified with practically every person's problems because I had been so much myself... But at the same time she imposed a certain discipline about working, about the process of working, somehow about the beauty of working.

JC: And the evolution of --?

AK: There wasn't much evolution on their part that had to do with my work. I don't thing I was even aware that I was doing any work until much later.

JC: But then really although it's a contradiction in your case, it was not like the doctor's approach which was, you know you don't get involved with your patient?

AK: Yes, it was that.

JC: But she had taken a real fondness for you.

AK: Yes, she had but --

JC: Which is a hole contradiction.

AK: Well, yes and no. She was pretty old even at that time. She was maybe in her sixties. I think the fact that maybe I was unlike other people, I mean I was very dedicated... She was never interested in my psychology or anything like that. I mean she wouldn't have that kind of interest. She took interest in seeing more or less that I would become whatever I wanted to become in a way.

JC: It wasn't actual, it was potential?

AK: Yes. It was not an emotional involvement in any way. She wouldn't ask me: what is your problem? If you had a problem she would tell you: go see a doctor.

JC: But she wanted you to get as much as she could impart to you from a professional point of view?

AK: From a professional point of view, yes. I guess she realized my potential. She was responsible for my going to the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles. She wrote to them and told them "this is a person you should have" and asked me to apply.

JC: So of those three people -- the person in design out of the Albers tradition, and the German out of the academic tradition, and her out of a kind of personal concern that you fulfill yourself, you know, took you far enough into your concern for your own work, I mean did you break through to another kind of level of understanding of your own self at that point?

AK: Well, yes and no. It took a long time. You see what happened was that toward the end of my last semester in college I was pulled out of school to go into the Army. Of course I did everything in my power not to go. I wrote letters to senators. My teachers wrote letters to senators. So that was a total break. I was taken out for a whole year just the last semester before I was to graduate because of the Berlin crisis. So I found myself in another situation which I hated but then you turn a disadvantage to your own advantage and it was okay. But I

found myself in this camp wearing a uniform which I didn't wear very well. But yet there --

JC: What do you mean you didn't wear it very well?

AK: Oh, I was the worst -- I mean after you become sergeants or whatever but I never listened, I was just the worst person. But at the same time, again, they respected me because I would do all this art for them. Like I would paint portraits for their wives and sweethearts and for generals and of generals' wives. And I painted my first mural there which was forty feet long by twenty feet in the officers' club there which was called the cow palace. For me at the time it was very modern. I broke up this whole area into various segments and painted cows and palaces. But it was so well done those guys loved it. I mean everybody that used to come in while I was working on the cow they would bet as to what kind of a cow it would end up to be. They had come from all those cow countries. They knew all about cows. I didn't know anything about cows. But the experience in the Army was also very interesting.

JC: But from the training camp you went to Berlin?

AK: No, I didn't go to Berlin. I didn't leave Louisiana. I stayed there. It was just a threat.

JC: Were you dismissed then?

AK: Yes. After the thing was over with we --

JC: It was sort of basic training?

AK: Yes, I was in the National Guard. That's what happened. The National Guard was activated. Then after the threat was over with we got reactivated again.

JC: So really it was the National Guard? It wasn't actually the Army? You weren't drafted into the Army?

AK: The National Guard usually was drafted into the Army. That's what it amounted to.

JC: So you went back to school then after that year?

AK: Yes, after that, of course, I went back to finish. So in consequence I didn't graduate until about 1963 (?) or 1961 (?) I guess.

JC: Well, did that year when you were in training have anything to do with your development?

AK: Yes, I think that was a very interesting year. Boy, I hated it, I hated it so much, and yet I learned to live with that demand that was made on you.

JC: Discipline?

AK: No, I wasn't disciplined but just the fact that --

JC: No, I mean discipline was the fact that you had to be there.

AK: Yes, but that still wasn't discipline because they had an awful time with me. A friend and I took an apartment outside in some town away from camp and we used to get up at four o'clock in the morning so we would make roll call. Because if they found out it was almost like leaving Wayne to move to New York. But, as I say, I didn't have a hard time because of this skill: it was that skill that really saved my life lots of times. Because with this skill -- everybody else was out bushwhacking or whatever they call it, and I was there drinking booze and painting this mural. It took me six months to do it. I made sure... Most of the time I was painting portraits and wa making some excellent money from that because it was ten bucks or something for a portrait, a pastel portrait.

JC: But innate in that experience was the fact that you had to come to grips with the fact that you didn't have the freedom that you had and there was a certain discipline in that?

AK: Absolutely. As I say, within that context though I found ways to survive. So I'm a survivor, you know. I found ways to survive and survive quite well. Toward the end I was really not bothered by it because II had done a lot of things in it and I learned a lot of things from it. During that time I learned a lot about blacks. I had some very good friends who were black and the alienation of the experience of being in a whole barracks with people and that whole goings on.

JC: Being close to people threatened --?

AK: Yes, in some ways close to people. I made some good friends in that time. It was still interesting. Finally I didn't really mind it so much. I hated the whole idea of the art of it getting away from it somehow. But it was interesting.

JC: Were you still doing your music at all at that point?

AK: No, during that time I stopped because there was no way --

JC: So that was when it stopped actually? I mean --

AK: Well, actually it stopped earlier than that. When I was a junior in college I had to major in something and I wanted to major in both art and music. I went to do a recital for this music teacher to see what kind of course I should go into. I played the piano and this old man sitting next to me asked me how long I had been playing the piano. I told him not very long, a few years. He asked me what other things interested me. I said I also wanted to be an art major. Then he showed me his shaking hands with a cigarette in them and said, "Do you see my hands? Don't go into music. Go into art." He really kind of discouraged me. But it was a decision I had made because I couldn't major in the two things. So since I knew that what I really wanted to do was to be a visual artist I went into that and dropped the music altogether.

JC: So in your third year you pretty much majored in the visual arts, and then you went away to the Army and then you came back and finished up in 1961?

AK: It was the year 1963 I guess; it was right before -- I finished up and then I left for Tamarind. That's what happened. I guess it was 1963 -- I'm not even sure any more.

JC: Yes. Well, you started in 1961 I guess I've got it screwed up. So when you came back was there anything more in that last year that you got out of it?

AK: Yes. Well then I met Barney(?) D'Aquila which was a very important step for me. I had met D'Aquila six months before and he had become my best friend. He was fantastic.

JC: Was he a student then? Or --

AK: Yes. You see, what happened was that earlier he had degrees in philosophy and psychology. He was teaching. And then at the age of thirty-five I guess he had taken an art course up at Tulane University. He had four kids and one in the belly. He decided to drop everything and go back to school and become an artist. So I met him during that transition. In fact, I helped him pack his stuff and drove him and his family down to Baton Rouge. It was his first semester in graduate school and my last semester of school. Well, he and another person named Paul Chatelain were the best friends I had during that last year in college. Paul was an artist and an opera singer and he ended up becoming director of the museum in Montgomery, Alabama. But they were all much older that I was. They were like ten, twelve years older than I was. Which isn't much difference any more, but in those days... They, too, kind of adopted me in a way. I mean they took me seriously and I liked them and took them seriously. We had a terrific six months going out landscape painting and doing other things together and talking constantly about art, and reading poetry and whatever. That was a fantastic six months. It was really beautiful.

JC: And it was basically with those two other artists?

AK: Yes.

JC: Then you continued the printmaking thing?

AK: Not really. I didn't continue it.

JC: But how did it lead then to Tamarind? AK; I had been painting all along, you know, since I was a kid. In college I was painting. I didn't take my painting teachers very seriously because I didn't care very much for that. But I began -- I think the first time I did an important painting was one that I considered that finally had something to do with me. The title was Pathos and it had to do with this cubistic kind of woman with holes in her stomach kind of thing. My sister-in-law has that painting. That's a very good painting. That was more or less like the first breakthrough into my really getting into myself. I don't quite know what it meant. But then the paintings that happened after that, the landscapes and everything that I used to paint... I used to paint with a lot of white lead until I found out it was killing me. Then I began to use a very minute amount of pigment and the paintings were almost like looking at light through an eggshell. It was so very strong and yet very, very delicate and light as far as the pigment was concerned but it was really very strong.

JC: Was the pigment part of the over-all image?

AK: They were all landscapes. But they were landscapes that were almost like seen through the eyes of a guy who was practically going blind with all sort of black with no white but just enough pigment enough to identify trees and to identify the forms. Those landscapes were done from the land; it wasn't my landscape.

JC: They were done outside? And they were done during that last period --?

AK: They were done during the last six months before I left college. And they were done with joy because the company was great. We were all out painting and singing. It was really a fantastic time of my life.

JC: Where did those paintings go? Obviously at that point you had not met any dealers or galleries?

AK: No, there were no galleries or dealers. I didn't even know what the word meant then. As a matter of fact, I remember Paul, that other friend of mine, one time he said, "Aris. What are you talking about? Art is just another business." And I almost felt like punching him in the mouth I mean I was so gung ho about the purity of art. And that went on for at least three or four more years.

JC: You mean they went through the years at Tamarind too?

AK: No. I left New Orleans and they stayed behind. JC; they stayed behind? You really go into it --?

AK: Then I went to Tamarind and that blew my mind.

JC: Now how did you come to go to Tamarind?

AK: Well, as I said, before I left for the Army, or whatever that thing was, my teacher Caroline Durieux said, "Look, there's a lithography shop that has been formed in Los Angeles that I went to as a visiting artist. I could get you there if you want to go. It's designed to train printers to open up shops." Caroline had been one of the first artists to go there as a visiting artist. Now I wasn't interested in that: I wasn't interested in printing: I wasn't interested in opening up any kind of shop. but then the thought of going away, of getting away from New Orleans appealed to me. I probably would have gotten stuck there. And, as I've been saying all along, things in my life just happened; I don't really do anything, I don't really say; I'm going to get up and go now. You know what I mean? It's just like the wind drifts me and sets me somewhere and the wind comes along again and picks me up. That's the way things happened throughout this. So since I had a lot of respect for Caroline, and even though there was some rebelling, I didn't want to hurt her feeling so I said, "I'll do it. I'll go if you want me to go there." So after I came out of the Army she asked, "Do you still want to do that?" I said, "Yes, I'll do that." So she wrote a letter. It was four hundred dollars a month which was like a million dollars to me. I had been living on sixty dollars a month, sometimes less, for the last three or four years. I thought: Jesus, four hundred dollars a month! my God, what am I going to do with all this money. It was a grant from the Ford Foundation and paid four hundred dollars a month and travel expenses. So that was like heaven for me. So I went. And my first stop was at Indianapolis. I remember how fantastic I felt as I was leaving Baton Rouge in an old 1953 Dodge or something. I was elated. It was almost like a whole weight of my father and my family and everything was just kind of lifting off my shoulders. I started to sing as I was driving along the highway toward Indianapolis. I was sorry to leave my friends. But then that was done; that was it. So I was on my way.

JC: Is that where you met your wife?

AK: Yes. Then I had lonely times. I was so lonely I couldn't stand it. You know, I was a kid that hardly knew the language and now I was traveling all over and I didn't have anybody any more; I mean I was a very lonely person.

JC: You spent six months in Indianapolis?

AK: Yes.

JC: Is that where you first met Garo Antreasian?

AK: Well, I went there specifically to study with him.

JC: And he was teaching there?

AK: Yes.

JC: Now what was that like?

AK: Well, that was good. Actually it wasn't six months; it was only two months -- eight weeks. It was good because that was the first time I ever went to an art school. Before that I had not gone specifically to an art school. The John Herron School of Art in Indianapolis was just an art school.

JC: Was that associated with the museum?

AK: Yes, it was the museum school. And Garo Antreasian was teaching there and there we were supposed to do our apprentice training for Tamarind. And there I met John Dowell who is now in Philadelphia teaching at _____. He is a good man. And John Dowell happens to be black and the experiences I had with him you know, bumming around with him, as I said, were kind of incredible. As I said, I was very lonely. And it was the first time I ever experienced temperature of fifteen degrees below zero and snow and so on. It was kind of fun in one way. But I did meet _____ there.

JC: Did you meet her at the school?

AK: No, I met her at a bar.

JC: Were you playing in a bar again?

AK: No, I wasn't playing, I was just there drinking. I started dancing with her or something and then we started going around a little bit. A few weeks later when I was about to leave for Los Angeles and Tamarind I asked her if she wanted to come along. We didn't get married or anything; we just kind of took off together for Los Angeles.

JC: Now Antreasian as a training ground and as a teacher, what are your impressions of that period and of your relationship with him?

AK: Well, Antreassian wasn't really a teacher there. We were there to do work. He taught a little bit. He is a nice man. You know, he knew his stuff a little bit. Most if it was like learning through experience. I really began to learn the medium very well.

JC: Lithography?

AK: Yes. There I did my first huge prints. I still was doing my own work there although we were being trained at Tamarind to do other peoples' work.

JC: At John Herron what was it like to be going for the first time to a strictly art school, and of course an art school that was related to a museum where you --?

AK: Well, I felt good. Although the museum didn't have much great work, but at least it did have some original paintings. I thought that was interesting to see some original paintings. In Baton Rouge those friends of mine were always talking about going to New York and visiting museums and all that sort of thing. But we never made it. But at John Herron I started to be seriously involved more or less in art in some kind of professional way. As I said, I pick things up very quickly and in eight weeks I became quite good at that medium. June Wayne came from Tamarind to John Herron to see us. We were the first ones, kids actually -- I was twenty-four years old then -- togo to Tamarind under that program.

JC: You were the first trainees, the first lithographers to go through Tamarind?

AK: Right. We were the first to go through that kind of trainee program. The others who had been there before that were teachers of printmaking who were kind of starting the place, like Garo Antreasian and Adams(?) and in the meantime they had already hired Irwin Hollander and he was there. And there were really professional people from Paris like Bohuslav Horak. He is an excellent printer. Those were the people that were doing that. So we were more or less the first ones, young people, to go in under that program.

JC: Aris, while you were still in Indianapolis and you were doing your own printing there and learning the technique, what were the images that you were dealing with in your prints? And were you doing any painting at that time?

AK: No -- well, first of all, I didn't have any room to paint. I lived in a rooming house. The interesting thing about that was that I was very lonely and through this loneliness I used to write letters a lot to friends I left behind and to my father and so on. I kind of realized then that I really enjoyed writing my impressions and that sort of thing. I wrote one letter to my father and he wrote a letter back saying how amazed he was, again, at the variety of my talents. He wrote, "My God, you will probably be more than just a visual artist. Some day you're going to be a writer as well." Which was very nice to hear because I always wanted some kind of approval from him. Which I very rarely had gotten. But I wasn't doing any painting there. there was no way of doing it. Anyway, I had more or less stopped. The images I was doing there were almost like primitive things. We were so involved in different technical things then. We had to learn various techniques like transfer paper. But there was one thing that did happen at John Herron Art School which I think was a seed for what has happened to me since then in art. It was a very basic seed which I had almost forgotten about until much later on when I was at Cranbrook it became clear to me that that was the point at which that started. One time I had finished rolling up some edition or

something and there was a slab of ink on the plate, on the glass. And for fun, I guess -- I don't know how it happened -- I put some newsprint over it face down and I ran my fingernails over it, and then I picked up the newsprint. And the most fantastic thing happened to my insight seeing those lines that resulted from that small action, you know, those two or three lines that I did were done from the back. Somehow there was something about it that totally moved me in such a strong way. It was almost like seeing myself without being conscious of seeing myself, without being conscious of it somehow, without consciously trying to see yourself. Those lines were something that later on, years later on, I found out that that's how Paul Klee first used to do drawings. But that was the beginning of some kind of clarity for me. Of course it got buried through the Tamarind years but it resurfaced many, many years later.

JC: Were those the first abstract things --?

AK: Yes, that was the first abstract -- well, not abstract -- but let's say the first non-realistic thing. As I say, I did a few paintings of cubistic forms, you know, through the whole Picasso era.

JC: Without associations?

AK: Without associations. It was the pure -- the elements of just the line themselves that moved me strongly. Since then I've recovered from that in a way. The first time I think that I became aware that there is such a thing to art an image that could go beyond a certain kind of whatever we call recognizable image as being part of an art piece or as being the tool of an art --

JC: Were there other experiments that --?

AK: We had a lot of experiments. And obviously lithography and the whole process certainly pushed me into experimenting with tools, you know, with various ways of doing things. I think it was then that I started using transfer paper to do my images and I did start transfer paper from those days and it followed through to Cranbrook later on. But I still remember that experience because I was moved by it. It was almost like the first time I ever heard Beethoven in my father's living room. I mean like your whole insides went into hysteria, that kind of thing. It was exactly the same kind of feeling. I've never forgotten that moment, that split second that that thing happened. Then, of course, I got busy again and forgot about everything. So my images were not great then; you know, there wasn't anything big about them.

JC: What about the discipline of the experimentation with the new technical processes that you were going into in much deeper depth?

AK: Well, actually what happened was I tightened up again obviously because of all the technological disciplines that you have to go through. We were learning techniques and the images had to do with specific techniques that we were working with. More or less secretly once in a while I would be trying that thing again to see if it was actually real or if it wasn't some form of my imagination. And even now I have my students do it once in a while. Some of them come up with a similar kind of thing. I still get this kick in my gut somehow. I can't quite understand what it is all about. But certainly I got to understand it much later. We'll talk about that later. But that was really the beginning of something that has carried itself over into what I am doing today in my painting.

JC: Well, aside from just the technical routine of it, did the discipline have any effect on the way in which you concerned yourself now with serious art?

AK: Well, I don't know. It used to be hard work for me to paint. It was a tremendous discipline to paint. Although those landscapes I did I remember Barney D'Aquila -- END OF SIDE 2 - (Tape 1, side 2) TAPE #2 SIDE 3

AK: Well, Barney D'Aquila and I used to go out landscape painting, you know those paintings I was talking about, which I think are very beautiful paintings. Even now I go back to my brother's house once in a while, every five years or so, and I see them and I still think they are _____ strong. You've really go to see them sometime. We would go out and like in one sitting I would capture the landscape and be finished with the painting, where he would struggle so much and then come up more or less with nothing. And after we would come back home at night and would look at the paintings he would always be amazed at now minimally I was able to pick up things and set them up in such a way that the landscape was always fresh. It was always like you were right there. That was interesting even in those days. Nevertheless painting still did come difficult especially in the studio. Especially in the studio they were semi-abstract but they were still -- I always had to have some kind of identifiable thing to hold onto.

JC: That you were representing in your work?

AK: Right, yes. Just something; there was nothing wrong that obviously, you know. But when the thing about those lines happened I think that was the first time that the purity or the mystery about what the painting s were about, the pure forms, was just recognizing those few lines that I did backwards obviously not seeing what I was

doing. So that was a very important discovery for me to really find that out and how I responded to that moment to that little image that was done on that piece of paper. But then, as I said, I was still not at all aware of the arts in the fifties, in a way. I was aware of Pollock a little bit and people like that, in other words, I was not prepared for all those people that I read about and whose works I saw reproduced; I was not prepared to meet them in the flesh and work with them at Tamarind.

JC: You say you first met June Wayne there in Indianapolis when she came out from Los Angeles. What were your impressions of her right off?

AK: Oh, I liked her. She was a good-looking woman and a very strong woman. Of course at that time I was anxious that I would pass the test and go to Tamarind. The purpose of our being there was to find out whether or not we were able to do it. June came and saw the results and decided that we should go to Tamarind immediately after that. We were given out travel expenses. At the time I had I guess a 1956 Ford or something but anyway I drove all the way to California with _____. I asked her to come. Maryan was more or less the black sheep of her family. She came from a very strong Catholic family. One night she didn't show up at home or something and they threw her out or something. So it was kind of easy for her to say, "Sure, let's get out of her." So we did take off for Los Angeles. And there we more or less started living together. At that time this sort of thing was a no no. At Tamarind I had to pretend that I had a roommate. They didn't find out it was a female roommate until many months later. They didn't care but there was still that underlying taboo about that sort of thing.

JC: There wasn't much happening at that time in the Los Angeles art scene, but what were your --?

AK: I think there was.

JC: What was going on then for you in that scene? And what was the general impression of Los Angeles which obviously was a much bigger city than you had ever been in?

AK: Yes. Well, we drove there in about three days. We did it straight more or less. WE didn't have much chance to look at the country too much. We saw a little bit of it. A couple of days after I arrived I immediately had to start working. We found a place to live in Hollywood. My first impression of Los Angeles was of the smog. I couldn't believe it. I was driving along and was told about the Hollywood hills and I kept asking, "Where in hell are the Hollywood hills?" All of a sudden bang! they were there. You know, you go through the smog and there they are in front of you. One thing about Los Angeles I hated was the smog. Then I was shocked to find that Tamarind was just a little shop, just a small little shop. It had two presses at that time or three presses I guess. The administrative office was much larger than the shop itself. I was introduced to various people who were working there. They accepted me and took me under their wing. There I was sponging and grinding stones for quite a while before I picked up the roller to print anything. My first experience there was one morning while I was outside waiting for the building to open at nine o'clock. I saw this old man coming to the door. Later I realized that this was John McLaughlin who was a very well-respected hard-edge painter in Los Angeles at the time. He was the first experience I had with -- you know, in lithography when you do something you fill it up with black and I thought he was going to put something on it but then I realized that that was the image. But his prints turned out to be some of the best things that were done at Tamarind. Out of necessity I just sold the last couple that I had. I hated to sell them. But anyway, there was no training there. The most fantastic things happened because all those people kept coming in and your mind was totally blown by all those various artists that would come in.

JC: Would you talk with John McLaughlin about his work?

AK: Oh, absolutely, yes. He was a beautiful man. We had aa very nice relationship. His prints were the first ones I printed, which got a lot of respect from the shop because the first time I picked up the roller there I really did this fantastic edition of his prints. It was two yellow bars, actually solid areas with white in the middle and on the sides. Much later on Albers came and looked at McLaughlin's print and thought he was a genius. I don't think he ever got the recognition he deserved because he was such a humble man. He would never push himself to anything. But in Los Angeles he was very well-known and very well respected. As far as I know, he was the first hard-edge painter, you know, of the hard-edge school. He talked a lot about that. He talked about things that I didn't understand at the time and yet somehow I did understand. He talked about the absence of the object. Like he was always painting the absence of an object that was there before but the thing wasn't there any more; he was painting that space. His influence was more from the Orientals. He had been a captain in the Army or Navy Air Force and had spent a lot of time in Japan. He started painting I think when he retired, or he had been painting for along time, but he really became a serious painter when he retired from the service or something. He as a career Army man or something. So I think the Japanese ideal void in space influenced him so he kind of purified all the forms into a very pure form of color and what the color did on the surface of that. I think his prints were even much more successful than his painting were because they were smaller and very even and flat and really did what he wanted them to do.

JC: How did that work influence you? You had obviously before that time other than with this one experience --

AK: Well, I think from that time when I became a student again in a way I almost rejected all my own things. For the first time all those artists kept coming to Tamarind and I was aware of the reality of the artist that I respected through reproductions in the past. So what I did consciously or subconsciously I used to copy this work every night. I used to go back to my own little studio, my room in my apartment and I used to try to do what they were doing. So I spent a couple of years going through various -- every couple of months changing according to what artist happened to there at the time; from a very tight Peter Takal kind of draftsmanship thing, to the very organic abstract things of Sam Francis, to the very Albers-like involvements when Albers was there and when Jasper Johns was there. I mean my thing was that every time I would find and artist that I really respected and loved his way of thinking, his way of talking about his work itself, and how much I responded, I would try to copy it there somehow. And yet at the same time I was doing my own thing by more or less thinking I was trying to get rid of my huge, overwhelming background of Greek heritage. I was doing a suite of prints using the letters of the Greek alphabet. That's when the work really became completely abstract. The suite itself -- I think it's now at The Museum of Modern Art or in one of those collections around the country -- the suite itself had a combination between the abstraction of the alphabet, the Greek letters, plus images from the mythological eras. One of the best prints was almost like a McLaughlin thing, very flat in appearance in the shape of the urns just in black and white. At that time, the idea, the whole realization became real to me, which later on came into my paintings, about the negative and positive not being opposed to each other but being equal and as important. Whereas before that in school you learned about positive space and negative space and they said that negative space means emptiness and positive space means positive. I think that was the first time I realized that there is no such thing because negative space was so intense that it became positive; and vice versa. In fact, Albers saw that print and was amazed by that print and loved it and he was shocked that at that age one could do something like that. You know, the artist came from the older tradition of years and they were all shocked to see that the younger artist could pick up and do something very simple and pure and beautiful, and that it hadn't taken them years and years to come to that.

JC: To evolve to it.

AK: Yes. Of course we all learned from them so that's why it was easier for us.

JC: Let's talk about some of the specific people that you printed for and what your impressions were of them and how that has lingered in you and maybe eventually you absorbed it other than from this point of view of where you were learning and imitating.

AK: Well, there were two aspects of it. First, there was the technical aspect which I as becoming very good at, plus the fact that I had great respect for the printers that were there. One in particular who came for only four weeks I think and couldn't even speak the language -- Marcel Duracier from Paris. He was Picasso's master printer and Braque's and all those people in the early twentieth century I guess. At this time he was Miro's printer. I became aware of how important those people were in actually making images for those artists. They were more important that the artists themselves. In fact, Duracier received a letter from Miro while he was at Tamarind in which Miro congratulated him that his sense of color was becoming better and better throughout the years. I mean all Miro would do was send some sketches and Marcel Duracier would do all the work, make the color decisions and everything. It was incredible. And all that went through an interpreter because he didn't speak English. Those people taught me respect for not just the medium of lithography but respect for the work, the actual physicality of doing something. Regardless you were doing anything. I mean they had this sense of love for what they were doing. It was so important to do anything and I think this tremendous love they had that kind of really vibrated to you, you know, regardless of whether you could understand them or not. Marcel used to kind of say -- he used to tell us about treating stones like women you know, through love and care and gentleness and all that sort of thing. It might sound chauvinistic now but then it was pretty true I guess. The other aspect, of course, was in the artists that came there. The greater they were, the more humble, the more human they were. On the other hand, the more the more mediocre they were, the more asinine they were. That was interesting to watch.

JC: Well, you worked with McLaughlin. Who were next several people you worked --?

AK: Well, I don't really remember all of them because I was there for a couple of years. And some of them I wouldn't want to remember. But when I was there it was the peak of Tamarind. Everything was treated like a family. We always used to eat together; we had lunches outside on the porch. Tamarind was not institutionalized but was still very fresh and very exciting an da lot of people would come through. The artists that I remember very well were: Sam Francis, Albers, Louise Nevelson, John McLaughlin, Peter Takal which in his way was kind of a nice man. Then Georgia O'Keeffe came. Of course that was a great experience for me to meet her and see her. I didn't get a chance to do any work for her because she left a week later. She couldn't do it: she just couldn't deal with it. But that one week was enough to... We had some kind of close contact for one week. Of course she was my god. It was like an incredible thing for me to be near her. She was such a fantastic woman.

As I said, two months is kind of a long time for people to be at one place, to see them every day and talk to them.

JC: So you worked with Louise Nevelson?

AK: Yes, I worked a lot. As a matter of fact, I used to like to work by myself and she used to specifically do small prints so I could print for myself on a small press. I liked her tremendously. She is a great woman. My father came to visit me on Sunday one time. On that occasion she gave us a Greek party. We were the only two Greeks that didn't come dressed in sheets. She got so upset about that. Everybody else came in costume in all these old bed sheets and swimming trunks or something. Anyway, it was a great party.

JC: You said that Georgia O'Keeffe had a profound effect on you, her presence and herself. What was it about her, or what was that about?

AK: I am very impressed with people that are people, that really totally seem to have arrived at a state of being total individuals and are somehow free from any kind of mythological illusions about themselves. I think Georgia O'Keeffe was certainly one of the strongest examples of that kind of person. I mean I didn't really care if she was an artist or not. Obviously the fact that she was an artist helped a lot as far as she was there.

JC: She was a strong individual in her presence?

AK: She was just great. An interesting example -- one day we were eating lunch. And I, I guess from being so awed by her or whatever, I stared at her. She started staring back at me and she wouldn't let go at least for a minute or a minute and a half -- I don't know how long this staring thing lasted -- her very deep eyes with __ straight back and beautiful wrinkled face. I was the first one to kind of take my eyes away because I couldn't stand it after a while. I mean she would never be the first one to let go of anything practically. I never really talked to her much; she didn't say much actually. It was just the presence and the energy that she brought into that, add the obvious respect that everyone had for her. It took Tamarind a long time to get her there and once they got her there she did one little drawing on a stone but I guess she just didn't do very much. And then she just left after that. She just couldn't do it any more. Which was unfortunate for me and for the rest of us.

JC: Working with Nevelson was also working with a very strong woman.

AK: Nevelson in other ways -- I mean she was a sculptor and lithography for her was the first time she had ever had anything to do with that kind of two-dimensional print medium, I think. I don't think she had done prints before that. She might have done a few things but nothing major. But, you see, she loved it and she used to use various tools to do her images. In fact, the larger the stone the better for her. She wanted to even do the floor if you could roll up the floor. I mean that's what she used to say, "I'll do the floor if you can roll it up." Her images were very beautiful and very much like a sculptor's and very black for the most part. At that time she was always dressed in black. Since then she has come out of all that. Now every time you see her she's like a masquerade party. But in those days she was always dressed in black. Her sister would always follow her around. She came one time complaining that her sister had dragged her here and there to see the Hollywood hills. Louise said, "I felt like a cow on a chain being dragged. Who the hell cares about all that crap? If you're within four walls it doesn't matter where you are in the world. You're going to work within those four walls anyway." And there was one more person there that I must mention that I shouldn't really forget. I really loved him a lot although he was such an alcoholic. His name was Weber -- I think it was John Weber -- no, not John, that's the guy from New York --

JC: Max Weber?

AK: No. Jesus Christ, what the hell is his first name. He was very tall, almost a Lincoln-type figure, carried a cane. He used to be so drunk. But he did fantastic work. I think the reason he never became anything was because of his alcoholism. He was with the Bauhaus in Chicago in the thirties or forties or whenever that was. He was just a wonderful and beautiful guy. He did abstract expressionist kind of brush strokes and very strong, crayon-like things which would make Gordon Riddens (?) look sick in a way. He used to do very powerful sort of things. The stories about him and his drinking are incredible. One time he had some tusche out for him to paint with on the stone and he had his gin next to it and he dipped his brush into the gin instead of into the paint and he was about to do the tusche when he realized what was happening he drew with gin. But the thing is that there were all those characters that would come in. I keep thinking about all those kind of minor artists that came; they were fairly good but for some reason or other they didn't make it as big as other people. They were not as good as those other people were. I don't know what the reasons are why one person makes it and another doesn't, but certainly --

JC: There was a whole atmosphere there that was really important in development that --?

AK: Oh, absolutely. This was the first time I was in contact with... And, you know, to be uprooted from a place

like Baton Rouge, Louisiana and being thrust into this professional world of professional artists that you had read about and had heard about who were right there and then -- it wasn't like you were reading about Rembrandt who is dead. These were living artists right there. I went to see the Albers retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum and I attended his lectures and I loved everything that he had to say about his theories of color and his "one plus one equals three" idea. And of course with him lithography was the medium because he realized for the first time that he could do something with lithography that he couldn't do with painting. In painting he had to mix the third color combination whereas lithography the medium itself did the mixing. So I think he's done prints practically ever since. I'm not sure that he even painted after that. And I worked on his fantastic suite - Midnight and Noon I think it's called. I still have one of those fantastic prints.

JC: So that was one of the first times that you were involved with a museum, too -- the Los Angeles County Museum?

AK: Yes. My outside activities were constantly going to galleries, to La Cienega Gallery every Monday night, and going to the museum in Los Angeles, and generally enjoying California a little bit; not very much. Because I was very busy. I worked at Tamarind forty hours a week. And then I used to do my own work at night. I would be there until practically two o'clock in the morning printing my own stuff as well. Sometimes I would wake up in the morning and I couldn't open up my hands. I had problems with my wrists. I used togo to the doctor who would give me shots because I was working with rollers all the time. But I would never exchange that experience. I mean it was a fantastic experience. And besides there were other good people within the Tamarind situation. There was Susan Jones, a woman who has since died. She was assistant director there. And she was fantastic. She was French. She was very influential to me; she was like Caroline Durieux. She was a very real person. She was not an artist. I guess she had been with Art and Architecture for a long time before coming to Tamarind. Her philosophy of life her sense of reality, her sense of being a total realist really affected me. That kind of person always affects me.

JC: And did June Wayne in the same way affect you?

AK: No, June Wayne was not that kind of person. She was a very strong person and had a lot on the ball but I think she lacked the kind of sensitivity that really great artists have, actually that great people have. I don't think she liked men very much and she used to kind of fight with them all the time. I never had any problems with her. But certainly Irwin Hollander did. She used to just scream and yell at them. Anyway, I got along with her. In fact, when I left she took me out to dinner and asked me to stay. I just wanted to get out because of another hassle that was there. Kenneth Tyler who later _____ the Gemini also got --

JC: Well, what about Irwin Hollander? At that point you --

AK: Irwin Hollander was the technical -- well, he wasn't quite the technical director yet. When Bohuslav Horak kind of finally let go... Bohuslav was a fantastic guy but he was a very secretive buy. He used to come in at five o'clock in the morning and do his tricks, he didn't want to let anything out, so they started getting tired of that. But I learned a lot from Bohus in printing because he didn't even have to tell you anything, you'd just watch him. He was fantastic. He and Marcel Duracier were the best printers I ever came across. Irwin Hollander took over the technical directorship after that. Irwin and I got along very well. He is a wonderful, great guy.

JC: So you learned then at that point a lot from doing and seeing?

AK: At that point it was just a matter of doing and seeing. I think it must have been about six months later that we did have a lot of technical problems that we always kept solving. At one time we had a very hard time with a Sam Francis plate and it was almost being abandoned. Then I took it over. I guess it was just because it was about to be abandoned that they told me, "All right, go ahead and see what you can do with it." I brought it back to life. And at that moment during that process of bringing it back to life the whole clouds about lithography kind of lifted. Immediately I understood what the medium was about. And that clarity hasn't left me since. So at one point everything just became totally very clear after really working hard at it for so long; doing it and yet somehow not quite understanding they mystery of it -- just the little tick that happens and things finally become clear to you, the clouds are lifted, the sky is blue, and you feel great. And it did happen there at that one moment. And from then on I was terrific. My editions were perfect; I mean it was just good. I had somehow become a master of this medium.

JC: You worked then on more of Sam Francis's prints?

AK: Yes. I liked Sam, too. You know, looking back now it's funny. In those days those people were like the gods of the art world. Sam was going to have a show at the Louvre, you know, the first artist still alive they would give a show to. He used to fly back and forth from his studios in Paris and Japan and Sweden or wherever. He was my idol -- the idol of... And then the other guy came -- you know, he shows with Gertrude Kasle now -- Philip Guston came. I did a very nice print with him. He was a very strong person too; he is very much his own man. There were those who were weak and drank a lot; and others didn't touch the stuff. But they were there. So my whole

illusion about what art is supposed to be was totally gone because they were all individual people. They had their problems so they acted according to those problems. But the art was equally good no matter whether they were drunkards or clearheaded. So from then on I certainly didn't have any kind of model as to what ann artist is supposed to be like. A lot of people around seem to have this Van Gogh thing still, you know, that an artist perhaps should be some kind of addict and starving to death so he can create. In the early days, as I've said, I kept going back to the studio and doing the things that the artists were doing. Peter Takal was just a draftsman but he was a good draftsman. That's what he wanted to do; he didn't want to advance. One time I asked him to come and look at my work because I thought I was doing something very interesting. I had started painting again and my paintings then were weird in a way. They had to do with environment a little bit butt they had aa lot to do with lines somehow. They were still California landscapes somehow but I used to paint with black and then going with pinks and pick up the black with pink lines kind of things and the whole thing was just covered. I think my sister has one little round painting that looks like the world practically. I gave it to my father but she took it after he died. A few of those paintings were quite nice. Peter Takal said something strange to me. He said, "Aris, I hope you are not a genius." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You're going to have an awful time in your life if you're a genius. I hope you're not a genius." In other words, go the middle way; that's the safest way.

JC: Well, Aris, at some point you got disenchanted with yourself in that environment or you wanted to move on. How did that all come about, that change of psychic state?

AK: Well, things don't stay the same -- right? Tamarind was changing. And this buy Ken Tyler -- I had met him first in Indianapolis, he was there teaching us who were trying to get to Tamarind and who finally did get to Tamarind -- he sort of uprooted the whole place. I mean he created mistrust. He stabbed people in the back. He stabbed everyone which I didn't like at all. He was just this aggressive kind of salesman type guy. He used to give us demonstrations put in a room by himself to do experiments. He used to come in to show us new things and they always failed and he would always convince you that they weren't really failures. The next time they would be perfect. And every time the would fail. But like, you know, it takes a guy like that. He made millions. After he left Tamarind, way after I left, he opened up a shop -- the Gemini shop. He and I were supposed to go in business together. I'm glad I didn't do that. We were supposed to open up a shop.

JC: So it was some personal disenchantment with the director that Tamarind was going in?

AK: Yes. You know, after all the nice people came then they really weren't getting any big -- well, what I would consider... And it wasn't just that. I had been there for two years. I was supposed to stay for only three months, six months at the most, because other people kept coming. Just as artists came there were young printers just like us would come. And then I still had this idea in mind about going to graduate school. Somehow still in the back of my mind I wanted to go to graduate school. A guy named Thom O'Connor came to Tamarind; he was a printer too. He had gone to Cranbrook Academy of Art. He told me about Cranbrook and said; if you'd like to go to art school I can write and find out if you can get in there. Of course, I still wanted to go back to art school, I mean I wanted to finish, to get a degree. I don't know whether it was because of my father; I just wanted to get a master's. I could have stayed in Los Angeles I guess but by that time I didn't care much about Los Angeles and its smog anyway and I wanted to get out of there. It's almost like -- I mean that has been my live; I finish something and I say; well now it's time to go on. As I say, you can't just--

JC: Did you get married at that point?

AK: Yes, I guess so. My father came to visit me. I remember a conversation I had with him. Of course he found out at the time that I was living with Maryan. He didn't like Maryan very much; in fact, he didn't like her at all. He told me that living with her was not socially acceptable I said, "Yes, I understand all that. Father, the time will come that I will be the one to decide what society will do, not the other way around." He said, "Son, that has been the dream of everybody that I know but nobody has been able to succeed." But in a way I succeeded. I live my life. Of course, now the whole society has changed too. But we did get married.

JC: Did that move you to get married?

AK: No, not that. but it was the time that I decided to come to Cranbrook. And I think it had to do with family pressures from both sides. Something -- I don't know what. But, anyway, one morning we decided to go the courthouse and make it legal. We did get married there. At the same time John Dowell had just gotten married too. Tamarind gave us a party. June Wayne gave us a part at her mansion in the Hollywood hills or something with a Greek swimming pool there and all that sort of thing.

JC: Well, what was the arrangement with Cranbrook?

AK: Well, I didn't realize then that lithography and all that sort of thing was going to become so big. Everywhere else it was still obscure; especially here. Jesus, there was nothing here then except -- well, Emil Weddige and Demertel(?). And their things were... Anyway, I applied to Cranbrook. And of course immediately I got a full

scholarship there. And that, of course, made me decide to come because it was going to be free. I wouldn't have to pay the huge tuition.

JC: Did they want you to teach lithography?

AK: Yes. I taught everything. Barkeer didn't know anything about it. I had to teach Barker a little bit. But I didn't feel so bad leaving Tamarind; I mean I was ready to leave there. I was kind of looking forward to this new experience at Cranbrook.

JC: Were there any other general or even specific impressions that that whole experience left on you as you look back now?

AK: Well, what it die was it blew my mind literally. And I don't think it has stopped since. You know, when I was painting for those few weeks and that whole concentrated effort of working under those conditions was so significant to me sort of like waking me up to the gorgeous world of the artist. I think that the artist does have a damn good life regardless of whether he has money or not. Because it is something that one wants to do, and does. I think that is so important.

JC: Did you recognize in yourself a kind of potential that you wanted to bring out as a part of making this decision to change?

AK: You mean to go to Cranbrook?

JC: Yes.

AK: I think the decision to go to Cranbrook was strictly the fact that I wanted to finish the master's degree. And, again, that had to do with approval from my father. That was still important to me. My father was very ignorant about the medium of lithography. He always thought of lithography as he remembered in Greece from magazines. It was only when he came to Tamarind and saw those painters and sculptors being there that he became convinced a little bit about lithography. I think that's one thing that I've always had a little timidity about being so good about lithography because my father never accepted this and therefore I don't think I had much respect for it as I should have because I'm so good at it now.

JC: He would rather have had you in the Greek tradition of a painter of a sculptor?

AK: Yes. And although I continued all that, he was kind of narrow-minded about all those sorts of things. His background was Greece, old Greece actually, ancient Greece.

JC: How did Maryan take all of these changes in her own life? I mean this change to California --

AK: Well, you know, Maryan was kind of brave to come with me because I could very well have dumped her or something -- right? Of course, I would never do that, but she didn't know that. We had a very distant relationship for a long time, a kind of easy relationship actually. Although it began to be wearing really after a while because she was not an artist, she was not in art, she didn't kind of belong anywhere among my friends. In fact, she hated to come to Tamarind's little parties or whatever. You know, she was very screwed up at the time, too. In California she was working in a bank. It was also good for her. But then it became even worse at Cranbrook because there was even a much more closed --

JC: Intense --

AK: Yes. Isolated kind of thing there anyway. But I still continued; we made our liaison legal. We bought a new Volkswagen bus and drove through Texas and up to see my family and her family and on to Cranbrook. That was the beginning of my so-called graduate career. Which was not much of a graduate career because I already knew what the hell I was doing. I was teaching most of the time in the first year anyway. Then in the second year I had this tremendous nervous breakdown. Which was also great because if it weren't for Cranbrook it would probably have been postponed even more; I mean the woods and the isolation there did it. And the, of course, I had this great relationship with Walter Hamady.

JC: Well, in those Cranbrook years, which we're kind of moving in to talk about now, what were your first impressions? I mean obviously you've mentioned the isolation. What about the other instructors besides Barker?

AK: I really didn't have much contact with anybody there except with Walter.

JC: Walter Hamady?

AK: Yes. We did those nice books together and we had a tremendous friendship -- relationship.

JC: What were the books about?

AK: They were about his poetry and my images. It was at that time -- I think it was after I moved from California to Cranbrook still fresh from all those expericences and all the stuff, that I started that thing that I discovered in Indianapolis as far as the work is concerned. I began to explore a little bit, you know, this thing about drawing from the back of things without seeing what I was doing. Eventually I think it turned out that I was trying to get rid of my conditionings or conscious conditions of why things are, how things are.

JC: What an image is?

AK: What an image is, and all the stuff that you learn -- strict things that you learn from school and all that sort of thing. We lived in a little trailer in Keego Harbor and I had a little bedroom in this trailer and I used to do very small prints and all those things I used to do. Then I decided to do a book. I had done a book at Tamarind for an artist -- what the hell was his name? He was doing Op art before Op art was Op. I've forgotten his name. But anyway it was a very nice book of prints - lithographs. He used to quote the poem The Ancient Mariner or something like that. And since I also had had a lot of involvement with music I guess I decided to do a book. One morning while I was eating breakfast before going to Cranbrook I as listening. to some classical music on the radio. I decided that I was going to do this book with music. Since I was really heavy into lines at the time, really exploring the whole process of working backwards or whatever kind of freed me from maaking my art being more like what music is, which is very abstract, you know, listening to it and feeling the thing itself and not what kind of images might come to your mind by that. So the interpretation of music through linear abstraction was what I was interested in at Cranbrook. That's what the books were about.

JC: The images in the first music book that you did were very lyrical and, as you say, there was a kind of linear lyricism to them. WEhat artists had any influence on you at that time? Had you seen Klee? Were they obvious influences? Or was that --

AK: I think Klee was one of my gods then I guess because he dealt along with lines. For some reason or other lines were very iimportant to me. The work at the time had all those things: a little Miro, a little Klee, maybe a littbit of Bissier, too -- Julius Bissier I think his name is -- but it was all because they were so small and so precious and very beautiful, and they were done on Henry(?) paper and Japanese papers and I think they were very attractive. But I don't think they had any immediate influence, I mean no immediate copying or anything as artists. But it's just that I think they had that sort of appearance to them.

JC: But you had seen original works by those surrealists?

AK: Yes. In Los Angeles I did spend some time in museums there, and also in Chicago I did spend some time at the ARt Institute too. I would go from Indianapolis to the Chicago Art Institute and for the first time I saw a lot of fantastic work there. Another one of my favorite artists at the time was Mark Tobey with all his little line things. They were aalso very small and I think I responded to that sort of thing.

JC: Do you think there's some reason in that response to the kind of background you had in music? I mean for abstraction --

AK: Probably. I never really thought that much about it but I think maybe music had a lot to do with my response to what lines do. I suppose maybe from musical scores, or may be from just the fact that the lines in music are almost like very abstract lines. In fact, the choice I made to use for that music book was Johann Sebastian Bach's Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor which has to do with one melody that he kept repeating over and over and over into the most fantastic piece that I've ever heard. I first heard that piece when I was a sophomore or junior in college and I remember really feeling totally engulfed by it and I've never forgottne it. I decided that that was the piece I was going to use because, again, my thing was the line and what lines could do, the same line, so the interpretative lines went very well with that particular Back piece.

JC: Do you see line and rhythm almost in terms of an impression of sound?

AK: Well, maybe. But I think the thing that really intrigued me about lines is that they don't really exist, you know, in nature. They are totally a man-made thing; whereas everything else; texture, color,form, space, or whatever, all those elements in the arts, do exist in some way or ther, are all with us. But lines don't exist and since the fact that art is a man-made illusionistic thing, I think one element -- line -- really intrigued me. And the fact that since it really didn't exist, therefore it was a very profound thing to use as a vehicle for artistic images somehow. And not necessarily just the line itself. I mean the qualities, the various qualities of what one particular line could do. I mean it was almost like limiting yourself down to the most essential element and really dealing with that. And I think I've more or less been dealing with that ever since. Now, of course, it has become very real. But in those days I would still get this fantastic intuitive feeling about how I would do those line and what emotional thing would come out of those things like you can see in those images there.

JC: The kind of emotional response --

AK: There is a tremendous emotional response to various kinds of lines. And I think doing work from backwards, not really seeing what you're doing, and coming up with images that were more or less extremely intuitive, that did not have anything to do with reasoning or conditioning or knowledge that you had learned about or that --

JC: Do you think that the fact that you had drawn since you were a very young child --?

AK: I'm sure that had a lot to do with it; it had to do with lines. I'm sure that all of this must have. I don't know quite exactly why. But as I get older I try to put things in some kind of perspective and try to arrive at a reason why you do things. But in those days it was a totally intuitive kind of thing. In those days I didn't have the knowledge to sit down and figure out why I was doing which and what.

JC: Well, when you think back now, I can sense that you feel that there was a tremendous kind of excitement in seeing the directness and obviousness of this elemental, primal kind of directly putting down the line, the line directly evoking an emotional or an unemotional response. I mean I certainly feel that that reduction method which first excited you in Indianapolis, and now again you're going into in more tremendous depth here in this first book that you did at Cranbrook, do you feel that that "elementalness" is the thing that is carrying through all the way up to your current paintings?

AK: Yes, just about. Although there have been periods, which we'll talk about, when I was more or less trying to get rid of a lot of conditions about the other elements like color and form throughout. But then basically I have come back down to this, again to the line more or less. Even now my paintings are very much like musical scores in a way, the way the pigment kind of spills out, and how thick and thin, and they're sort of like musical scores anyway. The line is horizontal for the most part with a few vertical things, and what happens within that action you're almost looking at a blown up musical score. John Dowell came to visit me in New York just a few months ago. He plays the piano and is much involved with music. He will do a painting and then he will play from that painting. When he came to look at the work he was very comfortable with it because he found another musical score for him to play or something. So that really had a lot to do with that Bach book. Consequently, it was a very successful book. A lot of people loved it. I t went all over and I've received letters from musicians that just went ape and they would play the piece.

JC: Right at that specific time, Aris, what was your feeling about color?

AK: I did start using pretty bright almost like primary colors which was very unlike me because my earlier landscapes were all very subtle, muted, very light. But I did begin to use minimum little shapes of colors, as you can see in the books there. Sometimes I would print a whole edition of one dot of red or something. Which was kind of incredible and stupid; you know, you print thirty of one little dot and you run it through the press. But it was necessary; it was something that I had to do. In other words, I used color almost as a musical accent like staccatos or little minute crescendos or something. Color was just used as accents. It was not really used as a total end in itself. The lines were still the predominant elements of the work at the time.

JC: In some of that work I can almost sense that you are again even attempting to create an image of not necessarily of a landscape but of a plane --

AK: Yes. I mean you could even call them ladnscapes, they were more or less like universal landscapes, they had a lot to do with universal elements. A lot of the symbols used in those early drawings and prints still continued from that Greek suite idea. I was still using the Greek letters of the alphabet as symbols. If you're not Greek you wouldn't recognize them very much; you know, it was a symbol to you, it was not really a letter. Some of the letters in the Greek alphabet are very beautiful -- the gamma, delta, omega. I used the omega quite a few time almost as a symbol of end or whatever. They were specific letters that were used in different colors, used as accents and yet they were very landscapes.

JC: How would you relate particularly that Greek alphabet work that you did -- not necessarily to go back to it -- but in this case to the way in which Jasper Johns used numerals or our alphabet in his work in the sixties?

AK: You see, this was before the Jasper Johns sort of thing, before all that sort thing. I would never really just pick up a number and try to make an image out of it; I mean that wasn't my thing. I mean I don't think I was interested in that kind of mentality as Johns is.

JC: But the Greek letters to you meant what the numbers --

AK: Oh, maybe you're right. It could be. It could be.

JC: -- meant to him except that you were out of the culture.

AK: Maybe. There is something in that, sure. Perhaps -- I'm not sure. Maybe you're right. There was a certain mythical thing about the first suite at Tamarind when I was doing those Greek letters. I guess maybe it would be the same. I found that the forms were very beautiful and I used them as images.

JC: As common very familiar in the environment.

AK: Yes, I think you're right. Maybe that first suite was dealing more specifically with those things maybe similar to what Jasper Johns did later on. But the books really didn't go into that specifically; they were more what the line had to do with landscape quality or whatever pictoria quality that the little things might have.

JC: Now before we get off this suite that you did with the Greek alphabet, how many were there in that suite, and when did you finish it - in 1963? And was it in all black and white or was there color?

AK: It was mostly black and white but there were some earth colors used, but not in the way I used color later on, not in the way of accent; it was just a solid field of color thing.

JC: Do you feel that that work was your first real coming to grips with the body of work of abstract expression?

AK: Yes, I guess so. I think that was kind of a major concentrated work. And that's what I like about lithography. I mean if you do a suite you concentrate on something. That's what I like about doing books. They are like a real concentration, of pushing an idea through. I try to drum this into my students but I don't think too many of them really pick up on what I am trying to say about that. In other words, it forces you to push something through.

JC: Through discipline a series of --

AK: To do a series in space and you really can do some concentrated... You don't have to live it kind of halfway; you really finish it. And when it's finished you realize how substantial a body of work can be.

JC: Were you familiar at all at that time with the suite of prints that Barnett Newman did which very much deal with this quality of bands of lines and so forth that he had done with Tatanya Grosman?

AK: No. You see, at that time I was still very ignorant about the contemporary art scene. D'Aquila came to visit me once at Cranbrook and he said to me, "Why don't you wake up and see what's happening in New York? You're too isolated to yourself." But at the time I really didn't have that need. I was into myself, and to that one friend I had and we really had a very nice relationship in our work. Our works quite influenced each other. That was my world then. I mean I was still not aware of the big scenes that were happening at that time. The period of the sixties was a very tremendous thing in New York. But i was still just going on my way and figured that when the time came and the need would come that I would get out of my shell and look at things. I would very rarely even look at magazines or anything of that sort in those days.

JC: This was an important time in your life for something that you've also continued to do, and that was where you began -- and I believe this is where you first began -- to do teaching. You were a teaching assistant at Cranbrook teaching lithography?

AK: Yes. I was teaching most of the classes because Barker at the time didn't know much about lithography. I think that's probably why he gave me that scholarship to kind of bring it in. And there I did some very important work. I introduced the aluminum plate to the medium. Even at Tamarind we didn't work in zincs. But I found that the aluminum plate had many similarities to stone. So I pushed that and tried to experiment a lot with that and kind of mastered that plate. I guess it was one of the first times around the country that the aluminum plate was used in such a major way. And of course since then it has been introduced pretty much everywhere through Michigan.

JC: At Cranbrook then you set up the shop and ordered all the essentials to establish a lithography shop at that point. What were your impressions of teaching or your methods of teaching? Now there are two areas here; one is teaching technical things; and the other is your response to the individual student in his work.

AK: I think at the time I really wasn't that interested in responding to individual work. I was just interested in teaching the technique. Cranbrook was a graduate school and everybody more or less was left on his own. And at the same time I couldn't dare talk about anything. I wasn't even ready for that sort of thing then. They were my colleagues it wasn't like they were my subordinates. So I was just teaching pure technique. I would solve their problems. I was just too wrapped up in my own self at the time to try to deal with somebody else.

JC: So there then the major breakthrough that you would say for yourself and with your technical development of the use of the aluminum plate and --?

AK: Well, yes, technique-wise that's true. But I think the isolation of Cranbrook and the walks in the woods for hours and hours at a time was a thing that kind of was the most important thing about Cranbrook to me. It

forced me into myself and consequently a lot of things did come from that whole experience.

JC: And this started right away in the first year at Cranbrook?

AK: It started, yes. As I said, Walter Hamady kind of grew up at Cranbrook. I think he knew every inch of the grounds and we used to walk a lot in the woods and eat lunches in the woods. In fact, I think we spent more time walking that actually working.

JC: Did you feel a sort of common ground with him also because he was a poet and because you had music and you had a whole range of the arts then?

AK: Yes, I think so, plus the fact that I think there was some kind of understanding we had. I mean I understood what he was doing and he understood what I was doing. We had a tremendous amount of conversation going. I think he is a great guy. He was sensitive enough to understand certain things, and consequently it was a good relationship. We did things together and -- JC; the things you did, the things you understood at this point about each other, were each other's ideas, each other's work?

AK: Yes, all that. Plus the fact that I think he is Lebanese which was sort of like an ethnic thing that maybe I felt a little comfortable with and he had all those fantastic olives from his grandfather in Lebanon. I mean that's what introduced us. One olive introduced us to --

JC: It reminded you of the five olives for dinners?

AK: Right. His style of life was something that I responded to -- the food he ate, the food he cooked. He used to have feasts in his mother's house inn downtown Detroit. He would cook all this fantastic tabouli(?) and stuff and we would have all these feasts. It was a nice time.

JC: Yes. His mother and stepfather, who is an art teacher in one of the departments of Oakland Community College --

AK: I think it was Macomb Community College -- right?

JC: Yes, Macomb. They had a center going on their home where people floated in and out. That was your first experience with Detroit or coming into Detroit?

AK: That's right. And I think he had a sort of nice kind of family which I never really did have in a way so I was able to get into that a little bit.

JC: Was he the one who first introduced you to Wayne State University? I think he went to undergraduate school there.

AK: Yes, I guess so. I went to see the place down there and I think there was a buy in graduate school named Larry Blauvitz who kind of pushed to get me to teach there one summer. The department decided then to ask me to teach there. But I wasn't really planning on staying here. But somehow things happened.

JC: What was happening with Maryan? Was she in or out of this sort of dialogue that you had and your own personal dialogue with your development?

AK: No, she was mostly out of that. She just didn't deal with any of that sort of thing. I mean by this time the marriage had become -- well, pretty much habit sort of thing.

JC: Routine?

AK: Yes, kind of routine. Then we had this automobile accident. I guess I was driving in the snow for the first time and we had a pretty bad automobile accident. Of course, Walter was a tremendous -- END OF SIDE OF 3 - (Tape 2, side 1) SIDE 4

JC: So the accident you had was during the first winter that you were at Cranbrook? And it was the following summer that you taught that introduction to lithography at Wayne State University?

AK: Yes. I gave a kind of workshop there.

JC: And Larry Blauvitz arranged it?

AK: Yes, he was instrumental in getting me there. And of course by this time I had had this exhibit of all the Tamarind prints at the Cranbrook museum and attention was beginning to come up about the medium. Joy Naskanson, of the Detroit News, wrote this whole article about it in those days. It kind of started out with the

success of the print medium in this area in a way.

JC: A deeper concern for --?

AK: Yes. In those days prints weren't even paid much attention to, especially in Detroit. The galleries didn't have much to sell in the way of prints. If they did have some they were always in the back somewhere in some cubbyhole or something.

JC: So you had arranged with June Wayne at Tamarind through the Cranbrook Gallery --?

AK: No, it was all my prints --

JC: Your prints?

AK: It was the prints that I have, the collection that I had including my own prints there. The exhibit was of one print that I collected from all the people that I printed. It included all the Albers prints. It was a very beautiful show.

JC: And that was in the spring shortly after this accident?

AK: The exhibit was done the first year. Wallace Mitchell was head of the Cranbrook museum at the time. In fact, I gave Wally Mitchell one of the best Nathan Oliveireas that I had -- that black and white Christ of his -- a very beautiful print. That print came out of that exhibit.

JC: What was Wally Mitchell like at that time?

AK: Oh, I loved him. He was a nice guy; he still is I guess. I haven't seen him for a long time. I did like a few people there. Zepeshy was still there then. In fact my graduation was his day of retiring kind of thing. I didn't get a chance to talk much to him. Unfortunately, I wasn't painting there. I got a chance to talk to him a little bit about it, but not very much.

JC: So you let your painting go the first year?

AK: Well, I considered all those little things that I was doing outside of prints more or less like little paintings. I did paint a little bit but not as much as I did after I left Cranbrook, or a year later anyway, because I didn't work for quite a while.

JC: So at that time you were dealing with very small scale, rather --?

AK: They were all small scale. Every time I would try to do something big it would never work. Once a year I would try something like a six-foot canvas -- which now is a small size for me -- but in those days I couldn't deal with anything large. I just couldn't deal with anything large. The largest that I did then was like two by two feet square.

JC: This was another thing that you had in common with Walter Hamady. He was working pretty much on small pieces.

AK: Yes, we was working on small things. In fact, we had a show together at the Hanamura Gallery. Really it was my first show, although I did have a traveling exhibition of the tamarind suite I did traveling through the South. But this wa my first show in a gallery situation.

JC: So you had met Bob Hanamura by this time?

AK: No, I hadn't. He was Walter's friend. It was through Walter that we got this little show. And it was an excellent show.

JC: That was at the place he had when he was down --?

AK: When he was down on Harmonie Park, right?

JC: Did you sell your first works of art at that time?

AK: No, not very much.

JC: But you did sell?

AK: Some. Once the book came out it was quite successful. The Detroit Institute of Arts had bought one. And of course I went on the radio about it. I really believed in those books as being the only things that prints should

ever do. In those days I believed that prints should be like a record. A book is like a record, you put it away on a shelf and you only look at it when you want to. It's not an the wall all the time and get used to it.

JC: Well, that's a very interesting concept. That's more out of the Japanese tradition. Where did that idea com from?

AK: I don't know. For me I don't know. I think it just evolved. The books were so beautiful and so intimate.

JC: That wasn't a venture of Tamarind's?

AK: The prints at Tamarind were big and splashy and they got bigger and bigger and bigger. Gemini started printing huge prints. I never really was very much for big prints. And I guess the relationship with Walter too because he had this love for hand-set type books, you know, those handmade books which he does now as a business on the side. He publishes for poets and things of that sort. But somehow the intimacy and the context and the whole body of work within a package like a book was very intriguing to me. And I feel that if you play a piece of music over and over and over and over and over and over and over it's just like the goddamned grindstone, you just don't really listen to it any more, it's just something in the background. Whereas if you really want to relax and be silent and put a record on you really listen to it and listen to it as new again. And that's what I felt about those books. And I really pushed the whole idea about people doing intimate things and not so much treating printmaking as a painting because they are not.

JC: So this book that you did on Bach at this point, it took the course of that first full year to bring it to fruition?

AK: Yes because I was very busy there teaching and also experimenting with all those techniques, trying to ____ a very substantial place for lithography. And then, of course, something really did happen to me which resulted in this kind of nervous breakdown which sort of took up the second year at Cranbrook. I really didn't do much work the second year. Most of those books were done during the first year and maybe the first few months during the second year. After that I was totally out of it; I couldn't do anything.

JC: Okay. Well, then let's go back now to that summer that you taught at Wayne State University. That was a special course where in some depth you introduced lithography to Wayne State University. And I -- being one of the students i that class -- have a feeling, a recollection, that it was the first time you came to grips with talking with the students about their images; at least you did with me.

AK: I think I did with you because you were still a young student; I think the rest of them were teachers for the most part. I remember even Jack Bailey was in the class. He has since gotten a Prix de Rome and moved to Rome or something.

JC: There was a number of people in that class: Vera Wolfe, Diane _____, Stanley Rosenthal.

AK: Even Blauvitz -- I'm not sure.

JC: Blauvitz was there.

AK: And even Tom Woodward might have been there; I'm not sure if he was part of that.

JC: He was in and out. So here you have introduced this medium to two new schools in much more substantial depth than and ever been dealt with before.

AK: Yes. And that exhibition at Cranbrook I think substantiated the fact that lithography could be a very positive medium for artists here in this area. It had already been more or less established by really great artists at Tamarind. Some of them didn't have anything else but that in a way. Like Sam Francis did a hell of a lot of prints. And Albers obviously did a lot of prints. And Louise Nevelson went back and did more prints. They found that lithography was a very versatile medium and the artists could get into it immediately. It's not like etching which is a very slow process; or woodcuts which is limited, you know, cutting into the wood and that sort of thing. Lithography was just the medium for the painter, in a way; or even for the sculptor.

JC: You were beginning then at that time to feel comfortable in this teaching role technically and --?

AK: Well, I don't know. I've always liked people and liked dealing with people. That was my first experience of actually being on the other side of the scale to where I would be the focus of attention. Until then I was always being in the background somewhere listening to things. That was the first time that the observer became the observed kind of thing. That was an important step to me then. But I think what brought all this about... It was that breakdown that was a very important step in my life. It was more or less like the old Aris died and na new one was born literally. That was a very graphic example of what a nervous breakdown is.

JC: Well, was it, in fact, in that changes as you capsulized it, as you said just a minute ago, as it were the

observer becomes the observed at least for yourself enough confidence in yourself so that --?

AK: Yes, I think so. UP to that time I was a very timid, shy, insecure person. I would hardly even open my mouth practically except to very close friends. But then, of course, it became obvious that I would have to expound on things in front of a group of people and this and that. But I have always done very well with that. I never did prepare for anything. I have never prepared for any lectures because everything I have is ingrained in me; it's not like I have to memorize or learn anything. So it did become kind of easy. I did develop a nice kind of personality and since I'm not really a bad-looking man that helped a little bit. Well, it did. I mean I think people kind of respond to that and I do have this energy that I think I may vibrate when I walk into a room kind of thing so people do listen and they listen because I treat things very naturally and very informally.

JC: Okay. To get at the crux of what that change was, your second year at Cranbrook after the summer of 1965 when you taught at Wayne, and it wasn't a particularly productive year, but it was productive year in restructuring yourself?

AK: Yes. It was a most productive year actually, not in images but in finding out things about myself. I think finally my whole subconscious kind of came into the conscious. Which had a lot to do with the war years and my whole insecurities about this and that from the past. It was a very, very difficult year. There were times when I didn't think that I would make it. But Walter Hamady really stood by me very, very well. In fact, I think we kind of ceased to be friends after that because it was a lot of strain on him because he really did try to help. And my friends from the New Orleans days, Paul Chatelain and Barney D'Aquila having themselves gone through a lot of things, understood immediately and they would call me long distance and even had me going down there. Paul gave us an exhibition at the museum in Montgomery, Alabama -- it was the show that was at the Hanamura Gallery. And I went down there to lecture too between going in and out of all these depressions. but those guys were extremely helpful in pulling me out of my suicidal kind of frame of mind.

JC: Now when you look back at this -- you know, we've talked about some of your like general attitude about all the things that were happening through your youth and you talked again and again about sleep or the unconscious.

AK: Right. Absolutely. You see, up until that time my whole life was art, my gods were art and the artist, I didn't think there was anything more important than that. And I think that during that whole breakdown -- which was a total breakdown, I remember even smelling my flesh rotting away, I think it was what later on came to be described as an LSD experience but without the LSD... Some people were describing to me what the are; I said, "Jesus, is that all there is to it?" But I mean to the point of totally incapacitating yourself. But at the same time I must have had some strong genes in me because I quit drinking and I quit smoking and I quit all those things. I just drank water because I really wanted to find out what the hell that thing was all about. It wasn't until after I was coming out of it that I finally went to a psychiatrist because I didn't think... I stopped reading, all my gods sort of like fell from their pedestals and I saw that they were flesh and blood and bones. Books didn't make any sense; nothing mad any sense; art didn't make any sense. Then there was a kind of very, very slow process of coming out of it. I remember one specific night that was horrible thing actually. I was trying to go to sleep. I had this fevered brain. Every time I would try to fall asleep my head would just jump off the pillow about a foot from this _____ somehow. It was so bad that that night I decided to finally allow my demons to come in front of me and find out what they were. Before that I used to hate to go to sleep because I would have nightmares constantly. That night, once the more or less conscious decision came that the subconscious would knock on your conscious door and you finally opened the door, I remember finding out actually that the demons weren't as real as I expected them to be. I slept like a log. For the first time in my life I slept without dreaming. I was totally dead. That continued for a week without any dreams. It was like finally the thing did come out. Fortunately, it was very strong so that it had to come out or it would have destroyed, right? It was one or the other. Months later I finally decided -- you know, the Shakespeare thing "to be or not to be" -- I think that's a very real thing. It's a time in your life when you decide whether you are going to be, or you are not going to be; and if you decide to be... Then I made the decision that if I'm going to be, it's going to be damn well; it's going to be good.

JC: But it was really many years before you really felt the ground --

AK: Oh, of course. Absolutely. I wrote this thesis at Cranbrook, a very short thing of about two pages, that had a lot to do with that experience I was just coming out of it, just beginning to understand, when I was finally graduated from there. And I wrote this thing; anybody who reads it kind of freaks out. And I remember writing toward the end of that about art and even saying that art is something that I don't think people know much about, it's something that is beyond us in a way, to where now I come to understand and realize that if you can go beyond good and evil, and if you can go beyond beauty, if you can go beyond all that, you have art. This where art must point to. But anyway that thing took a long time. What it really did was it made me understand a lot of things. And since then I've been able to be a very good teacher to a lot of people because I'm able to understand most problems of young people and know what they're going through. I was able to get into them very well. It's been a strain but it has been a very positive kind of thing for me too. Even years later I'm still

trying to learn about myself from listening to other people and talking about things.

JC: Now during the second year, in the beginning of that year you did work quite extensively on the two books that you did in collaboration with Walter Hamady. Why don't you talk a little bit about the sense of that poetry and the sense of those two books? AK; I like Walter Hamady's poetry because they pointed to a very -- they were not romantic poetry in a sense -- I mean his poetry is very real. If you read it it has to do with some very real clarity about things. And even though I didn't understand it at the time, I really respond to very clean thinking, a very clear understanding about things without confusion of illusions and mythology coming into it. I think maybe that's why we were very good friends because we kind of understood each other about that. The experience of doing those books was quite a strain. IN a way at the time we were two egomaniac trying to collaborate, which was a very difficult thing. Especially in the second book we collaborated in images. The centerfold in that book was a mutual collaboration on one image. But nevertheless the books did turn out to be very beautiful. The experience of making them and making the paper and printing it and doing all that sort of thing never left me. And then the whole quality about the love of labor and how, if you have control of everything, how well actually you can do something... Not because of tradition. It had nothing to do about tradition. It had nothing to do about history or nothing. It had to do with the actual manipulation of tools and the pleasure of actually doing it.

JC: Is there a sense of ritual also in the collaboration too, which was a very unique thing?

AK: Well, obviously there is a ritual. Even when I do my work now -- you know, Sarah and Ed Flood came to the studio the other night. Sarah looked at the paintings and she was telling Cynthia that every piece seems to be so carefully and lovingly put together that it's almost like doing the garden, working in the garden with plants and stuff. It was a nice kind of thing to hear. But I have developed -- perhaps because of the Tamarind experience, because of watching the master printers dealing with the technique with such loving care - I did develop a profound sense of the material, of working with the material and respecting the material you with. The material itself is what is going to broadcast your ideas. It is through the materials that we are able to do anything.

JC: At this time does the work itself become like a religious experience?

AK: I guess so, in a way. I mean I suppose... What is a religious experience?

JC: Ritual?

AK: Yes. It's any kind of awareness of some kid of an understanding of some kind of total understanding of the mysteries of everything is obviously religious experience. I think the ritual of the work itself has to do, I think, with being a human being and being able to use your hands and act upon things with some kind of certainty and some kind of confidence and some kind of mastery over it; and you have control over it. It's that sort of thing.

JC: So that you make them work or you breathe life into them? or --

AK: Well, absolutely. That may sound a little romantic about breathing life into it but that is about what it is. It is sort of like the beauty of understanding the material and working with it. It's the only control you really have. In a way, you don't really have control over what happens to it. Once you have done it it takes its own thing and it goes its own way. It's like a child; you help it make it, and it's fun making it, and then it sort of grows up and becomes its own entity. And I think that this is what art is more or less all about. Creating images is not just to create beauty. For me it's not like social commentary on this or that. All that possibly can be, but for me it's another thing. It's all that, and it's above all that. It's something that you kind of do for your own love for it and skills and attention to it. And after that it takes off on its own and you are not quite aware of where it comes from and why it came, and why anything.

JC: But while you are putting it together you are putting it together in such a way that things are going all in the same --?

AK: Oh, absolutely. Obviously there is some kind of parallel between the understanding of your own life. I think that's why that breakdown was so important. It even made me understand what my work was about. After this breakdown I would look at some of my painting and I would turn them over because the frightened me. They were so revealing. Even those painting I did in Louisiana which were very light. It was almost like I wouldn't dare look at the world with open eyes; I was looking at it with kind of sleeping eyes, with very closed eyes. I mean I really became aware of what the work was about after that.

JC: The conscious intent of making the work?

AK: Right. It became conscious then. What went on in the past all of a sudden became very conscious of what were the reasons behind it, everything about it. But I think somehow, somewhere I developed this basic thing that tried to clarify things in trying to make things very real. Maybe it's because I'm not thinking enough. Fred says I don't know what he has to do with my... But I think the fact that clarity is a very important thing to me and

is very important to the work because only through clarity can you understand anything without an conflicts.

JC: Not to break this short, but when is the first time that you came into an awareness of the beast called the collector? Was it now?

AK: God, no. That was much later.

JC: It was later than this though?

AK: Yes. Well, they are not beasts actually. They are kind of nice people that without them we can't even survive.

JC: No, I didn't mean --

AK: But I think a better question would be: when did I become aware of the beast of the art biz. I mean that's another world in itself.

JC: How did you come to go to Wayne State University? Obviously the first course there the previous summer of 1965 led to them offering you a job? But --

AK: Well, I think that as it. As i've said several times before, I never do anything myself except to work. Everything that has happened to me has been like the wind picks me up and sets me somewhere and I'm there, and then it picks me up again and sets me somewhere again. I mean I never really consciously do something. I don't say, "I'm going to do this." Outside of my work, in a way, I don't really have much control over what I'm doing. I don't make those kinds of decisions.

JC: You made a decision at one point to take a studio in New York and to commute.

AK: No, even that had some other connotations. It wasn't really me that did that. I'll tell you about that later on.

JC: Okay. So that in the wind the --

AK: I mean I ended up going to New York because I was offered the job.

JC: Were there other jobs?

AK: I didn't even try. I never tried anything. I did not send one thing out anywhere. I've never had to look for anything. I have been very lucky. In a way, I have never had to look for anything in my life. Somehow, some kind of fate or something has always picked me up and put me there in some area. In fact, when I started thinking about taking the job at Wayne I went around to various people and asked them whether they thought I should stay here or leave. Albert Landry who used to run the J. L. Hudson Gallery told me to get out of here. A lot of people told me to stay, that there were things we could do here. When I really did decide that I was going to stay here I also decided that if I am going to stay here that my mouth is going to be broadcasting from this goddamned town and that's all there is to it. And I think I've pretty much succeeded in the past two years.

JC: Expressing yourself. Well, so during this whole time you're married particularly the second year.

AK: During the whole time. And I think Maryan was very helpful during those difficult times because she didn't do anything --

JC: She stayed with you?

AK: And that was a great help to me. She was there and constantly talked. I think one thing that saved me was the fact that I was not an introvert. Whenever things were really getting bad I would try to find anybody. Maybe it was very selfish of me but it was necessary for me to talk, talk, talk, talk constantly to someone. I had to talk. Fortunately, that talk really helped me get out a lot of stuff. I didn't work at Cranbrook in the latter part of the second year and I didn't work for nine months after I got out of there. I just couldn't make myself get back into something that I felt at that particular time was meaningless. It didn't mean anything. But then slowly somehow I began to come back again, slowly, little by little.

JC: In the fall of 1966 you started to teach at Wayne?

AK: Yes. I didn't start working again until the following fall practically.

JC: And you moved into Detroit from Keego Harbor?

AK: Yes -- well, I was in Birmingham at the time. I moved to Birmingham after the accident. Then I did move to

Detroit. We were living on West Chicago Boulevard at Dexter which supposedly was a pretty bad neighborhood. But it wasn't bad for me. We had a nice apartment cheap and later on I rented another apartment next to it to make a studio out of it and that's where the ladder work was done.

JC: The work makes a dynamic change when you do start to work again. But I want to speak here about that apartment and that _____ _____ ____ remember that clearly. You used to have a yellow canary. And I remember distinctly a bookcase with several favorite books that had evolved. And in the second year there you had a child -- was it the second year?

AK: I think so, yes.

JC: Well, before the child, you were working in this new --

AK: Yes, I started to work again.

JC: But in a very different vein. Can you talk about that work?

AK: I'm not sure that it was that different. As you can see, they are still quite minimal. Again, I started to use foreign things trying to get away because through the whole nervous breakdown I began to realize that I was quite free somehow from a lot of things that kind of made me static, you know, conditionings and whatever, fears, and all that sort of thing. In art I continued to search for things to perpetuate that, to perpetuate the freedom of the conditioned Aris to the freedom of the conditioned in the positive sense. In those days I started using foreign things like instatypes and stuff to make images that I didn't have much to do with images again.

JC: They were collage.

AK: They were more like collages, yes, a little bit. Instatypes of little people, little mechanical people. That was the first time I started using the grid with sliver point and very polished - gesso polished surfaces. And, believe it or not, that was about the time that the grid became a kind of important thing in the art world, too. It's amazing how all those things are parallel in different parts of the world. I still did not read anything. I still was not aware of anything that was going on. As a matter of fact, it was pointed out to me at one time too that there was an article of Evans Mark (?) and so I really began to get into art I liked her ever since. But those were the days when I wasn't really using the pure grid. I was just using the grid as a means for something else. It was never really used as a thing in itself except in those lithographs up there. But, again, all those things had to do with -- came out of a musical linear sort of thing. The lines and become very hard-edged, the little singles were very hard-edge. The work was now more or less a little more intellectualized than initiative from the back of the thing that I was doing before. That work was never shown anywhere. In fact, most of it has been destroyed except for a few slides that are left.

JC: There were other teachers and other influences I suppose? Walter Hamady had an influence earlier. Now as you moved into teaching at Wayne were there any other people on the faculty or any other influences?

AK: No. Walter's influence was mental. He helped me to kind of... Walter seems like he was born an old man, in a way. And I was just very naive for a long time. His influence was that of helping me out to understand things through very difficult times. Wayne had nothing to offer me as far as people working there and all that sort of thing. I met John Negler for the first time and we became a little bit -- as close as you can get with John. But I've always had a kind of straight -- almost like those blinders that horses have about my work. I would never accept any kind of initial influence or immediate influence from anything else.

JC: So the influences were, again, coming out of linearness, the sense of the grid that doesn't exist but patterns that were created in grid form --?

AK: Right. Absolutely.

JC: -- such as little soldiers and so forth. Do you have any idea why this work, which a lot of it you say you destroyed, was so restricted, so tight?

AK: Yes. I think after things become conscious, after the subconscious becomes conscious they obviously become intellectualized. You begin to reason things out. In the earlier days, in a way everything was done very subconsciously: I guess the word is "intuitively" done. When things began to become very conscious for me I woke up more or less. I began to really wake up and my own senses more or less began to be more attentive to my own body, to my breathing practically, and I think they were beginning to intellectualize because of that, because of this kind of reasoning out of things. Consequently, the work was about reasoning out things and dividing things and putting things in a more or less very designed kind of solutions in some way without being designing. That was a very important period just because the intellect came into it. And later on I think the intellectual and the emotional kind of merged together into what's happening now. But in those days I think the

other extreme -- the intellectual extreme -- was very necessary from the totally intuitive extreme that I was into before. As I've said at that time, I wasn't really thinking about showing in galleries. I was still just trying to find by myself, still trying to understand things and still trying to understand in relation to what the work was about. Something did happen though and some of the major breakthroughs that I've had in my work have been through dreams actually. In the meantime I was having this correspondence with D'Aquila in New Orleans and we talked a lot about the influence of science on art and all that sort of thing. At one time Scientific American actually was my bible. The last painting I did from that whole series had to do with -- came out almost verbatim from an illustration of a circuit in Scientific American. As I was doing that, which is the last painting down there and then over here to where it has those dots all around the edge with the grid in the middle, it's like a blown up circuit. It was the first big painting I did, it was eight feet long and, I think, two feet wide. And, again, it was done with sanded gesso and then the sliver point which was very meticulously put together over an eighth of an inch grid, all over, which too a long time. And then I put down the instatype block dots all around it. They were not in straight lines but were staggered all around. I would spend a lot of time in the Science Library at Wayne looking at science books and stuff. And during that time I had this dream about being enclosed. I had this fantastic dream that I was almost like in a fetal position enclosed in a very bright, colorful sort of thing. I woke up and said: that's it, this is what my work is going to be about. It had to do with something very, very positive that would frame a negative area, you know, like I was within that thing very much. So the next painting that I did from that time I went to try to find a very positive image that everybody could understand. The thing that I found then was the spectrum, the whole spectrum, not just a visual one but the invisible one but I picked up the whole color separations from a science book, it was exactly like I found them in a science book. I first did this painting where I painted the stripes of the whole spectrum across the canvas. Then I taped the edge, just about half an inch, just the edge of it and then I painted the whole thing black. When I erased the tape it was the most fantastic experience to pick up the tape and watch those colors and line of color come out, and what it did to that was fantastic. I even made a little tape recording on my ideas about negative and positive not being unequal any more, that the negative and positive is something that is positive and that the positive activated the spectrum so much the negative area that it made it positive. A kind of nice group of paintings happened from that time, the whole elimination of me, of myself; I was even thinking in terms of like perhaps death which is connotative of being negative doesn't really exist, that everything is flowing one into another.

JC: Well, the actual voids in the canvases was not a black but a deep gray, gray-black.

AK: A lot of them were black and then I even went to white. But it didn't matter what I would do with it.

JC: It was still a play between positive and negative?

AK: Yes. The museum has a very important painting of that period which they already realize. I mean anybody who has seen that painting when it was up -- I've had more fantastic response from that even from the common minds more or less. And one time I was teaching an adult education class out in Southfield. A young woman in the class who was doing this nice kind of painting came to me after she had seen that painting and she said: that what she really got out of the painting was the fact that you really had to get into yourself, it forces you to get into yourself. And this is what the whole thing was about; it's almost like a flame all around and now allowing you to frivolously escape anything but really get into yourself. That was the most fantastic description of that painting that I ever heard. I didn't even know about it myself. So that is a very strong painting and it did get some nice response. I mean when you were saying that at the museum in the modern section there I thought it was a very strong painting and held very well along with the Stellas and the Rauschanbergs and all those people in those days.

JC: Well, right here at this time then you made a major breakthrough not only in understanding how you were going to reinterpret this positive and negative, but also in scale. And you are back onto painting?

AK: Right. Absolutely.

JC: And the body of work that just preceded this series of --

AK: They were still more graphic. Now they were paintings; now I'm back into painting. And I enjoyed every moment of it. In fact, I even used to do unnecessary things -- although they were quite necessary -- that is, I would treat the black with brush and various kinds of blacks to make it a very rich black. It would take me hours to put the surface down, although I wasn't really that interested in surface or any of those kinds of issues that were going around. But still I was interested in trying to really enjoy the actual working aspect of it.

JC: Now there's another very important thing that happens here and that is the birth of your daughter. How did that whole preparation for a child, you know, and your apartment, making room for it, and the child being born, how did that affect you?

AK: Well, of course that was fantastic.

JC: How does that relate to this shift in this work?

AK: I don't think it really has... In a way, nothing in my life has much direct relationship to what I'm doing. I've been saying that I've had a one strange thing when it comes to art ever since I was a kid. Nothing would stand it its way positively or negatively.

JC: Yes. But the whole process of new life --

AK: The new life had a lot to do with my own personal thing. Finally you have this person, this new child; you immediately see yourself as a child, as a baby which brings you to the present. I mean the greatest thing about children is that they bring you to the present. You don't have time to worry about your bullshit. You're just there. Of course Georgie came along. One of my greatest experiences was watching that birth. In those days a husband was not allowed to be present at the delivery of a baby. You know, Patrine was a friend of ours.

JC: He was your doctor?

AK: Maryan's doctor, yes. But he was also a friend because his wife was going to school at the time. And we had some very good conversation in the past with him. When he was delivering the baby we talked about -- I don't know -- philosophy or something. I watched the baby come out of the womb and it was a tremendous experience to watch this new life which kind of strengthens my whole thing about being alive. I was very glad I was alive at that second; that's for sure. And some of the happiest moments were spent when I was working in my studio in the next apartment and Maryan would bring Georgina in and we'd sit around and in time the baby would start responding to some of my work. I just remember how wonderful I felt then, how almost fulfilled I felt, how beautiful the whole thing was. And it was great. That time was fantastic.

JC: That was pretty much moving into 1967?

AK: 1967 - 1968.

JC: At the same time you had a grant to develop a paper mill at Wayne in that summer of 1967?

AK: Right. Well, I have to give credit to Barker for the paper. He really introduced the paper. I think quite a few people have picked it up, including myself. We found out what a fantastic tool handmade paper is. When I went to Wayne I decided that we should do something about that. As you remember, you assisted me in that and that grant we had that summer. We got to know each other very well during that time. We spent so much time together making paper and swimming in the afternoons; and even those great lunches that Maryan used to prepare.

JC: It was a very good time. I remember the summer. There was a ritual just in the time that we would take our meals as well as in the whole building of the paper mill and doing the experiments to --

AK: Everything had become so real for me. Eating had become a tremendous thing, whereas before I didn't pay any attention to it. Breathing had become tremendous; I started exercising. Slowly I actually started to read again. Immediately after that I became so thirsty for reading I would read anything possible. I would go through Yoga and Zen and all that sort of thing that I had never done before. Maybe I should have done that earlier in my life. But this was my youth now. I was twenty-seven but I was just a young kid and I was curious about everything. I would swallow everything. I was just constantly reading and trying to understand my fears which still persisted in some way, but of course not as bad as they were before. I guess I was able to deal with them and understand them. I was able to deal with this energy -- for the first time in my life I realized the _____ that energy has; it is not negative or positive, you know, it is just energy. And it comes to you and it's up to you to make use of it as being destructive or creative. That was something I hadn't realized before. I had all this energy which I used to kind of mistake as being aggressiveness. i was always afraid of hurting somebody. Of course I never raised a hand to anybody but my whole fears in those days were just -- I couldn't even go into a kitchen and deal with a knife in my hand to cut up vegetables without thinking that I was going to stab either somebody or stab myself. That fear was so terrific.

JC: How you were going to direct energy and that became --

AK: That became very, very important for me to understand that.

JC: And then with this work and the directing of your energy into this work and the excitement and success of it. And of course that painting was the Purchase Prize painting in the 1968 Michigan Artists Show.

AK: Yes, 1968. I don't remember who the jury was. I know that Sam Wagstaff called me up and told me I had gotten a prize, but I didn't realize that I had gotten one of the big prizes there. And then at that time I was collaborating with Sam Wagstaff to do the Robert Morris suite. I hadn't quite started yet. And then, of course,

Gertrude Kasle offered that purchase prize and decided to give me a show at the Kasle Gallery. That was really the first major exhibition of paintings I ever had. I don't think people took me very seriously because they knew me so well as a printmaker and as a printer that --

JC: Being a painter was something that was foreign to them?

AK: It was foreign to them. And it took me a long time to get out of that little... That's why I always felt kind of resentful about this town always trying to push me into those little corners, and I was never pushed into any corner. I mean I've been doing things well, I mean absolutely well. I could even print for Bob Morris and get into his scheme without any resentments or egos going. I've never had that. And to be faced with the thing that other people were pushing certain things was very disturbing to me.

JC: They would think that you were just a printer and not know you as a whole person?

AK: Yes.

JC: That happens in history until people have some insight and perspective.

AK: I'm sure it does but in the meantime it does bother you. Even up to now; I mean I doubt very seriously that a lot of people are really taking me that seriously no matter how many times I've shown. Certainly New York has helped me. New York is not like Detroit. They're you're accepted for what you do, and what you do to make your money doesn't matter to them.

JC: How did you carry this painting with void and the spectrum to conclusion before you changed your --?

AK: Well, something very important happened to me in 1968, a disaster actually. On my thirtieth birthday my father died. That was a major event. And of course it was a kind of symbolic thing for me. When he was still alive he was such a strong person. He was always kind of flying over me kind of thing, like his wings were always there. I think I never really grew up until he died: when he died he gave me birth. His death was a very traumatic experience for me because I did have a tremendous amount of respect for the man and I really did want him to accept me as I am. I really wanted to get to talk to him as one human being to another. Unfortunately, this happened on the day before he died. I hadn't seen him for years. The last time I had seen him was when he came to my graduation at Cranbrook which was a disaster area because I was still going through this nervous breakdown. I said things to him that he didn't really understand as far as why I was saying them to him. I was being very candid or hones about it -- thinking I'd be very honest of course can't really talk about this sort of thing with parents except after a while. And it was a disaster area. I mean it was just awful, just horrible. The he left. I hadn't written to him for practically two or three years and I didn't see him. Once in a while he would call from San Francisco or somewhere. I can still sometimes feel like the phone will ring and there he will be from heaven somewhere or hell wherever he might be or somewhere like that. One day I received a phone call from my brother that my father was going to the hospital and it seemed like it might be serious and that I should go down there to see him. I didn't take that seriously because my father said that he would never die, that he would live forever. I though; naw, that's another scare, it can't be anything serious. So I went down there very casually to see him because I was asked to go. He had cancer of the lungs. Apparently he had smoked four packs of cigarettes a day for at least fifty years starting I guess when he was like thirteen or fourteen. He was a very young man, a very strong man; he was sixty-two perhaps when he died. He was very strong and still a very good-looking man. We had an afternoon to ourselves before he went to the operating room. As soon as I walked into his room he kind of looked at me and said, "My goodness, you really look like a poet." It was really nice. I sat there for a whole afternoon with him. We had the most relaxing conversation I can ever remember having with him, just a total acceptance kind of thing. I had finally grown up and e could now talk about things. Fortunately, I had that before he died. But then ne went to the operating room. The following day we all kind of knew that he wasn't going to make it. They found out that the cancer had spread into the esophagus and all that sort of thing. He didn't know that but he saw it in our faces, and he knew. I guess I always had this thing about wanting to know how people die especially people that I have a lot of respect for. Sometimes I search the libraries to find out how a person that I respect died, such as an artist or a writer and so on. That's very important to me if a person really dies as he lives. In his misery I had the gall to ask him that question, "How is your mind now that you are about to go?" It was an awful thing to ask. But he said, "My mind is fine. It's just that it's my body that wants to let go." But he died like he lived. He was a man of very strong convictions, he didn't even bow to the fear of death, or to the fear of religion, he didn't bow to anything. He died right exactly as he lived. And my respect for him certainly tripled and quadrupled. Unfortunately, now many times I've really missed him because he was one of the most real persons I have ever met. It would be nice to know him now and talk to him and show... Like he always wanted to see me doing what I'm doing now, you know, having exhibitions and being respected. That would really have been a nice thing for him. But anyway --

JC: How did that change your work?

AK: Again, I don't think it changed the work. Nothing changes the work. Nothing really. I mean things change

the work but not really, nothing traumatic changes the work. The work only changes when it needs to change.

JC: Yes, but at this point, I mean we started this by talking about these particular paintings with grid --

AK: I got bored. That's what happened. One time after that show at the Gertrude Kasle Gallery I did a lot of paintings which I burned. They had to do with bringing the spectrum within inside, you know, dealing with a lot of lines. One night I looked at all the work -- at this time I had this nice studio at Common Ground -- and I said; my God, am I bored taping! this is just going nowhere. One night I just threw everything out. I stretched a canvas, six by ten feet, this rolled canvas, and I said to myself; I'm going to start more or less from scratch. I'm going to put one pencil line six inches away from the edge and start painting on that. And somehow -- I don't know how or why or where -- the idea came to start using this squeezer from a cake decorating set to push the pigment out. Of course that brought in a lot of other things. The action of painting became fun. I would run around the canvas with this thing and I would create those lines that were full of energy. And also the noise that the tool made across the canvas was fantastic, and the whole thing became a very nice thing.

JC: So it became semi-action painting?

AK: Semi-action. Sam Wagstaff used to think that I continued from Pollock, that I took over where Pollock kind of left off. During one of the Michigan Artists show Sam didn't want me to enter anything, he wanted me to take all those paintings and put them up as a one-man show in front of the Michigan Artists show by the balcony there at the front. I told Sam, "No, I can't do that." I think Sam really liked the work because once when he was in Paris he sent me a postcard of -- you know, when you take a tiny photograph of traffic and the whole thing was lines going in circles like that. It was just incredible. He wrote on the card, "I wanted to send you this because this is what the French are doing with your work." And then he said something about "maybe you can go into neon" because you know he was about bright -- I really felt good about that. He understood. And yet he wouldn't send his own little things. But anyway that body of work went on. And then I started using hypodermic needles with watercolor kind of thing to color inks and then the action became even more and more facile was going around, they were more organic. And there was a body of exciting work. The of course the mural downtown came about. In fact, I think the reason they asked me to do this mural was not because of that work, because my work was kind of young, but I think they wanted me to do this hard-edge thing Frank Holbert was kind of responsible for that. I told him that if he would trust me I wanted to do what I wanted to do. He said, "Sure." So I submitted a little sketch of the Renaissance Center(?) and he rejected it. but Bob McCabe was good enough to come to the studio and look at the one painting and as soon as he saw the painting he said, "Go ahead and do it." And I think that wall is still very beautiful. I've had a lot of nice response to it from some good people all over the country.

JC: Now there were several things that happened here. You were involved with Common Ground and at one time you were even president of it. When did you first become involved? What was that all about?

AK: Well, in 1969 I guess when I finally got a studio there -- I needed a studio. Common Ground had just moved into that space and they had enough space so I moved in there. And being the way I am, I always want to make things, do things well somehow. I took it a little seriously and I thought that it needed more kick or something and that we should do something, this and that, you know, I wanted to voice opinions about this and that. I did become thee president for one year. We had a little excitement doing certain things. We painted the place that sort of thing. Then during that time Greg Murphy came up and started talking about he idea of opening up a gallery. In a way, I was still with Gertrude Kasle. I as going to have another show with her in a couple of years later, as far as I was concerned anyway. And then knowing that the art scene in Detroit being so awful for local artist. I thought it would be a good idea to drop out of the Kasle Gallery and help establish this gallery which turned out to be the Willis Gallery. It's quite successful now in a way but in those early days there were a lot hard times dealing with so many characters and the art scene was becoming... Sam Wagstaff had come to Detroit and had created a kind of aura about art in Detroit. You remember all that. Greg and I and a few people practically more or less put the gallery together. So then they made me this kind of chairman of the board for that gallery. I think I did this for a year. We started the Willis Gallery. In 1972, I guess it was, I did have an exhibition of these paintings there. In the meantime I had kind of broken away from my family and had bought this house in Windsor on Lake St. Clair, right on the lake. And I just went nuts; I couldn't deal with the house then and the commuting thing and this and that.

JC: Well, at the time that you first went into Common Ground and put some of your energies into the organization of that, and then later into the Willis Gallery, Sam Wagstaff had come to Detroit, was in Detroit. Were there other things that you remember about, you know, your relationship with him that is of significance?

AK: Well, my relationship with him was business more or less. He knew what I could do with printing. He wanted to do things because he had just come back from the Hartford Museum, I guess, and he did a few portfolios and he was excited about doing portfolios or prints. And then the Robert Morris suite came along. I hired Theo Wujcik to work with me on that. It took us a long time. In the meantime one of my major graduate students -- Tom Scofield --had built up that press.

JC: He had designed a press and built it?

AK: He built it out of scrap or something which really turned out to be quite good for me. And so I set up a little shop there as well as my painting studio. I went to New York. And I saw Bob Morris and we talked about what he wanted to do with his maps and all that sort of thing. I kind of knew exactly what he wanted to do. He sort of let me do most of it, you know, most of the decisions on color. We even did the drawing from his maps and the plates. I think he came only twice to do some hand-drawn things that were necessary. And that is a very beautiful suite; I think it's a fantastic suite. It's a sleeper but it's a fantastic suite, and I'm very proud of it. I think it's one of the best things that I've done technically. It was quite a job; God, it was quite a job. But I learned even more about the medium doing that. I think it took us about six months to do it. And the edition was very large, it was about 125. That was the first time I ever printed such a large edition and solid colors and huge transparent colors. But it did turn out to be fantastic. So my relationship with Sam was more or less on that basis. Although on the side once in a while he'd help me with my work. Every time I would finish a body of work I would invite him to see it and we'd talk about it and he was very helpful about that. But mostly the basis of the relationship was business. He would commission those things and I would do them.

JC: When you established that shop at Common Ground did it have a name at that point?

AK: No, I just -- I mean when later on I went into this Krishna Vera thing I tried to start this Detroit workshop in fine prints. Which didn't get off the ground. But I didn't really have a name for it or anything. It was just --

JC: You did other free lance work then for Sam. And then what were the other people that you printed?

AK: There were three crazy guys that used to publish a balloon newspaper.

JC: From California?

AK: Yes. I've forgotten their names -- let's see, one was Henry Humboldt, and another one was -- I've forgotten their names really. In fact, I think those suites are still sleeping in the basement of the museum. And they were quite nice, a couple of nice suites. And the last thing I did for Sam was called the Newton Suite (?).

JC: How many prints were in those three different suites?

AK: They were all ten more or less.

JC: So that then you did three different suites each of ten?

AK: Four different suites. It was about forty different prints.

JC: And that went on for several years?

AK: It went on for a couple of year, yes. I was doing it in the summer times and it was a very nice way for me to make a living. In the meantime, as I say, I separated from my family, though I kept a pretty close relationship with them. And in the meantime I met Cynthia and we have a very, very nice --- END OF SIDE 4 - (Tape 2, side 2) END OF INTERVIEW