Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Mischa Richter, 1994 September 27-28

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

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Mischa Richter on September 27 and 28, 1994. The interview took place in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The sound quality for this interview is poor throughout, leading to an abnormally high number of inaudible sections. The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is an—we're all up and running. This is an interview with Mischa Richter at his house in Provincetown, Massachusetts, on September 27, 1994; Robert Brown, the interviewer. Perhaps we can talk about your family, your family background, the earliest memories you have. You said you were born in 1910 in Kharkov in what—

MISCHA RICHTER: Ukraine

ROBERT F. BROWN: Ukraine. How'd you get there apart from your mother having you there? But I mean were your family long in that area?

MISCHA RICHTER: It's not very clear to me how long they'd been there, but it couldn't have been more than five years as far as I can guess.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, they hadn't really been there long.

MISCHA RICHTER: But, uh, that's about all I know about it. They weren't born in Kharkov. They were from other parts.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Also within, what, then Russian Empire presumably?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, it was all called Russia of course, and actually, Kharkov is very close to the Russian border, and it's a young city relatively speaking—a manufacturing and university city. Most of the population was Russian, and the language was Russian, but geographically, it's still in the Ukraine area, so.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you were, you've said, an only child.

MISCHA RICHTER: I'm an only child, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And your father was an engineer?

MISCHA RICHTER: No. He started as a plumber's assistant at a very young age and then he fell in love with plumbing. [Laughs.] He just loved—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, what—

MISCHA RICHTER: —he can walk in the room and say, "I don't have to measure it," you know on heating and all that. "I know exactly how much pipe you need, how long," and so on, and so on [00:02:06]. And then he worked for Plumbing Concern [ph] and eventually opened up his own plumbing supply business.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And your father in Kharkov had a business and then—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, he had his own business, and it was, of course, confiscated during the revolution like all private property.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Even during the revolution, these things can happen very quickly, as you—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, I don't recall exactly, but he was arrested at three o'clock in the morning and the—he was arrested. He was flanked by four mercenaries, and the man who led the arrest explained to my mother at that time that all people who have—employs a number of people had to be held and then—to make sure that they wouldn't do anything to sabotage the revolution and then implied that some of them might be relieved, but for now, they had to be held somewhere where they could be watched, so, and that's about it. He was released

eventually and made commissar of the whole city of the waterworks—a job, which he didn't relish because there was a lot of contraband and all that stuff, and he was responsible for every nail. [00:04:00] And a cousin of mine—a second cousin of mine who works for this fellow, this multibillionaire who's been helping the emerging countries—Soros, I think.

ROBERT F. BROWN: George Soros.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, he works for him. Brought back the telephone book with my father's name in it. He also looked up the records. They have his name as commissar of this waterworks for the city of Kharkov. He also brought back photographs of the house where I was born, and it looks pretty much the same as it was when I left it. So I was quite pleased to see it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would you—what are your earliest memories of where you lived and things like that?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, uh, when I talk about my life during the revolution, it seems the very opposite of what people expect because nothing happened. [They laugh.] I lived on the main drag, and every time I went out, I'd see demonstrations and parades. But my father was very proud of the fact that I drew pictures, and he got me a drawing instructor. I had two drawing instructors. I didn't like one, so he got me another one. I had a piano teacher.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mentioned one teacher's name was Kastoff [ph]?

MISCHA RICHTER: Kozlov [ph].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Kozlov [ph]?

MISCHA RICHTER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Who I found out later in talking with some people here who had heard of him, and that he was fairly well known at that time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your father indulged your talents, did he? I mean he was—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, he indulged, yes, but I do think it gave me the kind of self-confidence that made rejections bearable [00:06:03]. I always felt if they reject me that's their hard luck. [They laugh.] Yeah, ego, ego, ego, vanitas vanitatum. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you were even exhibited you said when you were only five or six? There were some of kind of shows?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, my teacher, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Kozlov [ph]?

MISCHA RICHTER: —one of my—no, the other one that I got made sure that I got into a show, and that's about it. I mean, I was in the show when I was very young.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You might recall what kind of drawings those might have been?

MISCHA RICHTER: No, I don't recall at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did he have you draw from things or just from your imagination, do you remember that?

MISCHA RICHTER: Usually imagination and sometimes I did satirical drawings because the politics was in the air all around me, so I just drew it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you—did your family talk politics much, or—do you recall—was your father so busy with his business before the revolution?

MISCHA RICHTER: My father was not opposed to the revolution because being a Jew, the communist at that time represented liberation for the first time in the history of—he had actually seen an officer, uh—what do you call the—when they rip off your epaulettes in front of the company because he called someone a Jew. So the thing was, at first, communism seemed like the most wonderful and ideal solution to a very oppressive government. And I recall he was impressed with the fact that Lenin and—there was no—Lenin and Trotsky used to argue all night, and he said, "Gee, that's—you know that's wonderful. [00:08:14] They must be very bright to stay up all night discussing things." [They laugh.] Time too, I remember the communist won because they promised two things that the people wanted. They were tired of discussing politics. They wanted bread and the end of the war, and that they delivered, and at that moment in history, that seemed like a promised fulfilled.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, you were schooled by something, I don't know that it was Bolshevik at all, but you've mentioned a society of working women. What was that? Is this something—your mother, was she associated with this sort of thing or how—

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't recall why. It was a private school, and it was run by the society, which obviously was some of kind of women's rights group, and they were all Tolstoy followers. Tolstoy, of course, was completely removed from any communist idea, but it certainly was happily opposed to the way things were under the czars.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were these teachers like? Were these usually teachers [ph] of means or—

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't know anything about that. I just remember one teacher in my class, and that's all I had. She was a woman who came to class in a severe black dress. She wore pince-nez glasses, you know, that she'd pin to her nose, and, uh, she didn't wear any shoes because Tolstoy didn't wear any shoes symbolically. [00:10:07] I don't think he ever went out in the snow without shoes, but he liked that as a symbol of humility and being part of the people I suppose. It's like Saint Francis, was it, sharing his cloak with a beggar?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Saint Martin.

MISCHA RICHTER: That guy or say whoever—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Saint Martin I think.

MISCHA RICHTER: —one of the saints, yes. Well, I thought it was Saint Francis. I'm sorry.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Saint Martin [ph].

MISCHA RICHTER: One of them anyway. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But were you—what sort of things did you learn? What was the curriculum in that school run by the society of working women?

MISCHA RICHTER: I only went one session, and I don't remember. It must have been multiplication, you know—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The usual.

MISCHA RICHTER: —reading, the usual stuff, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well then, uh, with school or otherwise, where'd you go, to a regular school there in Kharkov? Because you were how old when you family left? You must have been about seven or eight before you left, right, or 10 even?

MISCHA RICHTER: I must have been around—close to 10, but most of my schooling was done privately at home with, uh—I only went one winter to that school and then I don't remember what happened. But I had a governess who spoke both French and German, and she also taught me the regular things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So it was—it was—they were trying to teach you various languages and all, give you sort of a genteel upbringing, your parent perhaps if you look back?

MISCHA RICHTER: I think you're probably—as you well know, all Europeans try to learn another language because of the proximity of other countries. [00:12:05] So if I had remained there, nothing would've happened to stop it. I would've probably ended up by speaking French and German as well as Russian, of course, which I speak even today.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. The—at the revolution then, you said it was—you pointed out earlier, nothing seemed to happen except your father was briefly interned, but then he was released and had a position.

MISCHA RICHTER: Given a responsible job, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, and very responsible and—was he, do you recall, as being worried at that time at all? You said it was a very heavy responsibility, and they were watching—

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't—I don't remember anything about his moods, except generally speaking, he is a very cheerful type. He's the kind of a guy that everybody liked. He's quite handsome and very friendly. In fact—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And your mother, what was her—sorry.

MISCHA RICHTER: Go ahead.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No, you were saying about your father, in fact—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, that's about it. He was a likeable guy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And your mother, was she of similar personality or—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, I think she was a little more picky about her friends. My father was hail-fellow-well-met.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. Why did, uh, you decide to leave, or do you recall, had there been—

MISCHA RICHTER: My father had—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —discussion?

MISCHA RICHTER: —brothers and sisters in Boston who came to Boston after the 1905 revolution or something, a war or whatever happened then. And they were doing all right in Boston more or less, and so he figured that it's dangerous to remain in this high position that he had because they're not very nice if they accuse you of not being responsible, so—[00:14:15]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he had, apparently, no ambition to rise in the party—

MISCHA RICHTER: No, no, no, he was apolitical.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was apolitical, right.

MISCHA RICHTER: He just wasn't against the revolution because life was so unbearable under the czar. As you know, it was called the prison house of nations. It was just horrible for everybody except a few that made it, but the rest were very bad. So he just went on vacation, which they gave him in his job, and he corresponded, which for some reason, letters came through with people he knew in Poland. And we took a train with our baggage and everything to the—towards the Polish border.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And took a good many of your possessions or some of them?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, quite a few possessions, yeah. And because, uh—and he corresponded with a man who said he would meet him at a certain point in the woods. I don't know how they managed to do it, but I recall he—we just hired someone, you know, with a horse and buggy take us to a certain point in the woods.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean you got off the train in Poland?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, my father scouted around for—a peasant woman was willing to do it, and she said, "I just hope you don't get caught." And she took us to the edge of the woods, and she left us in this crepuscular light. [00:16:04] You know, it was getting dark, and we were just left standing there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: With your baggage?

MISCHA RICHTER: With our baggage—

ROBERT F. BROWN: In Poland?

MISCHA RICHTER: —in the edge of the woods, and this man showed up that said he would and then he led us through the woods in total darkness towards the Bug River, which still separates Poland from Russia, you know the border. And luckily for us, no one challenged us. We got in a rowboat, and he took us across. But the border being several thousand miles, you couldn't very well have posted people all over watching it, so we just crossed it. And then we spent a year in Poland living in luxury on a farm and, uh—the visa came through and then we took the—went to the harbor and went—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were in luxury in the sense of, what? You mean abundance to eat and all—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, well, there was—my father's brothers, I think they sent them something like $5,000 or so collectively, which was a lot of money and then he probably had some too. So we lived in a farm, and there were a lot of Russians around who we got friendly with that you—we—my mother and father used to see them all the time. My father hired a Russian White Army officer who also escaped from the revolution to come around and teach me. We studied geography and mathematics. He had no money at all, so he's still wearing his army uniform while he was teaching me. And then when the visa came through, we went to the harbor, and we had a few days off before the boat sailed, so we took a train to Paris and looked at *Mona Lisa*. [00:18:16] [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your education continued.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, continued. I tell you culture always keeps going. And then we boarded the Paris, the French Line. We ended up in New York, Ellis Island where a cousin of my father met us, and we were out of there in about an hour, spent the night in Brookline where—or Brooklyn where he lived, and the next day, we took a train to Boston and the rest is—the rest is the rest. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you arrived happy or unhappy to have left or indifferent or just very curious or—

MISCHA RICHTER: I was curious mostly. My mother thought the country was not cultured. That was her objections.

ROBERT F. BROWN: She was probably right.

MISCHA RICHTER: And she was—would always argue with my father about—he'd say, "Well, you wanted to come here," and she'd say, "You wanted to come here." Of course, years later when I was in a cab with a Russian driver in New York, I told him all this. He said, "You are very smart to come here." [They laugh.] He was right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. This was about 1922, I believe, is when you arrived is what you told me—

MISCHA RICHTER: 1922, yes. I'm a derivative citizen, a category that no longer exists.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Derivative?

MISCHA RICHTER: Derivative. It was abolished soon after that—we arrived. But in those days if you were under 12—and I was just about two weeks under 12—when your parents became citizens, the child became automatically a citizen. [00:20:12] So I'm probably next to being born here, a category that makes me feel very unique. [They laugh.] We're a dying breed. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. So you went to Boston because you had uncles there?

MISCHA RICHTER: Because of—yeah, because of the relatives, yeah. Boston was wonderful then. It was the essence of America.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you went—you—actually, you lived in Beacon Hill?

MISCHA RICHTER: Myrtle Street right in the back of the state house, yeah—not right in the back, but the street that's in the back of the state house.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And did—were your family provided for, or you, of course, brought only—

MISCHA RICHTER: My father got a job immediately in some—I don't know—some house. And then he got a job with a plumbing outfit and then years later, he opened his own plumbing and heating business in Taunton, moved to Taunton.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, south of Boston, yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah and did well. He outfitted some of the war camps during this so that didn't—that was a break financially.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure. There were big camps around this area.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, that's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Embarkation camps were some [ph]—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah. And the plumbers all were crazy about him. He made very good friends among all the plumbers.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Well, these houses like on Beacon Hill, would this be a house you purchased or a house you rented—

MISCHA RICHTER: No, no, it was an apartment building.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Apartment in a house?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, we rented an apartment. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was the neighborhood like in that particular—it was—it's still a very still crowded neighborhood, wasn't it? It was before people left the old apartment of the city—[00:22:00]

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, Myrtle Street was—

[Audio Break.]

MISCHA RICHTER: —nice. It was kind of just a block away from the crowd. Somehow, it was immune to those things below. And, rather, the old family Bostonians were all over the place with their private homes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did your mother approve of the neighborhood more or less—

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't recall. [Laughs.] She was a very proud type, and I don't know why she was like that, but no, she liked it, sure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about you? Did you have to go to school right away?

MISCHA RICHTER: I went to a special English class, which they had in those days and, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean to learn the language?

MISCHA RICHTER: To learn the language, yeah, and during the summer, you see. That's about during the summer and then I think I went right in, Wendell Phillips School right in the West End. But I was about a year behind because of the language business and, let me see then I skipped—I forget. Anyway, I ended up in The English High School afterwards.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In Boston, yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, which was a good school in those days, a very good school.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you continued, did you, in these early years in Boston to draw and to—

MISCHA RICHTER: I stopped drawing, and I was picked up by this guy, Zimmerman who was also—he had Jack Levine and Hyman Bloom under his wing, and he thought very highly of the three of us and never got the credit he should. I'm going out on a limb now. [00:24:04] I don't understand why Jack Levine never mentions him because the man

[Audio Break.]

MISCHA RICHTER: —the Fogg Museum was across at that time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Denman Ross.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, and Ross gave money every—

[Audio Break.]

MISCHA RICHTER: —so he could continue to work. And Ross also wanted to put me on that business, but I wanted to go to Yale instead.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So this—

MISCHA RICHTER: So this was when I was already in the Museum School. I switched to Yale instead going with Ross.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you were still with—and before you had gone while you were still in high school, you studied with Harold Zimmerman?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah. Well, I did once a week in a local club of some kind, but—

[Audio Break.]

MISCHA RICHTER: —a community house. But, uh, when I was in high school, I went to the museum every afternoon to draw from cast and then—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who was the teacher there, was this—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —these Saturday classes at the Boston Museum while you did while you were in high school?

MISCHA RICHTER: No, they weren't Saturday. They were every day.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Every day.

MISCHA RICHTER: After high school, I would walk up Columbus Avenue and across Huntington Avenue and across—you know right up to the museum and draw for two hours. And then I would take a streetcar back to Park Square somewhere and walk across the whole thing back up the hill to my house, and this was done daily. And then I won a scholarship to go to Museum School at the end of those four years. [00:26:03]

[Audio Break.]

MISCHA RICHTER: —I think they gave two or three scholarships a year, and I was in the Museum School one year.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was 1929 and [19]30, in fact.

MISCHA RICHTER: Right. And then I—yes?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that memorable? Did you like that at all? You had live class with Philip Hale as the—

MISCHA RICHTER: It was memorable in a sense that Philip Hale was a very strong personality and a little scary because he looked just like his father's statue on the public garden of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Edward Hale.

MISCHA RICHTER: That's right. He looks exactly like him in fact, with a walrus mustache and so on. And he used to come in the class and hold up the charcoal very dramatically and say, "Action, proportion, light and shade, structure." And when you analyze it, that's pretty much what it is. [They laugh.] And he was a very funny man. He gave anatomy classes too, and, uh, yeah, so he quite memorable. But then there was a Chinese student there I got friendly with, and he seemed to think Yale is a good school, so. I was anxious to get away from home not out of—

[Audio Break.]

MISCHA RICHTER: —dislike of my parents, but just I thought it would good to be on your own more, right?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MISCHA RICHTER: So I went to Yale.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Well I was going to ask—you didn't decide—you didn't want to stick around and study with Denman Ross? You've mentioned earlier—

MISCHA RICHTER: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you said on intellectual ground, you felt that that would be, what, too limiting or—

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't know what I meant. But Zimmerman came to see my parents and said, "Try to make him change their mind and influence me to remain in Boston rather than go to Yale," you see. [00:28:08] But I had some idea that if I get a degree or a piece of paper of some kind, I might be able to make a living because making a living was very important to me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because, well, it was a hard time, but also you wanted to accomplish—

MISCHA RICHTER: I just had the idea—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —something for yourself.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, that's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was Zimmerman like? Can you please—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —characterize him as you recall?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, he was about—

[Audio Break.]

MISCHA RICHTER: —he was thin, and he had a mustache and a lot of hair in the back, you know not much hair in front of his forehead. And he had a—he was a chain-smoker, which killed him by the way. He died young. His laugh kind of resembled coughing rather than laughing. But he was—he was crazy about my drawings and thought I was crazy not to stay with him. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did he teach? Would he come around and hover around your work?

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: I've heard that he would send you off to look at things and then draw from—

[Audio Break.]

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't have a clear picture how it was. I would show him the drawings. There was no organized class.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was informal. You would just go to meet with him now and then?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would the other students be there as well, or he just had a—

MISCHA RICHTER: No, he just worked. I remember him being with me and Hyman Bloom a lot because we—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Bloom—you got to know pretty well then?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, we were friendly. He lived across Charles Street I think—no, the other street, Cambridge Street, the lower part of the West End—

[Audio Break.]

MISCHA RICHTER: —around where the hospital is, Mass General. [00:30:02] He and I were very friendly for a while there, but as Byron said, "The friendships of childhood, though fleeting, are true,"[laughs] you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. So you went to Yale with [inaudible]. You go and you've gotten to know at the Museum School, Will Barnet who became a long-time friend.

MISCHA RICHTER: We were very friendly. In fact, I just saw him a few weeks in New York in an emotional reunion. But he later became my—

[Audio Break.]

MISCHA RICHTER: —so his kids. I'm an uncle to his children, but we were very close friends and still are.

ROBERT F. BROWN: At Yale, did you—which you went to I guess about 1930?

MISCHA RICHTER: [19]'30 to [19]'34, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were some of the highlights of your years there? Was the program pretty stiff, or how would you compare it with, say, the Museum School program?

MISCHA RICHTER: I think it was basically about the same drawing and painting. Drawing in the morning and then we'd paint in the afternoon. And then once a week, we would do little composition like—and the guy would tell us, "Now, next week, I want a composition about this subject or that subject" and then he—

[Audio Break.]

MISCHA RICHTER: —and criticized the compositions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were the subjects pretty—or were they—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, one that he liked that I did, it was *Rest after Labor* [ph]. So I had a bunch of symbolical figures resting and posing. That was the idea—to emphasize rest.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This element of symbolism and the—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —high sentiment, was that in the air down at Yale? Was it a—[00:32:02]

MISCHA RICHTER: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —traditional and—

MISCHA RICHTER: It was traditional because—what's his name—Taylor [ph]—[tape stops; restarts].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Wait, this man Taylor—

[END OF TRACK AAA_richte94_6359_r.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is disc number two—you were talking about Yale art school, a man named Taylor who taught—

MISCHA RICHTER: —the history of art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the history of art.

MISCHA RICHTER: And that was taught in large hall. It included architects and everybody taking the history of art. So, yes, what we were given, uh—we bought black-and-white reproductions and then given sheets of paper typed out with a brief analysis of every artist, and we'd paste them in a book, so I now have a very interesting book with all that. But he'd lecture on all this with slides. I don't think he went beyond the—I think all painting stopped around 1910 or something. He didn't recognize the existence of any art beyond that, and that was annoying. But what he had to say up to that date was perfectly all right, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you find this fairly exciting or not? Was it not nearly as important to you as your studio work?

MISCHA RICHTER: No. I found that it very—I don't know if it's exciting, but it was bordered on exciting. I mean, I was interested in it. But, of course, the guiding spirit of all of this was Eugene Savage who was a mural painter, and he was the head of painting, and he used to come once a week to go over our paintings. He had an earth palette, a very low-key palette, and everything was geared for mural painting. And you see—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Eugene Savage then was the principal?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, he was the—but he'd arrive like god, you know, once a week from New York or something. [00:02:06]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you pretty impressed by the way he went about things and—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, I didn't feel comfortable with him because he was a great man. You know he was supposed to be—in those days, I thought I respected the university, and I respect the whole ambience of the university, so I was impressed with everything there. I wasn't a revolutionary when it comes to the university.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And so you then did some work in murals then. I mean that was—that—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, we made designs for murals, yes. But, uh, we were just working like one painting, let's say, towards the end, and that would be judged, you know? And I'm trying to remember—I don't remember everything very clearly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were the—could the themes be cotemporary ones, or were you typically asked to illustrate something and—

MISCHA RICHTER: No, I remember doing one painting, which—a man drinking coffee, that's all, in a restaurant, so a coffee drinker.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And this might have been a mural painting or done in mural [ph]—

MISCHA RICHTER: No it wasn't done from here [ph]. It was just a painting, but it employed—I employed the methods of the Old Masters. I'd use—construct the whole thing in black and white with some—maybe some brown or something and then glaze over it because we were fascinated by the methods of the Old Masters.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. What other, uh—so you had mural painting, you had oil painting I guess? [00:04:02]

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there a great deal of instruction in careful—in drawing and that sort of the rendering?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, there was a drawing class and then there was a painting class and then there was the composition class, and that's about it—and the history of art class.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And at the culmination of this, say, the fourth year was a thesis or a grant, a project you would undertake?

MISCHA RICHTER: No. Only if I went—I didn't go for a degree because a degree meant another year doing the same thing. So I just ended up with a certificate, which says I completed four years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were you a bit resentful of that, the fact you'd had to go yet another year?

MISCHA RICHTER: I wasn't resentful. I just thought I ought to just leave at that point. I got one piece of paper, and that was enough. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So then you finished in '34, what were you going to do? Did you go back to Boston about that time? Is that about the time you were—

MISCHA RICHTER: It's a little vague. I don't remember. I had a little money saved, so I went to New York.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You went there to—you went to Boston as well I know—

MISCHA RICHTER: Later.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —I've found out [ph]—

MISCHA RICHTER: Later—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, a little later—

MISCHA RICHTER: —later. I went to New York where I could live for about a year on what I had, and, uh—then let's see what happened. I got—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —fairly soon there.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, afterwards. Well, Will, Will brought over—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Will Barnet?

MISCHA RICHTER: —yeah, brought over his—this—the sister of his wife who—and I married this girl that he brought over, you know, and—[00:06:13]

ROBERT F. BROWN: In fairly short order or—

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't remember. I think—well, we knew we were going to get married, but we didn't get married right away.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And her name was what?

MISCHA RICHTER: Helen.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Helen?

MISCHA RICHTER: Sinclair Annand. Well, her name is Sinclair, but her father was killed in World War I, and the man who brought her up, his name was Annand.

ROBERT F. BROWN: A-N-N—

MISCHA RICHTER: A-N-D, and he was an artist. He made this drawing of her when she was 12 and a very nice guy. He was the one that was the friend of Holger Cahill, and I forget the details, but he got me to move to New York from Boston. You see when I got on the WPA, we had to go to Boston because I came from there and that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you—uh, Helen was a student herself at that time?

MISCHA RICHTER: She was studying in—I forget the name—a drama school. She was onstage in Westport with Lillian Gish and was going to go on the stage. Lillian Gish liked her a lot, and she was quite talented as far as the stage goes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was there some thought when you got married that she would pursue that career?

MISCHA RICHTER: No, she wasn't interested.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No, by then, no. You, at that time I guess in New York, met Will Steig who created a—was a cartoonist himself? And that's what—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah. Well, I met Bill Steig at a party that Helen's mother gave in New York. [00:08:00] And the—Helen's family knew the Steig family because they came to Darien one summer and rented a house very close to their house in Darien, and that Bill used to—took Helen out several times. They went to Harlem to listen to jazz and all that, which was the thing to do in those days. So I met him at the house there, and I figured what the heck? I always liked—I liked drawing for magazines, and so I said, "I'll try it too," so.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is when you first gave a thought to doing that really?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, because I looked upon it the same as—kind of miniature murals in the sense that it was done for a job. I liked the idea of art being done for a job rather than through a gallery. I never pursued the gallery because I just don't feel that it's a very healthy way to sell art, you know? But maybe it's sour grapes on my part, but I don't think so. I think if I had pursued it, I could have done it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were you also—it's about this time when you first met the painter Ad Reinhardt?

MISCHA RICHTER: I met Ad Reinhardt through Crocket Johnson who worked on the *New Masses* as cartoon—as editor.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So that's after you went back to New York?

MISCHA RICHTER: I went back to New York, and I wanted to do political cartoons, so I went up to *New Masses*, and I said—because I was against fascism. [00:10:02] And I could see my drawings against Hitler and Mussolini published, and it was very tempting, and Ad Reinhardt was doing drawings for George Price. I don't think there was an artist who didn't, at one time or another, did at least one drawing for him for the same reason that he could say something a little stronger. And that's when I met Ad and then when Crockett Johnson sold his *The Man with Eyes* to *Collier's*—it's a little man who did things with his eyes with no words [laughs]—he said, "Would you like to take my job?" He said, "You seem to have—you're the only guy who comes up with any ideas." So he says, "Well, there's not much to it. You come in twice a week, you lay out the magazine, the galleys and all that, and you assign cartoons to various artists."

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this was after you had gone back to New York?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, I was living in Darien, so I was selling all over and working for the *New Masses* twice a week as a kind of a technical guy not an ideological guy and 20 bucks a week. And then, uh, I started working for *PM* and then I started—then a book of my cartoons came out and that's when Hearst said, "Get Richter." You know he literally sent one of his telegrams.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that was for the—

MISCHA RICHTER: —King Features.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —King Features. [00:12:00] But, wait, before we, uh—

MISCHA RICHTER: Pardon?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Before we get to that, I wanted to ask before you really settled into your career in Connecticut and New York, you did return to Boston, I guess, because—try to find a means of support at that time. You were, what, newly married by then or had you—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, I was newly married.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And in '36, you undertook this big mural that a man named—

MISCHA RICHTER: *Burroughs*.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —*Burroughs* had commissioned. What was that? Was that part of a WPA project?

MISCHA RICHTER: It was WPA.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you went back to Boston because there was WPA?

MISCHA RICHTER: Not because of that mural. That developed while I was doing WPA work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Ah, what was—

MISCHA RICHTER: And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —sorry.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, well, at first, I was teaching at the *Burroughs Newsboys* Foundation on WPA. Kids would come in, and I'd teach. There was no mural. And then—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were teaching, what, drawing?

MISCHA RICHTER: Drawing, yeah. And then Burroughs evidently got the local WPA people saying, "Well, I'm a charitable organization. I'm doing this and that, why can't he do a mural here?" And so I did a mural, which was very exciting to do because it was quite big.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did the boys help you, or this was all your own?

MISCHA RICHTER: No, it was all—I had an assistant, George Kanellis [ph] who was also on WPA, and he was my assistant. And I don't recall how he assisted, but he was my assistant. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you pretty pleased with it? What was it—what was the idea of the mural? Was there a —

MISCHA RICHTER: The idea of the mural—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —theme? [00:14:00]

MISCHA RICHTER: —were the activities of the Burroughs Newsboys Foundation showing all the wonderful things that it does for young fellas.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. And the idea of such a foundation in those days was to keep boys off the street and try to give them a trade and develop what we call work ethic and all that?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah. Well, Burroughs, of course, was a poor kid that sold newspapers and then became a bigshot lawyer. And he felt, as people did in those ,days that selling newspapers was the symbol of working as a kid and so he called it the Burroughs Newsboys Foundation.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was the WPA when you were on that and other people were on it, were people proud to be on it, or were they just happy to have a job, or politically did they think well of the government—that is the artist who were on the program or—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, they were always bitching. They wanted more and had demonstrations and didn't know how well off they were, and so there was an artists union, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: And I was a member. Jack Levine was a member of the artists union. Karl Knaths came around to our meetings once and stayed over at my house in Boston—

ROBERT F. BROWN: He came up from—

MISCHA RICHTER: From Provincetown—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the Cape—

MISCHA RICHTER: —yeah to be at one of the big meetings. Everybody was supporting the WPA and demanding more and more rights for the artists and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Did you—did you think you could continue doing murals, or did it seem there wasn't much demand for them once you've done this project for the Burroughs Foundation?

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't think I visualized anything in the future. I just did what I have to do. [00:16:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. By the way, even before the '30s, you've been to Provincetown, have you? How did that come about? I think you said in 1928, you—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, I came here in '28 for the summer because an artist I knew told me about it and then I came in '29 and so when I was here, I met a lot of the people. Malicoat was working up and down the street with no money, Phil Malicoat?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MISCHA RICHTER: And John Whorf, of course, was doing well. But he would—I was drawing—and he came—doing a watercolor, and he didn't know me. He just came over and suggested a few things while I was doing it, which is indicative of the spirit of the time too I think. And, uh, Bicknell who was a—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —etcher one.

MISCHA RICHTER: —etcher, he observed. He watched me draw one day, and he said to me—there was a cat lying down on a—I was drawing it, and he said, "The important line is where the cat's body meets the thing it's lying on. If that line defines the weight of the cat and the line of content." Now, they did things like that in the old days. The artists, you know, they spoke to one another, [laughs] very helpful. And I told Ms. Lambrecht [ph] that I met a John Whorf, and she was one of these—[laughs] what do you call—old maids. She said—she kind of almost blushed, she said, "Oh, he's—" you know, you thought about him being a ladies' man that she was quite shocked. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: That her little student is—[00:18:00]

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah. [They laugh.] That I met such a horrible [inaudible]. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you—and you said you must have met Knaths or you might have at that time or—

MISCHA RICHTER: Knaths I met later because I was already on WPA.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who else did you meet that summer? You've met Whorf and Bicknell. What about Moffett, would you have known him or Richard Miller or was Dickinson in there—

MISCHA RICHTER: No, Moffett, I knew later.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Dickinson likewise?

MISCHA RICHTER: Dickinson I knew quite well on—I'm not just saying it. He was crazy about my drawings, so I was quite flattered. He was quite excited in meeting me, which made me—you know, "Oh," he says, "those drawings" and all that, so I felt very flattered.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Hawthorne was still alive when you first came down, so—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, but I didn't really know him. I did go up to this house once to invite him to a party because I knew some people that were going to give a party, and they said, "Why didn't you go up there and tell him about it?"

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm, did he come to the party?

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't remember.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] How did you live down here? I mean did you just have a room or did you—were you were with a friend?

MISCHA RICHTER: My father used to send me $10 a week, and that's how I lived. The room was 450, and no private toilet. Just some fisherman family would rent you a room, 450 and you—and then I'd drink milk or something during the day and then at night, I splurged and spent 50 cents or 75 cents to get a meal in the restaurant, waited on and everything at that price in those days. So I lived quite well on $10 a week for a young guy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did the place exude a charm or at least hold an interest for you from the beginning, Provincetown? [00:20:15]

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, I loved it right away because in those days, coming from Boston here took about two

days to get used to the fresh air. The change in air was like perfume. It was unbelievable. You don't notice it anymore the way—as dramatically as it used to, as it was then. And the whole place was friendly because tourism breeds a kind of a competitive dislike of one another whereas the fishermen were very—they're doing well. And I don't know what there was about it, but they were very, very friendly people. And you could—you could ask one of them like, "Could I borrow the boat this afternoon?" A rowboat I don't mean [ph]—"Hey, sure go out and use it," and all that, something like it, very friendly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Was—do you recall going to exhibitions during those summers when you were a young man?

MISCHA RICHTER: No, I wasn't—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You weren't—

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't think there was that much emphasis on exhibition at galleries. There was just the art of those—[tape stops; restarts.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —continue on our—interviews on Wednesday, September 28, 1994. You were in Boston doing that huge mural about 1936, but you found there was no further demand for murals, is that right? [00:22:00] I mean—

MISCHA RICHTER: No, basically, it wasn't the fact that the—whether there were more murals or not. Actually, I got quite a bit of publicity out of it, and theoretically, one would think it would be a very good environment to be in. But I felt that if you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere. And so I asked my father-in-law—

ROBERT F. BROWN: George Annand.

MISCHA RICHTER: George Annand who was a friend of Holger Cahill who was in charge of the Federal Art Project. I asked him to do something about transferring me to New York City. And so George Annand accomplished that by one letter or a telephone call or something or other, and I was transferred.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What—were you transferred on right away under some particular project, a WPA project?

MISCHA RICHTER: No, I wasn't. I was—it was—I was deglamorized by going to New York because I was put in a large building on 42nd Street as an assistant to another guy who was doing a big painting. And the—the only interesting thing was that Stuart Davis was doing his painting also a few feet away, and he used to come in in the morning, lay out the area, and his assistant would simply fill in flat color into that area.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did you think of that at the time? [00:24:01] Had you heard of Davis?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, I have heard of Davis, and you know I don't remember. This is so long ago. It's—everything seemed okay. I was newly married and was very happy and all of that, and I was working in New York. And, uh, I knew this was a temporary thing being an assistant to someone, a small price to pay for the situation. While I was in New York, I began to take drawings around to various magazines. And my memory is very hazy about all this except that within—I would say within six or seven months, I was selling enough so that—to the magazines so that I just simply left the WPA.

ROBERT F. BROWN: There was no particular commitment there I guess?

MISCHA RICHTER: No, there—no, I was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Cross talk.]

MISCHA RICHTER: That's right. I just left it. There was no need to be on it. I was making more money. You know WPA paid $20 a week whereas I could sell two or three drawings a week at $50 a drawing. In those day it was a lot of money because you could get a fairly good apartment in New York, not fancy but everything worked well, for about $50 a month.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you were well ahead of the game them in terms of—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, and then—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were these drawings of what sort, illustrations or—[00:26:01]

MISCHA RICHTER: No, they're cartoons.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were cartoons.

MISCHA RICHTER: You have to remember that, at that time, magazines were a strong entertainment media, and there were many magazines, and they were all more or less in the same area around the Grand Central Station area so that in one—we used to go—I used to go and meet other fellows doing it. Some of them later became well known, and by noon, we have—we had all covered about five or six markets and then we'd meet for lunch, and they all say, "Well, I got an okay from *Collier's*," or "I got two okays from *Saturday Evening Post*," and it became like that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you said—you've said you sold your first cartoon to *Cavalcade Magazine*.

MISCHA RICHTER: Cavalcade, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what was that in a sense [ph]? It's a sort of potpourri of articles and cartoons?

MISCHA RICHTER: Right. And it was a small—small sized like the *Readers Digest,* about that size. And oddly enough, the first cartoon was storks picketing a birth control office, [they laugh] which shows that the struggle never stopped. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you found you could be very topical and fairly pointed in these cartoons?

MISCHA RICHTER: You could be topical but not as much as one is today because people were concerned about hurting other people's feelings more than they are today. In fact, today, I suppose it's the reverse. [00:28:00] It's to see how much you can hurt people's feelings that counts. [They laugh.] It's ironic. As my father-in-law used to say—I admired his ways of talking—he said, "There's more churchgoing and less religion in the country than there ever was. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you didn't find that the Depression made people any more [laughs]—

MISCHA RICHTER: No, but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —charitable and—[they laugh]. You—did you obtain—you obtained a contract fairly soon you said with *PM* magazine.

MISCHA RICHTER: *PM* was a magazine that published in Brookline—Brooklyn that was considered progressive not radical but—as opposed to the—more progressive than other magazines. And I had a contract to do—I forget—one or two a week, just humor, and occasionally, I would throw in a political cartoon aside from the contract. And that was my first contract in the cartoon business.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And did the contract simply indicate how many you were to supply, or it didn't try to get an exclusive on what you did?

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh, the contract was exclusive—

ROBERT F. BROWN: To *PM*?

MISCHA RICHTER: —that would—yeah, which they—I don't remember. I think I had to do only one drawing a week. They had several people doing it for each day, and I was one of them and then I could sell them a political commentary and so on. [00:30:01] And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this a weekly magazine?

MISCHA RICHTER: No. It's a daily—it was a newspaper the size of the—the size of the *Daily News*, and the cover of it, the first—the outer page of the magazine was kind of a sepia color for some reason, and the rest was regular black and white.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So sepia is almost the color of the [inaudible] reviewer sections, and this—

MISCHA RICHTER: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you then—in the later '30s, you were involved with the *New Masses*? You've mentioned that a bit, but you succeeded a man named Crockett Johnson? Please explain.

MISCHA RICHTER: Crockett Johnson was the art editor of the *New Masses*. He used to work for McGraw-Hill originally and he—then he worked for the *New Masses,* and he was a master layout person. He could look at a galley and don't have to measure it. He knew exactly how many words are in it and how to cut it up and so on. He became very well known when he created the comic strip *Barnaby,* which was, uh, the first intellectual comic strip. They try—they were rehearsing it for Broadway. There was—songs were written about it, but he was very picky and unexcited by any glamorous offer and so he would argue about what should be in and what should be

out. But he was a very famous man at his time, particularly with intellectuals. I would say it was the first intellectual comic strip that appeared on the scene. [00:32:03] Later, they had, of course, Kelly and so on, but he was the first the first to do it. So when he left the *New Masses*, he said, "Why don't you take my job? You come in twice a week and lay out the magazine and maybe call up one or two artists with gags?" They all dealt with—oh, with fighting the Depression, and of course, the main target was Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, was—had—the *New Masses* was during the 1910s quite a formidable force in terms of the—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was it still a fairly important, highly read magazine—

MISCHA RICHTER: When I was there, I think it made enough money to survive without any asking, any drives, or so on. I was quite excited about it because I met Carl Sandburg and I met—who is this—the woman—oh, she wrote that, *My Sister Eileen*, the author of that. They were—they all were there, and being very young, I was quite impressed with meeting all of these people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, years old- all—you solicited, as you just said, from other artists. You would solicit—

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh, I just—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —cartoons?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well no, there were artists who worked for the *New Masses* Work, I don't mean they got paid, but they contributed. A. Birnbaum who was famous as a cover artist for the *New Yorker*. [00:34:02] Of course, Gropper had a daily—a weekly page.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you get to know him at all?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, I got to know Gropper.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he very outspoken or anything like—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, I didn't—I didn't get to know him to talk too much to him because he would send in his stuff, but I later met him at the exhibition. On Eighth Street, there was a gallery there that I gave a chalk talk in, and he came to see it, and he was very complimentary about the way I did it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: A chalk talk on drawing or cartoon—

MISCHA RICHTER: No, political things. Like I would draw an apple and then change it into Hoover's face. It was very easy to do and kind of tie it up with the Depression and so on. That kind of chalk talk. Or draw something and turn it upside down, it became something else. It was very popular that medium in the chalk talk.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You also mentioned that there was influence in the illustrations of the *New Masses* about George Grosz. Was he—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, George Grosz—yeah. Well, of course, he was very well known, and I looked at his work. Of course, you couldn't help it, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Through the magazine, you got to know then various artists or you knew them already like Ad Reinhardt who—

MISCHA RICHTER: I got to know Ad Reinhardt because of the *New Masses* because he used to come in, and once or twice, I would do a drawing with him. [00:36:00] In other words, he was—as you know, he is very neat and so he'd do the lettering or something. Well, a lettering was important, and it was a lot of fun working with all these guys together.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he somebody you became pretty close to at that time?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, we got very close. He and his wife and the kid and my wife, and we'd stay at his place in New York, or occasionally, they came to Darien where I was living at that time—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were living in Darien?

MISCHA RICHTER: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you mind living away from the city, or did you prefer living out there?

MISCHA RICHTER: It didn't seem like it was away because it's just an hour's ride on the train, and so you could be in the city any time. In fact, later on, my wife and I sometimes after supper would say, "Let's go and see the Dodgers play," and get on the Merritt Parkway and no problem in driving over there, plenty of parking. You can buy a ticket and smell the grass and shit [ph]. So the city wasn't that removed actually.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the traffic wasn't that—

MISCHA RICHTER: It wasn't what it is—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —heavy?

MISCHA RICHTER: It didn't resemble today's traffic at all. So you could have the best of both worlds—living in a country and enjoying the city.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So it wasn't that divorced really at all?

MISCHA RICHTER: Mm-mm [negative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: In the '30s then you continued this, working with the *New Masses* and also probably selling other cartoons to other publications as well?

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh, I was selling all over. Working for the *New Masses* had no exclusive quality about it. [00:38:02] It's just two days a week anyway.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, were you occasionally exhibited? Cartoonists were favorites for occasional exhibitions in art galleries, weren't they? Were you—

MISCHA RICHTER: No, I don't recall ever exhibiting my cartoons.

ROBERT F. BROWN: About that, hmm. Well, when did you begin with the *New Yorker*, about in the early '40s, about 1941, something like that?

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't really—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Cross talk.]

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't—well, I knew that the *New Yorker* was more or less a closed thing, and just going there over and over again wasn't going to change their mind about anything, so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And it was desirable because—perhaps to try to get on the *New Yorker*? Was it—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, it would be if you were a singer, you would want to be in the Metropolitan Opera. I mean it was about on the par with that. So what I did was I made an appointment with Jim Geraghty who was the art editor. In those days, they only had one—they didn't have art editors or cartoon editors or this editor and that editor. He was the art editor. You see that mean—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mentioned later—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, yeah, that's the new *New Yorker*. So he says, "Sure." So I had an appointment, and I went over there. I said to him, "By now, you know my work because I sell everywhere. I have a lot of ideas, and would you be willing to buy my ideas if you don't want to buy my drawings because I hate to see them wasted lying around?" [00:40:01] But I prefaced all that too by being very young and full of self-admiration, I said [laughs]—I said to him, "I don't want to waste your time and don't waste mine." [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: That got his attention [laughs]—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —conceivably?

MISCHA RICHTER: —he says, "Sure, we'd like to see your ideas." So the next two or three weeks, they bought ideas from me every week. In about the fourth week, I was—you know, I announced myself I was going down the corridor to see him. He was by the water cooler having a drink of water, and he said, "I have an—okay here, and I saw—see no reason why you shouldn't draw it," so okay, so I was thrilled of course with the idea. This was great stuff in those days to be allowed to draw for the *New Yorker*. So I did the drawing, which they bought. And when I got back to Darien that afternoon, I had a phone call saying, "We'd like to see more of your stuff." So about—they kept buying for two or three weeks, the drawings as well as the ideas and then they gave me a

contract. That's how I got in the *New Yorker*.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The *New Yorker*, what accounted for its being considered sort of the cream of the magazines in that time? [00:42:00] Was it just generally thought to be?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, you're asking the general question what make—what is the difference between art and just something mediocre, and I think it's—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Pretty evident.

MISCHA RICHTER: —it's evident when you see it, but it's impalpable. I mean it's—if we knew that, we'd all be great artists or great writers. There's always the mysterious quality, which the mystery begins when all theories end. And *New Yorker,* if one is to analyze its success, I would say in that was the fact that Ross, the editor, considered everything in it just as important as the next item so that every spot was thought about and considered. It mapped up in one way what Cezanne said about painting, "It must make a fist," and I think *New Yorker* made a fist. You knew exactly what you were buying, and also it understated. Like a person who's always yelling, nobody listens to him after a while, but someone who is very quiet in a corner and suddenly says something, they all turn their heads and want to know what he has to say. So by understating and not being too personal, in other words being the very opposite of what journalism is today, it made an impact. It had the highest automatic renewal, subscription renewal of any publication. [00:44:07] I'm not talking about specialized now but in the general magazine—among the general mag. So that—also, Ross had a great respect for the artist, and he also knew that he wasn't an authority on art, so he thought about it a lot. He would talk to Geraghty about it. They would ask other artists about it. Like I remember doing a drawing of Hitler for the *New Yorker* in the cartoon, so they asked another artist what he—how it should be drawn—you know, how I should do it. They felt he was more experienced in doing certain kind of caricatures. So the whole thing was a cooperative effort pointed towards creating a unified product.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you didn't mind in that case that they'd ask—

MISCHA RICHTER: No, no, I didn't mind.—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —another experienced artist.

MISCHA RICHTER: I didn't mind at all because whether—now as I look back, I realize that cartoonists were impressed with what I was doing, and I didn't realize it then. I mean when I was a member, one of the early members of the Cartoonists Society, people like Rube Goldberg [ph] and Willard and all those guys would gather around me and impressed. [00:46:00] Here is just a young guy, and they were impressed. I was impressed with them, and they were impressed with me because I was in the *New Yorker* including the King Features people for whom I later worked. I think Ward Greene was the bigtime guy in the syndicate at that time, and he was quite impressed with the fact that he came from the South, the same place that Ross came from, and he admired Ross and he, kind of, was impressed with the fact that Ross liked my work, and so on. So, without even realizing it, I became kind of a celebrity among cartoonists for being in the *New Yorker* so that—very flattering.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Wow. Well, you've said that the *New Yorker* needed you and the other cartoonists because I don't know if you were told, but you have realized that much of the character of the magazine came from the presence of these fine drawings, the cartoons. Is that fair to say in—

MISCHA RICHTER: I think it's fair to say because as you know, the term "A*New Yorker* cartoon" or" This would make a good *New Yorker*," it had some kind of stamp of approval or excellence that the other magazines—

[END OF TRACK AAA_richte94_6360_r.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is disc number three. Was there sort of a routine schedule? You'd submit your drawings a certain time and then was—what—did the editorial staff at the *New Yorker* considered them at another time?

MISCHA RICHTER: They had art meetings every Tuesday afternoon as far as I can make out because you bring in on—after I got the contract, I would come in. I would still come in on Wednesday, but it was Tuesday that the meetings were there. So I'd come in in Wednesday, and usually, he had something for me, say, "Here's an okay from last that you can draw," or "Here are two drawings," or something and then he'd look at this stuff I brought and pick out the things he thought might work and held them. And they had meetings during the week some time, and Ross took a lot of the stuff home with him to Connecticut. He worked at night you know, and that's another thing that game me quite a thrill when I found out that everything he took went with him to his house where he thought about all these things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did Ross—did you ever come to know what his feelings were about your drawings or

drawings in general? Did he—did you ever talk to him about such things?

MISCHA RICHTER: The only time I talked to him was we had lunch because I had some complaint about the size of drawings. And basically, what he said was, "We try to publish the drawing in what we feel—in the dimension that it looks best," so it's another way of avoiding any argument really. [00:02:01] But when I had lunch with him, it was—he was already sick. He had stomach cancer or something. He was taking pills while I was eating, which discombobulated me. But I never got to know him well because—not because I couldn't or any of the writers or anybody on the *New Yorker.* I knew some of them because I am by nature that way. I don't go through the doors that are open. I just say, "Oh well, I'll just work at home." [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But on the other hand, you had made sure that you got the attention of Geraghty at the *New Yorker* to get your own work in there?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, well, Geraghty and I got to be quite friendly. And his—I knew his wife, his family, and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was Jim Geraghty's training or background for this to work as art editor?

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't know exactly where—he came from Oregon originally I think, and he came to New York—I don't know what his background is. He, obviously, had some kind of education. He was a well-educated guy, but he tried to make a living by writing jokes. So he told me that he called on Ed Wynn and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The actor, yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: —yeah, and said, "I am a gag writer, and I can write jokes," and Ed Wynn pointed to a wall lined with the bureaus, and he said, "Mr. Geraghty, I have every joke on every subject right there." [Laughs.] [00:04:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, he had a vast file—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, a file—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —already filed.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes. So Geraghty contributed jokes to Peter Arno, and Peter Arno bought—took some of his jokes. Peter Arno was not a gag—he just—he depended on other people for jokes. So one day, there was—something happened in the staff where they needed some—a cartoon editor and Arno suggested to Ross that he hire Geraghty, and that's how Geraghty got into the *New Yorker*.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you found he was very good to work with?

MISCHA RICHTER: He's a wonderful guy. You'd come in his office, he'd have a classical music blasting away. He was kind of an actor, put on a big show of temperament and discuss all kinds of subjects, a very nice person.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But he had—to the extent you were around the *New Yorker*, was there an intellectual—quite a high intellectual level there, or was any of that apparent, or most of its contributors weren't right there in the office anyway, where do they [ph]—

MISCHA RICHTER: I bumped into them. I met Thurber, and I remember when—yeah, well, I knew Peter De Vries quite well and a few other people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he would write regularly in that—

MISCHA RICHTER: He'd come in every day, and I'd see him. But as I said, I didn't make a point of knowing anyone. I just was pleased to get my okay, go home, and work on it, that's about it. I did meet Truman Capote when he was an office boy over there. [Laughs.] [00:06:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You did. Did you predict a brilliant future? [They laugh.]

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh, it was more of a startling future [laughs] than—because Geraghty—I remember the drawing. It was the chase, the British chasing on horseback the fox, and along with the riders was a cook riding on a horse, you know? [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: It was during the war, and Geraghty said something about fixing the drawings. He says, "Why did you go up to this floor?"—oh, I forget which floor—"There's a table there with materials, you can fix the

drawing." So I go up, and I'm greeted by this cherub who—[laughs] he came up to my chin, and I'm a short man, and this pink-like cherub with bright yellow hair, the most polite, the most pleasant, greeting I ever had from anyone. He said, "I have this—I got you some water. Do you need this, do you need that?" And that was Truman Capote. And then Geraghty told me about him later that he used to take Ross and Thurber and a few other guys to lunch. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who? Capote?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah. He was the office guy, and he took them out to lunch at 21 or someplace because he had money, you see?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MISCHA RICHTER: But he was also—I don't have to emphasize—a brilliant writer, so he didn't hang around there too much. But he thought it would be fun to get in and the *New Yorker* just to be around writers when he was very young. [00:08:06] [They laugh.] I did see him many years later in [inaudible], and he was gray, and he was wearing a trench coat and busy talking to some woman in a café, which I suppose with kind of a businesslike look on both their faces, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: The cherub was missing.

MISCHA RICHTER: The cherub flew away, fled, flew. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, and—in about that same time beginning in the '40s, as you mentioned earlier, you started doing cartoons for the Hearst King Features Syndicate, right? Was that because of William Hearst Sr. work or—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, yeah—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —some—

MISCHA RICHTER: I was told that he sent a telegram to get Richter, which was his way of sitting there in San Simeon ordering things around. They bought out the contract from *PM* at that time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this was before you went to the *New Yorker* then? No? Or you had both—

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —*PM* and *New Yorker*?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, that's right. It's very hazy in my mind, but it was all kind of bumping into each other that whole process. So they—I did a panel. They offered me a panel called *Strictly Richter*, which ran for 16 years later. And I said to them—they offered me a certain amount of money, and I said, "Well, I make more than that by freelancing." So they said, "Well, we'll throw in a weekly illustration job for Bugs Baer to fill out the figure, the amount of money." [00:10:04] So I—so I got—I signed the contract with them.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What you wanted but you had to do an extra illustration.

MISCHA RICHTER: But that was all right with me because Bugs Baer was a very nice guy and a very funny guy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see. So now Bugs, what, did he supply the ideas and you—

MISCHA RICHTER: He—no, he wrote a column. He was a famous columnist, and every Saturday in the pictorial review supplement—

ROBERT F. BROWN: To the Hearst Newspapers?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, he had a column too. They're all very funny columns not about the world situation or anything, just humorous writing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Bugs Baer, B-A-E-R?

MISCHA RICHTER: B-A-E-R, yes. He was very well known. In fact, my father-in-law told me when he was a young guy in Detroit, he knew a businessman who wouldn't see anyone. He'd close the door and then read Bugs Baer—he didn't want to be disturbed—to put himself in a good mood. And then when he was finished, he'd go—[laughs] then he'd continue with the business of the day. Bugs Baer coined the phrase, "She was vaccinated with a phonograph needle" and stuff like that. Yeah, so I was quite thrilled to do his illustrations. I got to know him and

when I went to Europe in 1950, I went—my wife and two kids and I went for about nine months to Europe. He got ahead about three or four weeks so that I wouldn't be under pressure, which it was a hell of a nice thing to do.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Hmm. [00:12:00] When did you receive the best cartoonist of the year award? You were awarded that by the National—

MISCHA RICHTER: —Cartoonists Society. Yeah, I received it twice. I don't remember when it was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: '60s or yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: '60s, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Well, the—and then beginning, I guess, in the '70s, you would occasionally contribute to the OpEd, the new OpEd page, the opposite of the editorial page for the *New York Times*.

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, that was fun because I just doodled away at any humorous spot that came to mind and send them a bunch every week. And they—it would come back with two or three okays, and that went on for a while.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was—the editors would just pick it and then run it when they chose to?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, they—yeah, it was—there was no contract, but it turned out to be a steady thing for about three years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You did it—was it a somewhat political content or not particularly? Topical—

MISCHA RICHTER: It was topical—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —thing?

MISCHA RICHTER: —anything that might appear in the OpEd that would fit you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Uh, I wanted to—we've marched along in this one way. I'd like to talk for a little bit about maybe your family and your friends and your life so to speak? [Tape stops; restarts.] Well, we've talked a bit about your family, your being raised in Boston and then your marriage in 1935 to your wife, to Helen. And I guess at that point, you learned to live in New York briefly and then in Darien, Connecticut. And was she raised there herself? Her father had come over from Detroit right or somewhere else—[00:14:04]

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, well, both her stepfather and her mother came to New York as young people because he was an artist, and he came to New York for the same reason that all artists do. And his first job was working for the National Biscuit Company in the bullpen [ph]. In fact, he designed the Oreo, you know that cookie or whatever?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Cookie, yeah. And what was the bullpen? Is that—

MISCHA RICHTER: A bullpen is a bunch of guys working in the art department. Whatever has to be done, they do it. [Laughs.] And my—and his wife was—would write short stories and do occasional fashion drawings. She was—she studied at the Chicago Art Institute and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what was her name?

MISCHA RICHTER: Elizabeth.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Elizabeth?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you were in Darien for, what, into the '40s or '30s? You then later built a house nearby, in Weston?

MISCHA RICHTER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, we built a—we rented a place in Weston while we were in the process of foolishly selling up property in Darien, and, uh, while we rented in Weston, we were building a house in Weston.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this must be in the '30s or something like that?

MISCHA RICHTER: No, no, it's much later. It was '52 or something like that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And did you had—you had your children by then—

MISCHA RICHTER: I had two sons—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —right or—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [00:16:00] Well, did you spend—during, say, the '40s, did you—your routine was New York City and then Darien and later Weston?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But did you begin to travel at that time? Because later, I believe, you and your wife spent a good deal of time in travel.

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, it suddenly dawned on us that seeing it didn't matter where we lived, why not take advantage of this situation and go to Europe? Because I was thrilled at the idea of seeing the masterpieces in France and Italy. And more or less as a—not really as a tourist because we stayed three months at a time in an area and then move on and stayed three months in another area. And I would just do my work and mail it off. In those days, I—it was financially wise to go to Europe because I remember coming back, and my lawyer said to me, "Well, look at all the money you made by just going to Europe that you didn't spend" because you could live very well.

ROBERT F. BROWN: With so much less. And you would take your sons with you?

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh yeah, yeah, the whole family went.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was your—did you have a particular routine now or not? Just travel and look and did you—would you mail drawings back from time to time?

MISCHA RICHTER: The routine, it was—as it is all my life, I work in the morning, and I'm finished by the—after lunch, I'm finished. [00:18:04] So I would work mornings, and in the afternoons, we would explore the area and see what we could do. And it was very wonderful that way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How about your boys? Did they—were they put in school once you get to these places?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, the first time we went to Europe in 1950, the boys—one was only seven years old, the other one 11, and skipping school didn't make much difference because the older one was very bright in school. In fact, when he came back, he'd argue with the teacher about whether Mt. Etna—I mean whether Vesuvius or part of it caused the explosion you see. Because while he was in Europe, he discovered there was another peak, Mount Soma, I think, that actually blew its top. It was part of the Vesuvius chain, but you could argue that it wasn't Vesuvius. [Laughs.] So the teacher got furious because she was drawing it in front of the class. So you see, traveling does create a certain amount of [laughs] education.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, your own experience had been somewhat that way too, hasn't it? I mean you've been tutored at home and so you had no problem with your boys not having a routine education.

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, they were routine, but we did take one year off away from school feeling that whatever they learned in travel would be very rewarding in itself. But we also traveled by accident with another couple and their children, friends of ours, who didn't plan this trip. [00:20:07] They just happened to be going at the same time on the same boat when we went. It was a very interesting trip because they were extremely well off, so they could—had the luxury of not being insouciance when it comes with charm, quiet charm of money, you know? [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MISCHA RICHTER: And very interested in the arts, genuinely interested. In fact, their daughter married the Rauschenberg later and so I met Rauschenberg before he was Rauschenberg.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh I see, you mean before he was known—

MISCHA RICHTER: Known as Rauschenberg. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: He had another name then?

MISCHA RICHTER: No, no, I mean, before he was famous. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were these people notable collectors?

MISCHA RICHTER: Not really. They were more interested in puppets actually. When we were in Sicily, they were very—the woman was very interested in puppets. In fact, she brought the puppeteer to this country, and they made a little puppet theater in the area where they lived in Connecticut just as a hobby.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was their name, their family name?

MISCHA RICHTER: Weil, and she was part of that, uh, General Foods or some damned thing. I forget what her name, maiden name was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. The big industrial money of that sort, yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: But our friendship was purely accidental. See, I—and I didn't know they were well off. That had nothing to do with it. It's just that I discovered later by certain things they did that they were never in a hurry. [00:22:12] There's no tension about anything. They just did things that were fun to do. So we traveled together not every day, but we'd say, "We'll meet you two weeks from now in this town" or something.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Not bad.

MISCHA RICHTER: Not bad.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In Connecticut itself, were you involved in any art organizations there? You've mentioned—I think you said your mother-in-law was involved with the—what was that, the—

MISCHA RICHTER: The Silvermine Guild of Artists, but she—that was before I knew her. This was in its original stages. She was the kind of person that was always involved and doing good and all that around the community, fussing over the school system, and helping to enrich the Stanford library, busy over there all the time. So a real kind of progressive society lady if you can—the best way I can describe it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [They laugh.] You remember—I think you've said, it seems to me—most fondly, your father-in-law George Annand, in the evenings, he would spend talking with his cronies. I gather you were—to some degree, you even heard about them or you were sometimes involved with that?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, the beauty of George Annand was that he had no cronies. Everybody was fascinated by him from people who are 14 years old and people who are 80 because his way of talking was remarkable. [00:24:00] He also had the facility for keeping quiet about things, personal things of other people, never butted in with advice or said anything. I remember when my wife and I came back from getting married in city hall in New York, he was drawing a map or something, and he looked up, and he said, "Did you get married?" and I said, "Yes," and then he went back to drawing. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: He had no problem, but he had no interest to speak of, or he didn't show it?

MISCHA RICHTER: He was very hesitant if you asked his opinion about personal matters, which is unusual in families.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Would you discuss work now and then or—

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh yeah, all the time because he was a friend of Crockett Johnson too, one of his real pals. And their idea of fun was to get together in the evening and try to top each other with stories and humor and that kind of stuff like Samuel Johnson and his cronies in London of that school. And they were wonderful to listen to because both knew a lot. Johnson used to spend the first four or five hours just reading in the morning and then I'd say to him, "Well, when you were—" he'd say, "Oh, I'll think of something well later on," but first he immersed himself in just reading. And at one time—[00:26:07]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Even when he would stay at the *New Masses*, he'd be—or when he was—had a job, he'd be reading?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, I didn't know him that well then. I just saw him in the office. I'm talking about the time when he quit the *New Masses* and was doing *Barnaby*, and he bought a house close to our house in Rowayton, which is part of Norwalk bordering on Darien. So we used to see each other all the time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Then he'd say, well, he's thinking about it or—

MISCHA RICHTER: He'd say, "Well, I'll think of something." He was a night worker, you see. And the amusing

thing is that his wife Ruth Krauss who wrote the children's books was a like three-or-four-in-the-morning worker, you know? So I don't know when they saw—they were half asleep when they woke up. [They laugh.] But I remember going to supper at his house, she's—we'd all eaten, and she'd get up and lie down on the floor and go to sleep [they laugh] while he was just waking up, you see, for an evening of continuous witticism and talk. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So he would work until the end of the night—

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh, he'd work—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —through the night.

MISCHA RICHTER: —into the night, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And she would too but then—

MISCHA RICHTER: She would get up at three or four and work and then—

ROBERT F. BROWN: In the morning?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah. And in the afternoon, she'd go to a movie. She liked going to a movie.

ROBERT F. BROWN: By early evening, she was ready for bed.

MISCHA RICHTER: That's right. That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

MISCHA RICHTER: But she wrote a number of things that became quite well known. [00:28:00]*A Hole Is to Dig* was one of them and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was it called?

MISCHA RICHTER: *A Hole is to Dig.*

ROBERT F. BROWN: Is to Dig?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, and then she wrote something about the carrot, *The Carrot Seed* or something, I forget, but they were popular books.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The suburbs in Connecticut at that time, there were a lot of people, were there, who were in arts or in music or in theater?—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes. Yes. I knew Schnabel, not the pianist but his son was there. He's an actor. I knew a Garden—what the—my memory fails me on this. The guy who was editor of the Simon & Schuster, Goodman, yes. Yeah, and I met some of the critics. They were all around there. It was a convenient place to live.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So the tone of them as suburbs was not what one later associated with it where a lot of corporate executives live and then the predominant feeling was that of businesspeople who were very conscious of their status. There wasn't so much of that at least in the circles where you—

MISCHA RICHTER: You could find—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —were—

MISCHA RICHTER: —both in Darien. You could find—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —both.

MISCHA RICHTER: And what was known to the world and emphasized was the stuffed-shirt businessmen rather than the other side of which there were quite a few.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. About that time you—or in the '30s, when did you—you met the art patron while you were in Darien, Hudson Walker? Did you meet him about—

MISCHA RICHTER: No I met—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a few years or—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes. Well, I knew him quite well, but I didn't meet him in—yes, I did meet him there because Will Barnet brought them over once to Darien for dinner. [00:30:08] He thought—he—you know he—he was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Will was—

MISCHA RICHTER: —he knew them from New York. And Will, of course, was at that time my brother-in-law. He had the same relationship, obviously, with my wife's family that I had. So he brought them over when they were just married or newly married or something to Darien for Sunday dinner or something, and that's when I met him. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: At that time, was—Hudson had his art gallery in New York, or what was he—

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't know if he did or not at that very moment, but certainly around that time, they had it or was about to have one.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was he like? Did he talk to you about how he got into the art world or—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, he was very kind of a nice, friendly guy, and he told me that his family objected to him opening an art gallery because they didn't think it was—well, the usual objections for those. And that's all he talked about at that meeting—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because he had a gallery in Boston before he had one in New York.

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh, I didn't know that. You see, I only met him in New York.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mentioned that, at some point, in terms of Peter Busa, the artist that Hudson Walker had a great deal to do with helping him get along, get a job, and I gather he was noted for helping a lot of them.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes. He put his money—yeah, he put his money where his mouth is. In other words, if he liked your work sufficiently, he tried to see what can be done about helping you if not by purchase—not so much—I don't mean that he bought everybody's work, but I mean he helped them in any way he could, and he got him a very good job, which he stayed with—Peter Busa for the rest of his life teaching at I think Minnesota or someplace like that. [00:32:20]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Some of the other people that became good friends of yours out there, particularly in Connecticut, but like Will Steig and his—when did—you've mentioned already, you met him fairly soon after you went to New York. And what was your relation with him?

MISCHA RICHTER: One of my good friends. That's the relation. He's a very nice guy and was easy to be friendly with, and I'm a very good friend of his. He's still alive I guess in Boston somewhere. He's retired.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Whitney Darrow, he was—

MISCHA RICHTER: Whitney Darrow, I knew from when I lived in Weston because he had a house there, and I got to know him, and I like him a lot. Actually, most cartoonists seem to have no trouble being friendly with one another. And I never met a nicer bunch of people. Maybe it's because they were all working, I don't know. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean as opposed to being [inaudible].

MISCHA RICHTER: That's right. Very friendly and very concerned about each other and—we used to get together. When I was in Weston, we had a Friday nights kind of get-together at each other's house. I remember Mort Walker was part of that group then. [00:34:02] We'd all go out to eat and then take turns to whose house we'd return for the rest of the evening, so. I distinctly remember Mort Walker as being one of them.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mork, M-O-R-K?

MISCHA RICHTER: M-O-R-T. He draws now that strip—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were women involved too, the wives?

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh sure, sure. This was—and we were all young, so it was a lot of fun. And Ketcham was there as part of that get-together—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of *Dennis the Menace*?

MISCHA RICHTER: *Dennis the Menace,* and everybody thought it was such bad taste the name, his son after—

imagine—we used to say, "Imagine this kid being brought up called the Menace for the rest of—" [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did he turn out all right?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, I guess he did. Everything worked fine for—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Robert Osborn, did you know him?

MISCHA RICHTER: No, not well. He lived in another area of Connecticut. I met him just when I had a show on the [inaudible].

ROBERT F. BROWN: So a good deal of these friendships occurred just because you were neighbors with young families and that sort of thing in Connecticut? Now, Ad Reinhardt, you first got to know—

MISCHA RICHTER: Through the *New Masses* and then we'd see him in New York a lot. He did come out to see us and stayed overnight occasionally in Darien, but he was the kind of guy that got very nervous in the country. He wanted to be back in the—where he could work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was, of course, quote, a serious artist though. I mean he wasn't a cartoonist particularly, so he was the exception among your artist friends, was he?

MISCHA RICHTER: No. I had—no, I had a lot of—I don't recall now exactly, but I never looked upon myself as a cartoonist. [00:36:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now what did you—

MISCHA RICHTER: I looked upon myself as an artist, that's all. The fact that I was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why—

MISCHA RICHTER: —humorous, I didn't think—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was secondary, huh?

MISCHA RICHTER: It was secondary, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You've said Ad Reinhardt with respect to your drawings, he was not so much interested in any message but in the physical properties of them. He could admire the line—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, he liked my line because he thought—well people—other people had noticed it, but he was—he thought that it had its own life, you see. And that's all he was interested in is the formal means of any drawing. He was not—but he was not unaware of the humor, but what interested him was the ways that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you tend to agree with him that the formal qualities of drawing are the—are very important that you must—to adjust the quality of a drawing, you need to—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, I not only agree, I expound that point of view, and I'm stuck with it for the rest of my life. That's why it's—I'm very sensitive to layouts and anything that visually is a disaster to which most literary minds are immune.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. Yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: And that's why they can skip over all kinds of horrible visual atrocities in the publication. And I don't see why that's so remarkable. A good writer would be very sensitive about the choice of a word and yet utterly insensitive to the fact that composition, values, all those things exist to an artist as well as writer in his medium or her medium. [00:38:07] This is not a tautological statement. I would think that there are exceptions. Of course, there are writers who are very sensitive about drawing, but generally speaking, it's safe to say they're not.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You mentioned—back to Reinhardt just for a little bit more—that he was a great fan of jazz, and through him you got to know—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, because I was very naïve about jazz and I asked. So we went—he and his wife and—[phone rings]—what. [Tape stops; restarts.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's Reinhardt then that brought you along in this interest in jazz. Is this something that remained with you? Did it become a fairly continual interest to you or—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, I associated with the—it's this thing that's been said by everybody as the true American contribution to music.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: And Reinhardt, of course, liked it because it's linear or whatever. It related through a modern painting in a way, and somehow, he thought it did, and I agree with him.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. Was Reinhardt a pretty talkative guy or fairly outspoken in—

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh yes, he was very talkative, very friendly man, and was always—would find himself laughing at the things that he suddenly said that amused him. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So he was of rather sunny disposition and—

MISCHA RICHTER: Very sunny disposition, and I admired him greatly for his analytical mind and when he was a teacher, of course, too. [00:40:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You told me, you mentioned that he had—that Reinhardt had an anecdote regarding Mondrian.

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh well, he told me that Mondrian rented a house—an apartment in New York from somebody who was away. It had a column in the middle of the room somewhere, and he had it squared up because he couldn't live in a place with a tube-like column, you see?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MISCHA RICHTER: So he covered it with boards, so it became a column, whatever you call it, like a square you know or—[they laugh].

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then at—some—I believe that Reinhardt once told you of his retort to a man who asked what Mondrian had done, what had he accomplished and—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, the way it went, they were in the Museum of Modern Art, and they were—he was looking at a Mondrian and some guy in the back of him said to someone he was with, "What did he do?" And Reinhardt got very sore and couldn't keep quiet anymore. He turned around, and he said, "He divided the square, what did you do?" [They laugh.] And when you analyze it, the *Daily News* by putting its heading sideways on the side of the page created a lot of space for advertising. So dividing the square had a lot of practical applications as well. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So Reinhardt didn't [inaudible] talk too, and I think you say, he didn't mind teaching. He, in fact—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, I used to—I had an apartment close to his studio in the Village one winter, so I used to go over and see him. [00:42:03] I could see him out my window and look into his window and see that he was there working, so I'd go over and talk with him. And he would tell me, "Isn't it wonderful I'm through at 11 o'clock and I have the rest of the time to paint and do whatever I want?" He loved teaching. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But Jack Levine you'd known when you were a youngster in Boston when you were—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —around the time when Jim Zimmerman was teaching you all—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, I didn't know him as well as Hyman Bloom for example because he somehow was in a different area. But I did meet him there, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And Levine is somebody you saw occasionally in later years. I think you mentioned that when you were in Italy, at some point, Bloom or Jack Levine was too.

MISCHA RICHTER: In 1951, we were living in Sorrento, and he somehow—I forget how he knew I was there—he wrote to me or phoned or something that he's in Naples, and thus I said, to him, "Well then, come to Sorrento with me, and I'll pick you up in Naples," and so on. And then I took him back or whatever—I forget the details. But, yeah, I—we met in Naples and we were sitting there, and he's a very sour kind of guy. You probably know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: And we were sitting there, and he said, "This is just like the North End, you know in Boston." [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sorrento?

MISCHA RICHTER: No, no, this is in Naples before we took the boat to Sorrento.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see. But still—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah. [Laughs.] Later when we were in Rome, he was living in Rome with his wife and child. [00:44:02] He took me around. He was—he showed me the Sistine Chapel. The first time I saw it was with him and then we went for supper at his house where his little child would give instructions in Italian to the maid because she had picked up Italian immediately like all children do. And then we actually went to a nightclub, which is an unheard of thing for Jack. Picture Jack Levine in a nightclub.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really?

MISCHA RICHTER: So he danced with—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Cross talk]?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, well he's just—he's a big thoughts man, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, and nightclub is for—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, everything is big thoughts, so. [They laugh.] So I danced with his wife; he danced with my wife. [Laughs.] I tell you we were really a riot [they laugh] in Italy. And he did—I did have a card from him from Florence once in which he could—he didn't like Florence because he got not enough impasto—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Impasto?

MISCHA RICHTER: You know he liked that, the impressionist, the application of paint, so he felt more at home in Venice or places where they slapped the paint around a little more freely. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was it—he used refer to the Museum of Modern art as something

MISCHA RICHTER: The Museum of Model and Art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of Model and Art.

MISCHA RICHTER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Because I don't—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What do you think he meant or was trying to say there?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, as you know, he's—well, I don't know. I shouldn't speak for him, but my impression is that he's against the abstract, nonobjective, and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [00:46:00] You said you were told once by someone who knew him as a youth, something—he's like an old man already.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, well, I introduced him to someone, and when he left, the guy said to me, "This is not a young fellow. This is an old man." You know him, you know what he—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: He always has that look of—but I think he has a good sense of humor basically.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Good, yeah. Bloom though was more—you got along with, and he was easier to know when you were a young man.

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, I was very young then and we were—we'd see each other practically every day and discuss art. You know how young people do.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

[END OF TRACK AAA_richte94_6361_r.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is disc number four—with Mischa Richter. I want to just sort of wind up talking now

about your work, the art world, your assessment of your work. I know you've not only exhibited rarely in art galleries, but you've mentioned that you've tried to avoid showing. Is this an opinion or feeling that you've held since you were a young man, respecting art dealers and showing your art? You hate to release your work, on the other hand, you produce it, and it goes straight to a magazine.

MISCHA RICHTER: No, I don't—I'm not—I have no hatred of galleries. It's just that my temperament is such that I feel more at home if I'm treated like an auto mechanic or somebody who is needed you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: As you would be in a magazine—

MISCHA RICHTER: That's right. And it all sprung from a combination of two things: first, I was grounded in the Renaissance painters, which is an example, a supreme example of being needed as an artist.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean when you would go to those the afterschool classes in—

MISCHA RICHTER: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

MISCHA RICHTER: And that at Yale University, the history of art course and so on, I just loved it. I loved composition, forcing the eye to go where the artist wanted it to go, balancing the positive and the negative spaces. All these things were fascinating to me. [00:02:02] That was one aspect of it. The other aspect was that I was brought up during the Depression and the idea that like Orozco or Rivera had the satisfaction of doing something as a message for the people was very strongly embedded in me. And I still feel that it's more exciting to do that than do a painting and wait for somebody in the gallery to say, "Oh, this is great art; I think I'll buy it." It's more exciting to me that way. The other thing that—so I utterly remove from today's scene because museums have become concert halls. They've become places to show people who have not stood the test of time. What is wrong with a museum being a depository of things that have stood the test of time? It's like an anchor then to which you can hook on to and study. Why not wait till somebody proves that they cannot be eliminated. In other words, they made some contribution in such a way that it's worthy of a museum. So all this contributed and then I did work with galleries for a while here in Provincetown. I was president of the Group Gallery [ph], which was founded when I was president.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Back in the '50s or '60s?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, and I found that to be in a gallery, you have to produce all the time you know because let's see more of your work, let's have this, let's have that. [00:04:13] So my temperament doesn't fit that because I may get a spell of wanting to paint and then I'll hit a snag and think about it for two months. I don't have that same difficulty with drawing cartoons.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. With a cartoon, there is a reason for doing it, isn't there? Or if you work for a magazine, it wants something, and you, in your negations with that magazine or discussions, have an idea of what they're after. And this as with Renaissance painting is most appealing to you, isn't it?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, as I often say, that nobody says to you when you get an okay from a magazine, you have to do a lousy drawing. [Laughs.] They don't say anything. You could make the greatest drawing in the world if you're capable of it, so. I mean Leonardo drew caricatures. He thought it was fun to draw caricatures, people, and so on, as you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: So what caricatures means to overload, in Italian, *caricare*, so it comes from that. So overload means to emphasize, to bring out the essential maybe. So cartooning, I feel very pleased with being so-called a cartoonist. I would rather say that I'm a humorous artist. Also, I like the idea and the mystery of where ideas come from. [00:06:04] Why is that—there's a great satisfaction in knowing you have an idea that cannot be added to or taken away from that hits a common denominator in people's experience. So it's immediately recognizable. It says something that—and there are memorable things like that in cartoons that we all remember so that it had its own excitement too. So maybe I'm just a doodle personality. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. Well you've said that it's, on one hand, say, with a magazine, they don't care if you do masterpiece or a poor drawing as long as it's what they want. And obviously they wouldn't take you on if they're getting consistently poor drawings. I mean you do feel that—you're very proud of the fact that your work is well drawn and well composed, and you praised a bit earlier some of your training or the study of history, Renaissance art for that very reason. In your own cartoons, you've mentioned that, say, if you're dealing with humans and if you are dealing with human figures that the face is the most important element, and that could

relate to the overload, the caricature of Italian, classic Italian type too, right?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, I used to say things in the office that Geraghty would say, "Hey, that's true, yeah." I'm not showing off, but he was very fond of remembering what I said. And I said one day to him, "The face sets the pace," and he loved that expression. [00:08:00] In other words, it's like a comedian—you don't laugh at the joke, you laugh at the pace. You laugh at what the comedian creates on the stage, then whatever he says becomes funnier because you kind of expect that it's recognizable. Like Jack Benny talking about—I saw him once at the Waldorf Astoria when I worked for King Features. We he had these monthly dinners up there, and he was a guest once, and he didn't have any jokes. He just talked about how no one paid him to come here from California, and how much money they owed him, and it was horrible to be appearing here you know. [Laughs.] And there was no—he set the pace, you see. So it kind of does it humor too, in drawing, you see, sets the pace.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

MISCHA RICHTER: And also as far as composition goes, it's very applicable. Classical composition and drawing, humorous composition because Ross used to have his three w's. He'd say, "Where it is, what's happening, and who's doing the talking?" [Laughs.] You see, that's very interesting. Those are his three absolutes in judging, where is it, what's happening, and who the hell is doing the talking here? And if you can get that right away, you get the idea that much faster. I always composed—I always put my punch line picked—I mean the punch line on the right because of the western civilization. We read from left to right and so you set the stage. [00:10:05] Your eye moves, ha, ha, ha, ha, and unexpectedly something happening on the right, so there's a surprise, you see. If you give it all away on the left, then—with some exception of course. And I remember talking to Mike Gordon about it, the guy who directed *Pillow Talk*. He lived in Weston, and he was blacklisted and then given a chance to work again. But I used to meet him at parties. He went to Yale Drama School, and he talked about the same thing. He said in directing the movies, he studied art and the composition. So you see, there are many things that go into—can go in in making a cartoon that are just as enriching as doing any kind of drawing. It's true on abstract painting, you still control the eye. If you don't control the eye, then you aren't in charge. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you said so many different ways in this interview that the context of cartooning and the situations in cartooning are as noble—I guess we can use that word—as those of what is pretentiously displayed and enshrined in a museum or offered in an art gallery and that—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, maybe noble is not—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's not the right—

MISCHA RICHTER: —the right word. But as you know very well from your own experience as an art teacher, I mean history of art teacher, Daumier was rescued by Corot who was his friend in his old age and so on. Corot recognized him as an artist, and later on, the whole world caught on to the idea that maybe he's a great artist too not just a—not just a cartoonist, you see? [00:12:09]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MISCHA RICHTER: And that's—in a way jazz, is that way too. It took years for people to realize for example that Fats Waller was an admirer of Debussy [ph] but had to be a clown to make a living. But I knew one of his players, and he told me that. I said, "I noticed certain notes in the construction of harmony was like Debussy" He says, "Yes, he was a great admirer of Debussy."

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But Waller had to play the part of sort of a nightclub or bar entertainer.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, when he was first—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Cross talk.]

MISCHA RICHTER: —first worked on radio, the white musicians sat in one corner. He had to sit away from them playing the piano. That was on radio, and nobody could see them, and they still separated them. This was one of the greatest musicians, in my opinion, in the jazz era.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You felt that overt jokes and the like are not your kind of humor. They don't have the reality or they don't have the—and thus, they won't have the kind of lasting impact that more profound humor can have. Is this something, say, as a young man, you weren't—or perhaps you were a subject to the usual young man's bantering with jokes and one-liners and the like. [00:14:00] You were more interested in the absurdities and the humor that comes out of life, is that right? Has this been a pretty consistent theme because—

MISCHA RICHTER: I was always humorous, and that's a double-edged sword. It can be—it can—people can either like you because of that or feel you're not serious about anything and shouldn't be taken seriously—you know the kind of person that always has a morose look on their face when they talk about art but—[laughs] I remember Motherwell giving a talk, talking about us intellectuals, we intellectuals were asked to participate, intellectuals—and I mean I like his painting, but where does he get off talking about himself as an intellectual in front of a group of people who are supposedly not as intellectual? So that kind of taking yourself seriously was always abhorrent to me anyway. I—my own experience has been that most famous people that I have met are very human, very approachable, and very intelligent. For example, my son who worked for The Beatles and the wife who met—knew The Beatles, and John Lennon, for example, was a very intellectual, sensitive man. That didn't come through until you met him. [00:16:03] So when I heard Motherwell talk about we intellectuals [laughs] I thought it was a little unnecessary.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did he tend to be a bit heavy about himself or at least—

MISCHA RICHTER: No, I don't think so. I've met him, I talked with him but—and everybody in Provincetown knew him especially if you played poker. No, he was a nice enough guy. It's just the idea that he singled out a group and talked about it. In some occasion, that took place. I forget what it was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was Provincetown—now you've mentioned it, but here we are in the Provincetown. Was that a pretty major part of your life in the sense that you came and summered here, I supposed, for years and years? I think you had several residences. Did your in-laws or the Annands, did they come here first and then—

MISCHA RICHTER: No, no, no. They had no connection with Provincetown. Later on after my wife's mother died and my father-in-law went to live with his other daughter in *Redding* and Wellsley after he got to be an old man, he'd come here with his daughter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: When did you first start coming here with your wife and kid?

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh, with my wife?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you first come in '28 as a—

MISCHA RICHTER: Right. Then I came here with my wife for a few weeks before we had children. But we started—we came here in 1950 around June and spent the whole summer here and then went directly to New York and boarded the *Grasse* [ph] to go to Europe. So we spent a long time here, and the kids got to know everybody and played around here. [00:18:07] And from then on, we kept coming back here first for two- or three-week vacation in which I just stared at the water and did absolutely nothing. And in '59—then in '59, we bought our first house here and then we bought another house and then we built a house and then we bought one next to it and finally ended up here. We kept going from one house to another. At one time, we had three houses at one time here including the house in Weston, Connecticut. And that's—of course, this is a story of my idiocy because being an artist, I looked down on business. I was brought, oh, I'm an artist, I don't want to think about, so I sold 24 acres of land in Darien like an idiot.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Instead of holding on it?

MISCHA RICHTER: Its worth about a million dollars an acre now. Well, I was very successful at a very young age. You see from WPA, I ended up with a house with 24 acres. I had a gardener, I had two—a cleaning woman, a cook, and a woman that took care of the kids, all this when we were young and didn't need any help. We had all that energy, and here were these people who were hovering over us, helping us, and I thought that was normal procedure. You go to school, you graduate and then you start working, and you get well paid. [Laughs.] So you see, everything I say it's not very profound. [00:20:04] I'm capable of a lot of stupidity too. [They laugh.]. So when we went to Europe at 1950, I said, "What do I need all that land for while we were in Europe?" So I sold off 15 acres that I had with an idiotic rationale in which I said to myself, who in Darien would ever want to build in the woods that border on a railroad station. Well, I certainly proved myself to be all wrong. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You didn't want to carry the burden.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, that's right, the burden.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The taxes I mean—

MISCHA RICHTER: I don't know. I don't know, just sheer idiocy, that's all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You resent some of those decisions of years ago or not?

MISCHA RICHTER: Sure. You'd be talking to a multimillionaire now if I held on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MISCHA RICHTER: And I'm not talking about one acre; I had 24 acres in Darien, Connecticut. My god, what a stupid move that one. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you had several properties here too at one time.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you must have stood out slightly with—in contrast to a number of the other artists here who I gather were impoverished or near poverty much of their lives. They'd come here in the Depression and sort of hung on here ever, ever after.

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, this community among artist was kind of a *salade russe,* you know. It's—some are rich, some are poor, so I don't think—I give everybody credit for ignoring that completely.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Good. You found this as a pretty healthy, clean atmosphere through the years here in Provincetown. I mean the relation among the artists, is it somewhat like that? You talked about earlier among cartoonists—

MISCHA RICHTER: I think it varied because in the old days, artists were more approachable. [00:22:03] They'd talk to one another as—later on, as it is today, they all have their little private connections, and they're not too anxious for you to find out about them.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes, you mentioned in even your very first visit how Hawthorne, and I forget who else, Bicknell, they went up [ph] to you.

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh yeah, they talked. They want to help you if you're a young kid drawing. They were interesting, very friendly people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. You'd been involved, I suppose, with the art association here off and on or—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, yeah. I started as a member, and I was president as one time, and I was on the committees, part of them. But I got fed up talking about money all the time especially when you sit at the table with about four millionaires next to you. And one of them was—one person was so generous and so good about paying bills, helping. The others would sit there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sit on their hands, huh?

MISCHA RICHTER: Sit on their hands, and I thought that was a little uncalled for.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Finally, it gets tiresome just that most of your talk was about how to keep going.

MISCHA RICHTER: It was about money, and all my life, I've devoted to trying to live so to eliminate bill, and I didn't want to—I've been—I never had any financial problems, you see, so I said—I tried to avoid them. So when I was put into a situation where they talked about money—well, when they became a museum, as you well know, a whole new set of rules entered into the picture. You can't ask the government for this and that unless you meet certain specifications, and of course, specifications mean spending a lot of money. [00:24:05] And so why they made it a museum without being able to finance it comfortably as a museum is—I felt was stupid personally, but a lot of people get ego satisfaction from it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Has it meant— Did it become a bit of burden to you when you were involved with it? So have you pulled back from the art association? It's not something you sought to be involved with, was it?

MISCHA RICHTER: No, I just showed pictures there. They'd hang my pictures, and I wanted to see what they look like. You always—your pictures look quite different when they're on the wall because they shrink in size, and they find other pictures, and you—it's a good test to see how they stand up, so it was interesting. But being part of the organization behind the scenes was too much talk about money for my temperament. I remember sitting in a meeting once when we had a $500 telephone bill, and there were millionaires next to me. And one would say, "Well, we have to have another meeting about this, so maybe we should have a committee to—" all this. I said, "Look, at the end of this meeting without saying who it is, will you go in the office, and write a $100 check, those who want to do it, and pay up this bill?" and they did. Just as a—I don't know who did it. I know I did it, I paid that too. I mean I didn't say that to them, but the bill was cleared up right there at the end of that meeting. That was a good example I think.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. [00:26:01] Pretty annoying [inaudible].

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you find—you've known Provincetown best and from the '50s till now, I guess, have you seen that it varies in trends or tendencies or anything you can generalize about?

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, the general thing, of course, is the obvious. Tourism is now the attraction not fishing. The fishing industry is moribund; you know it's dying.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: So the dignity that went with the fishing industry is gone. Now, it's shopkeepers. And the other thing, of course, is the gay rights thing, and it's become so—sometimes, it reaches the ridiculous so that even people I know or friends of mine who are gay objected to it. They say, "What are they demonstrating here for? Why don't they demonstrate in front of the state house? Not somewhere where nobody gives a damn or bother to them."

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure. Yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah. So that's the only thing that annoys me at times, but it's a minor annoyance. There are still enough beautiful things here too.

ROBERT F. BROWN: When you were here, and it's been said that in the '50s, there were—it was a time when a lot of major art collectors came around here. And, in fact, I gather they could spend part of—they spend part of their summers here. People would come and board or maybe they owned places but could also board—there were some old hotels—here.

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, I don't know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you recall that at all when the—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, Hirshhorn, of course, was married to Lily Harmon who was the big one that I knew. [00:28:00] I knew Lily Harmon at Yale and she—I launched her on her marriage career. I mean I introduced her to her first husband, then she went on marrying. [They laugh.] Very nice—I'm not being mean, she's a very nice woman, and I'm sure everything is fine now. But I had a date with her when I was at school. We went to a movie or something, I don't know. We came to my place in New Haven, and next to me was a fellow named Peter Harnden who was a bon vivant, and he came into the room, and I introduced them. And she started going with Peter Harnden who later became quite a well-known architect and lived and died in Spain. And then she married Harmon who was a theater producer and then she married Hirshhorn and now she is married, as you probably know, to Schachter I think his name is. So I'm responsible for her successful marriage career.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] So that's a prominent role you played through the years.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah. Peter Harnden was an amazing man.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Peter Harnden?

MISCHA RICHTER: Harnden, yes. He spoke several languages. His father was envoy to Switzerland, and he was one of these people brought up all over the world and very charming. He threw a party during the Depression, which was very amusing. [Laughs.] He had a room about this size, and he hired a five-piece orchestra. [00:30:01] [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: On like a 30 [inaudible] room or—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, and a butler who spoke only Spanish, an immigrant, and Peter could talk fluent Spanish you see. And the guests would come in, and they couldn't move, and he'd tell the butler, "Give them this, bring them that," and the orchestra was—[laughs] it was really wonderful in a way. He was that kind of a guy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he was Lily's husband at one time.

MISCHA RICHTER: First husband, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In the '50s and '60s, the New York Press gave a good deal of play at the art activities in Provincetown during the summer. It seems like there's less of that since that time.

MISCHA RICHTER: Maybe, I don't know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. You're not so sensitive to these trends. I mean, today, we have—there's a good

annual coverage of Provincetown, the magazine *Provincetown Arts* about reviews or reports on art in Provincetown. But do you think there is as much being done in Provincetown, or is it being done, as you suggested earlier, rather quietly, that the artists don't share too much with each other?

MISCHA RICHTER: I really don't know. I don't know what—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were in the Group Gallery. When—the Group Gallery went—got going when, in the '50s or '60s at the time?

MISCHA RICHTER: '60s, I would say.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that a group that shared ideas, or was it merely a convenient—

MISCHA RICHTER: Well, the Group Gallery, it was a cooperative, everybody paid and so on. I mean they—we had a committee that passed the qualifications and so on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But beyond that, once you were in, you just rotated your shots?

MISCHA RICHTER: That's right. It's now called the ADA Gallery [ph], which is next to the—in the building where the tennis club is.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The tennis club?

MISCHA RICHTER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would you show largely paintings down here or drawings?

MISCHA RICHTER: I showed both paintings and some of my cartoons. [00:32:04]

ROBERT F. BROWN: By the way, all these years, have you kept up painting? I mean, did you paint practically and steadily as you drew?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, I paint all the time, but I have such peculiar mind that I always question things and get theoretical and get bogged down and analyzing instead of letting myself go.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean you're frozen sometimes when you'll be painting and then you'll hesitate while you—

MISCHA RICHTER: I reached—I paint, I'm all excited, I paint and then suddenly I—the thing doesn't look right, and I'd stop right there because I don't know how to solve it and hope that some—you know, it'll hit me like lightning or something or like Minerva from Jupiter's head or some damn thing like that. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you find you go back to much older canvases from time to time?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah, for a while, I was all worked up about composing people in boxes sleeping and using that in an abstract way. So I—am I still hooked up?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah. So I do that, and I showed—they had the President's Show here earlier in the year, and I was given a wall in which I showed some of the paintings.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But they're—paintings then present problems for you as much as—more than solutions?

MISCHA RICHTER: Present problems, they present problems to viewers because they cannot understand that you can do humorous drawings and paintings, see. So they're confused by my—by me I think generally speaking. [00:34:10] Very few bridge the gap in looking at my work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well let's say they're a viewer who doesn't remember that or for the moment forgets that your drawings and cartoons, even so is it—they're problematic, the paintings?

MISCHA RICHTER: No. They—I get the usual amount of compliments and all that, but that's about it. Once or twice, I sold some but no big deal.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, I know you're very fond of this painting here of—

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is a very early one. Very bright colors laid on heavily. What is the title there? It's rough —

MISCHA RICHTER: It's *Racing Cars* [ph].

ROBERT F. BROWN: *Racing Cars?*

MISCHA RICHTER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that's about 1930 or so, isn't it?

MISCHA RICHTER: Oh, no, no, I did that 1950 or something.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And that's shown in the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut.

MISCHA RICHTER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In late 1950s.

MISCHA RICHTER: And I'm very pleased with it because the black-and-white reproduction, reveals [ph] that all the values work and so on. So I'm very happy about it. It took me about 20 minutes to do that painting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really?

MISCHA RICHTER: Yes, I just did it. It worked. Everything worked, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

MISCHA RICHTER: And so I did it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's really [ph] rare in your painting?

MISCHA RICHTER: Right and I used Magna colors—I'm not trying to advertise—but the quick-drying oils, the Magna color, so that would—and used a palette knife. So that was very pleasant. You could just put it right on. [00:36:00]

[END OF TRACK AAA_richte94_6362_r.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]