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Oral history interview with Reed Kay, 1995 December 22-1996 October 4

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Reed Kay on 1995 December 22 - 1996 October 4. The interview was conducted at the artist's home in Brookline, MA by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

REED KAY: Essentially, Cutter was a national commentator on the national politics.

ROBERT BROWN: We're beginning an interview of Reed Kay at his home in Brookline, Massachusetts, Robert Brown, the interviewer. And this is December 22nd, 1995. And I thought, Reed, we could just begin at the beginning. Your family -- you said your parents came over to this country from Latvia, I think, about 1920?

MR. KAY: That's right. Right.

MR. BROWN: Did they talk much about the homeland?

MR. KAY: Not a great deal -- well, not really. They were conscious of it, of course. I mean, they made me conscious of it. But there weren't long reminiscences about the white sands or the beaches near Riga. It was mentioned from time to time. But they were very young when they came here. I was born, I think -- I'm not sure about that 1920 date. But my impression is that they were here for about five years before I was born. I was born in 1925, and in Boston at the Boston Longian [phonetic]. And the family lived at that time on Charles Street in an apartment building.

MR. BROWN: In Boston?

MR. KAY: In Boston.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. Now, your family -- your father had a profession, didn't he?

MR. KAY: He had a trade.

MR. BROWN: He had a trade.

MR. KAY: Yes. He had a trade. Actually, I think he and his brother, my uncle, were taught their trades in some sort of a displaced persons camp after World War I, shortly after World War I, around 1920. And they both came over here, I believe, as jewelry engravers. They could carve rings, could carve inscriptions on flat silver, and so on. My uncle changed his trade and became a dental laboratory mechanic, making prosthetic teeth, dentures, and so on, and lived with my father for a certain period of time here in Boston, and then later, shortly afterwards, moved to New York.

My father lived here in Boston. My mother came over, I believe, after he did. And they were married here.

MR. BROWN: Was she also from the same area?

MR. KAY: She was from the same area in Latvia, near Riga. Lebow was the town.

MR. BROWN: Lebow.

MR. KAY: I've never been back there, never had a great inclination to get back there. And there was a rather large family, at least my father's family. I think there were some six or seven siblings. My uncle came over here with him. There was an older sister who came here around 1938-39. The others, I think, all perished in the Nazi years when the Jewish community was virtually wiped out in Latvia.

And they stayed on Charles Street, I think near Blossom Street, on the corner building. There was a tenement that I remember very well. We lived there till I was about four or five years old. I entered kindergarten. There was a public school, Blackstone School, near where we lived. And having completed kindergarten, I got the rest of my education when we moved to Roxbury, first near Dudley Station on Winthrop Street. I went to a school, the Sarah J. Baker School. I never knew who Sarah J. Baker was, but it was somehow auxiliary, an annex school to the Julia Ward Howe School. And though I didn't know it then, Julia Ward Howe, of course, was the woman

who wrote, I think, the lyrics to the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And then --

MR. BROWN: Well, where you lived, were there mostly people who had just come over?

MR. KAY: Actually, the neighborhood in which I lived first, from the time I was four until about the time I was eight, was largely Irish, near Dudley Station. And I think we were almost the only Jewish family on the block. Now, some of those Irish families may also have been recent immigrants or perhaps first-generation people. My parents kept, of course, in touch with a great many of their friends who had come over when they did. But they lived in other sections of Roxbury. They got together on weekends and so on. So there was a lot of contact with people with whom they had immigrated.

MR. BROWN: You've mentioned that there were -- my impression is that in childhood, there were lots of people coming in and out, a good deal of socializing.

MR. KAY: There was, yeah. Well, it was -- if you think of the time, we were heading into the Depression. Most of the people who had come over were having a hard time surviving, really. And when we lived in Roxbury, by the 1930s, life was pretty difficult for many of these people. They were all quite young, though, and very industrious.

They were all -- at least the ones that my parents associated with were all very concerned about politics, had witnessed, in a sense, the Russian Revolution before they had emigrated from either Latvia or Poland or Russia. And they carried these concerns with them when they were in this country finding the conditions of the -- of working class people difficult.

They also were very -- they were not people of much education. I think most of them were self-educated. They could all read and write. But the men in some cases had gone to religious school, as was the custom on Europe, but had, for the most part, discarded their attachment to the observant religious community and were very secularized and at the same time very conscious of Jewish culture. So they read a great deal of the Jewish authors, people like Shalom Aleichem and Perutz. And they kept many of the customs, the songs and so on, which pretty much surrounded my childhood.

MR. BROWN: Yes, you had mentioned that Yiddish was spoken in the home.

MR. KAY: That's correct. Until I went to public school, that was the only language that I knew. And it continued to be the language inside the house in a sort of strange mix. I mean, they immediately picked up, as young people will -- they picked up a great deal of sort of street English, which they mixed with Yiddish, so that it was really a pretty impure form of Yiddish by the -- that I remember. I remember noticing the differences, for example, when we read Yiddish stories. The differences of the style of the author was very apparent when it was compared to the way people had begun to speak already, you know, with the introduction of many English words. In fact, they were aware of it, and they often made jokes about that, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. They would be reading Shalom Aleichem because of his stories of the culture in Eastern Europe?

MR. KAY: Yes, and also because of his general stance as far as social and political problems were concerned. Most of the Jewish literature at that time pointed to the kind of political turbulence, the injustices, social injustices that surrounded the Jewish communities in Europe. And so there was a keen awareness, really, of the differences between rich and poor, between state and citizen. And they were usually presented in a humorous way, in the case of Shalom Aleichem. And a kind of certain ironic twist to the account almost always occurs. And this is true with many of the writers.

They were not exclusively reading Yiddish, however. My earliest memories of my parents are in that attic that we lived in in Winthrop Street, 49 Winthrop Street, reading to each other in English. Theodore Dreiser was an author that they regarded very highly. Michael Gold was a man who wrote for, I think, *The New Masses*. And he had a novel called *Jews Without Money* [New York, Liveright Publishing: 1935], I believe.

I remember -- the funny thing is, I remember the color of the books, the sort of red-orange binding with black embellishment on it. And they're sitting there in the living room. Just the amusement was really reading to each other. Neighbors would stop by. There would be exchanges of opinion about various books.

And pretty soon, my parents moved out of that place that they had on Winthrop Street up further towards Elm Hill Avenue. Holborn Street was the address. There were more members of their group there, so that by that

time it was very -- well, the social organization was really very different then from what I live in now. It was almost like having one very large family. You slept over friends' houses; they slept over your house. My mother would on occasion have to go in and help my father in the shop, and I was always -- arrangements were always made that I would eat with one of my friends' families.

And this sort of reciprocity existed in that community, you know, to a very -- to the extent that sometimes was troubling to a young boy because, you know, you had a mother in every house telling you to simmer down and don't throw a ball around in the house, and, you know, wipe your feet, and take off your shoes before you come in out of the snow and track up the floor. You know, it was all right if your mother said this, but when you had about six or eight people feeling entitled to tell you all of this, it could be a little wearing.

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.]

MR. KAY: But in general, you know, there was never any hesitation. For example, I remember one time I was somewhat older when I was taken aside by one of the men, a close friend of my parents, and told, you know, "I know you're interested in roller skating and playing and all of that. But you really have to help your parents a little more, you know, and you should help with the housework and things like that." You know, this was said to me in a sort of avuncular way. I mean, this was not a relative, but it was somebody who in a certain sense could claim to stand in local parentis, you might say. And there was never any challenge to this kind of thing. I mean, this was accepted.

MR. BROWN: And you had siblings then? You were --

MR. KAY: No, I didn't. I grew up as an only child for 12 years. And then my mother gave birth to my brother, who by that time was really living in a -- it's strange to me now to think of it, how different the community was that he grew up in, than mine. Those 12 years made a great deal of difference. Let's see, between 1925 and 1937, we had sort of gone through a period of Depression, a period of a great deal of labor conflict, and my parents were involved in that to some extent. By 1937, we were sort of easing, I think, a little bit out of the Depression, but the second World War was already threatening.

I mean, the Jewish community was very acutely aware of the rise of Hitler and what was going on in Europe. And by 1938-1939, people were very, very concerned. However, most of the families were in much better circumstances from point of view of surviving and their financial condition. Of course, most of my friends were in their early teens and had -- their greatest concern was just raging hormones, you might say.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. KAY: So my brother was a baby, actually, as I was sort of going through adolescence. And I was expected to take care of him from time to time and so on. I by that time was at the William Lloyd Garrison School. See, I didn't know who any of these people were. It's only in high school years that I began to realize the significance of these names. And that was up on Hutchings Street.

MR. BROWN: In Roxbury, also?

MR. KAY: In Roxbury, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: It turns out that that was the same school to which Jack Levine went. We found that out decades later when we were both up at Skowhegan. Strangely enough, we could both recite some of the same poems that we had been given to memorize in the sixth grade by Ms. Fitzgerald -- *Opportunity* by Edward Roland Sill, for example.

And a lot of the schooling was -- I wouldn't say Talmudic, but it did involve a great deal of rote memory, which is despised these days as being a kind of mechanical, anti-intellectual quality. I personally think it is a tremendous assistance and a wonderful tool in education. I'm very saddened by the way some of these older disciplines have been discarded.

In any case, I was at the Garrison School only for one year, and then was sent to Boston Latin School for my seventh grade. I was at the time 10 years -- I finished sixth grade when I was 10, so I was 11 when I began Latin School. I think that's correct. I know I graduated when I was 16.

MR. BROWN: Well, you had accelerated, as you mentioned.

MR. KAY: I had accelerated.

MR. BROWN: Third and fifth grades?

MR. KAY: Correct.

MR. BROWN: You did them in two years or something like that?

MR. KAY: Yeah. That was not unusual in those days. I mean, they -- the Boston schools seem to have done that in lieu of skipping grades, as was done in other communities, where kids were sometimes jumped from the second grade to the fifth grade, completing omitting the material in the fourth. This was simply an acceleration with the same teacher. The same group of kids stood with one teacher for two years, covering the material of the third, fourth, and fifth grades.

As a matter of fact, I went back from the new address, which was really in a different school district -- I was allowed to go back and finish the rapid advancement year in the Sarah J. Baker School with Ms. Caldwell, whom I remember so well. You remember a few teachers as being tremendously important. This lady was tall, I think beautiful woman, black hair, very classical features. She tolerated a great deal of -- I guess I was not always a very quiet or docile student. And she managed to keep me in class and just was a marvelous teacher. She was one of the three or four teachers that I will always remember. For two years, worked with her -- she sent me then up to the Garrison School for my sixth grade and I was sent from there to Boston Latin.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: I had several friends. One of them was Matt Hentoff, who has since gone into journalism and letters, at the Garrison School and he went to Latin School the same year I did.

MR. BROWN: About the same time?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Can I go back just a little more on general terms?

MR. KAY: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: You mentioned when your parents and friends were here that they still saw signs of injustice and poverty, and, of course, repression here. But I suppose, by comparison with, say, Latvia, wasn't it milder? Did they ever compare America favorably, vis a vis Eastern Europe?

MR. KAY: My impression was that they were very concerned with the class struggle, as they put it. They saw everything through a kind of Marxist window prism, which arranged all problems really as emanating essentially from the fact that poor people were exploited and rich people were profiting from the labor of the underclass, so to speak.

They immediately attached themselves to various causes in this country, like freeing the Scottsboro boys and so on. And they never made in those days to me very clear how they felt about the problems in the United States vis a vis the problems that they had encountered in Europe. They were, I think, of the opinion that the whole thing was an international problem, that this was a problem of the entire industrialized Western world, that national boundaries may have given a different inflection in one sense or another to these problems, which were to them the major problems of Western society. So you might have different manifestations in France or in Germany than you had in Latvia or the United States, but nevertheless, it was a sort of international conspiracy of wealth against the exploited poor, in their view.

I think at the same time, they realized that they had a kind of political freedom and a license for expression in this country that they did not have elsewhere, and that anti-Semitism was somewhat less -- not somewhat, considerably less evident and rabid than it was in their situation in Eastern Europe, which they had left. But they were still highly critical of the organization of American society or of aspects of it. They were devoutly attached to Franklin Roosevelt when he emerged as a political figure in this country. Although they said he may be a representative of the aristocratic class, but he is as a person a great idealist and he will save capitalism in this country.

Their cultural sense was very -- well, I don't know how to describe it. They were not sophisticated people. They were not people who knew a great deal, for example, about music. But they respected it a great deal, and we went to the symphony from time to time. I remember being terribly bored. I was young, they had taken me to some concert that had some modern music in it that I couldn't make anything out of.

They took me to the museum. I must have been -- my earliest recollection, I was going to the Boston Museum. Perhaps I was 11 or 12 years old. And I remember looking at Impressionist painting and thinking, "Well, that's not really very good. Everybody knows trees aren't pink and red." But I was told to look at everything and to keep an open mind.

They were great enthusiasts about film. There was at that time a theater in Boston, the Fine Arts Theater on Norway Street, right around the corner from Symphony Hall, owned by, I think, somebody called -- somebody by the name of George Krasker, if memory serves me. It was a very little theater, not too many seats. You came in, and there was red carpeting on the stairs. And there were prints along the wall in black and white that I liked very much. In memory, they seemed to me, now in retrospect, to have been something probably like Kirchner, sort of German expressionist, sort of angular prints that really seemed to me to be very interesting.

And we saw all kinds of French pictures there, Russian pictures, particularly. He dealt -- he exhibited mostly European films. There was one scandalous picture, I understand, *Ecstasy* with Heddy Lamarr. I remember seeing that. I must have been about eight years old when my parents took me. I never understood what all the talk was about, of course.

[Laughter.]

MR. KAY: But there were all kinds of other films, marvelous French pictures, *It Happened at the Inn* and *Harvest* and the Ray New [phonetic] pictures, Fernandel. Very weepy, sentimental pictures from Russia like *Troyka* and *Broken Shoes*, which showed, you know, young street kids who were becoming hoodlums taken over by the good schoolteacher and taught to become useful citizens.

I didn't really -- I didn't really believe those pictures then, and I must say I can't take them seriously now, but my parents liked them. They were in Russian, which they spoke, and they just, I think, were like -- almost like a visit to the Old Country.

So films at an early age sort of got me started being interested in theater and taking seriously what one could find in the theater in the way of -- and of course, there were books. I mean, the first library I remember was the West End Library. This was -- I was taken there by my mother when I was -- well, before we left the West End. So I was less than four years old. And I'd be getting Thornton W. Burgess books, *Paddy the Beaver* [New York, Little, Brown and Company: 1925], things like that. It was a lovely library, and the building is of course still there, but it's used for other purposes at this point. It's on Cambridge Street and has a wonderful iron railing going up -- right past the Mass General. And it's between Staniford Street and the river.

So we went to the public library and got books. And when we moved to Roxbury, I had the habit of going in every week. I had my own library card and would make the walk and come back with five or six books and read them, you know, just adventure books, kid books.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: But I read an enormous amount of stuff growing up. I was never told not to -- you know, that I ought to read one thing and not another. Mostly, I just got boys adventure stuff, Altsheler, the *Rock of Chickamauga* [New York, D. Appleton and Company: 1915], things like that. I soon drifted into -- I remember when I was about nine or ten, I was reading Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, which is a big book for a little kid and I'm sure I missed most of what was in it. But I liked the idea of getting big adult books, you know, and reading them. They made it easy for me to do that.

There's one thing about Boston at that time. None of us had people chauffeuring us around. I took -- you know, as an adult, I've had to move out of all of that. Anytime we wanted to take our kids anywhere, we'd bring them in a car to the conservatory or to classes at the museum or whatever. Those days, kids went everywhere by themselves and interestingly enough, they -- it seems to me -- it seemed to me then, it seems to me now, that we were welcome everywhere. You went into a public library, and librarians really sort of turned themselves inside out to help kids.

There was a woman, Miss Lahane, in the Roxbury Memorial Library, who was -- if you just mention her name to Jack Levine or to Jason Burg or to any of the people I know, she was like a second mother to us. She must have -- soaking wet she might have weighed 85 pounds. She was a tiny bird of a person, but so energetic, hyperkinetic, I think we'd say today. And the minute you walked in, you know, and showed an interest in reading, she would line you up for four more books. "Try this one. Try that one." And anything you did was okay, so long as you didn't speak above a whisper in the library and, you know, kept coming back with the books.

This was true not only in the library, but it was true in classes. When I was at Latin School, I was given tickets to Shakespeare performances by my English teachers that Emerson College was putting on. Student productions, but it was something for a kid to see, *Measure for Measure* or something like that, come alive on the stage. Never mind if it wasn't, you know, the greatest production in the world. It was up there. It was alive. And it was free. Boston was just great for kids at that point. The museum -- well, I'll come to that a little later on.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. KAY: But it was also the case that the museum was extremely welcoming. So that, in a different way from today's outreach programs, where they sort of reach out and drag kids in, you had to show an interest. But if you showed an interest, you were sort of given the keys to the place, whether it was a library or a theater or a museum. And I think that's a little different than it is today. In any case, it was very important for me and for my friends.

MR. BROWN: During these years then, you had -- it sounds, you know, marvelous. You also occasionally would help your father in his various shops? Did he own shops or co-own them?

MR. KAY: No, no, no. When he first came here, he found employment -- well, I don't know about first. But when I was first aware, he was working for a jewelers, firm of wholesale Solomont and Ettinger, who had their business up on the fifth -- Number 5 Bromfield Street, up on the third floor, I think, or the fourth floor.

He worked for them for a number of years and then decided to go off on his own as a sort of freelance engraver, which he did by taking space on the same floor that they occupied at 5 Bromfield Street, along with a few other artisans. A diamond setter, a watchmaker, a manufacturing jeweler, and my father all rented one room, one office, and had a bench that went along the windows. Each one had his own customers and my father still retained the firm that originally employed him, as a customer. But then he had other jewelry departments, such as Gilchrist's and Rogers Jewelry, Washington Jewelry, and so on.

MR. BROWN: For whom he would do engraving and carving?

MR. KAY: Yeah. That's right. He would go out in the morning and pick up any work that they had. If they sold a watch, for example, the customer would want it engraved on the back saying, "To Johnny from Mother and Dad on his Graduation," you know, "1939."

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And they'd write it out on a slip, and he would pick up the watch and the slip, engrave it, and bring it back to them in the afternoon, bill them for it, usually by the letter. It was something like two cents a letter or something like that.

As his work grew in volume, he hired an errand boy occasionally to deliver the work and to pick it up. It was very seasonal work. He would be very busy around Christmas, and then again around June and graduation and traditionally the wedding time. He'd have a lot of work at those parts of the year and then very little in between. During those periods, he would be working until perhaps two or three o'clock in the morning to get the work done. My mother would help him and I was regularly drafted from school to come in during the busy seasons and work in the shop, which I did. First just doing the errands and then just, for example, cleaning the silver after he had engraved it.

Usually, you have to put a little wax on it and a little powder and, with a hard rubber point, outline the letters, lay them out, and then he would cut them. I got so I could do the layout work for him and eventually, by the time I was about 11, I was cutting metal as well. So I did learn -- my mother insisted. He didn't want to teach me the trade. But my mother insisted and said that, no matter what I did -- it was hoped that I would go on to great things in school. But that I should always have a trade to fall back on.

MR. BROWN: Was your mother the more forceful one in the marriage?

MR. KAY: Oh, absolutely. And that was true in -- I would just say without thinking too hard, that was true in four out of five cases in my neighborhood, that the women were very directive, very assertive, and the men, you know, sort of went off to work at seven in the morning and came home exhausted at six at night or seven at night, and were told that they were greenhorns, that they really didn't know what was going on in the world. And they didn't. I mean, the men didn't really speak the language very well as the women, because they had to go out and shop and all of that -- soon, I think, became a little more knowledgeable about their new environment than many of the men did.

And the kids in general respected their mothers a lot more than they did their fathers. I was fortunate because I think the greatest thing in the world was that I worked with my father, and I saw what he had to put up with and how hard he worked, and the various sort of indignities that he put up with at the time.
I mean, he worked for people who were not very cultivated people, and they wanted everything done the day before yesterday, you know. They had absolutely no interest in his problems. If they sent him a couple of hundred Coleman file sets to put initials on, they wanted that stuff back in a day or two. And if he didn't deliver, there was a lot of screaming on the telephone. Or when I delivered them, you know, they would give me a few pungent messages to take back to him. He was always afraid of losing customers and losing the work.

I said to him at one time when I was about 12. I said, "Pa, why do you put up with all of this? Why don't you just

tell that guy off?" There was one particular fellow. He said, "Listen, Reedy. You like the food on the table, don't you?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, that's how we get it." And I realized at that time that, though he wasn't doing a lot of heavy lifting, he was working very, very hard. Also, by those years he began -- I think I was about 13 when he had his first stroke.

MR. BROWN: He wasn't that old a man.

MR. KAY: No. He died at the age of 41, when I was in the Army. He had had several strokes before and each time had recovered, but painfully and slowly had recovered his manual dexterity. He was really a very good engraver and carver. I mean, he didn't just do initials on Coleman file sets. He could carve a tray. He carved wedding bands, things like that, very beautifully.

In fact, that trade is just about gone now. We wanted to get a gift for my daughter and have it engraved and I went back to the jeweler's building where I used to know a lot of people. There's scarcely a single engraver there left that works by hand. They all have these machines that sort of jiggle the letters on there. They look horrible. And, you know, it's not hand cut anymore, and it doesn't look anything like it.

He was very good. After these strokes he took usually a month or two before he could really trust himself to cut. And that's when I was really doing some of the work. There was another engraver who he would bring the work to just to tide us over till he could get back to work. So I was sort of running back and forth between the shop and my studies. I was expected to be a good student, and I think I was.

MR. BROWN: Well, you went into, at the seventh grade, at age 11, to Boston Latin?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: That was based as a result of a competition to get in there?

MR. KAY: Well, in those days -- it is today an exam school. In those days I think -- all I knew about it was that my teacher from the Garrison School had recommended that -- she asked my mother to come in and talk with her and recommended to her that I go to Latin School. I have no recollection of an exam of any sort. So my supposition is that it's very likely that you -- that they had a system by which the local schools recommended, from the sixth grade, likely students out of their class, and that that's how the thing worked back then. I'm not sure, though. There might have been more to it than that. I don't recollect any particular exam.

MR. BROWN: But it was the school? I mean, academically, it was the one to aim for?

MR. KAY: I didn't know anything about it, nor did my mother. No, it was recognized as such in those days, but not by this community. Latin School, of course, goes back to 1632. It was founded a year before Harvard College. Actually, Harvard, I think, was founded in order to take the boys from Latin School and bring them up to the levels necessary to enter the ministry.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: But the Latin School is a very old school, and the first thing you notice when you come into the assembly hall as a kid is that there are these names, Robert Treat Paine, Benjamin Franklin, you know, all these wonderful names that were all alumni of the school. So it was a well-known school elsewhere, but not -- my parents had never heard of it, nor had I, nor had my fellow students. We just were given the option to either go to Roxbury Memorial High School, which was just a few blocks away, or to go in by streetcar to Latin School, which we did, and which was really, I think, a tremendous education for us, along a certain line. There were deficiencies, it is said now. I'm sure that there were.

MR. BROWN: You began in what we call the seventh grade?

MR. KAY: Correct.

MR. BROWN: And what -- do you recall what -- what was the coursework?

MR. KAY: Oh, sure. It wasn't very hard. First of all, there were no options. There were no choices or elections to be made. You took English every year for the six years.

MR. BROWN: And that meant grammar and literature?

MR. KAY: Grammar, literature, and composition. You took history, which I think in the first year was ancient history. You took math, which, as I -- I don't really remember if we got to algebra that first year or not. But you had math -- English, history, and math. Latin, of course -- you began with Richie's first steps in Latin in class six. What am I leaving out? There's another subject. English, history, math, Latin -- it will come to me, but I'm

not sure.

MR. BROWN: Was it particularly rigorous in contrast to your earlier schooling?

MR. KAY: Well, it didn't seem so at the time to me because the Garrison School was a rather tough school, too, and reputed to be so in Roxbury. But yes, it was very rigorous, especially in regard to conduct. That took a little getting used to in my case.

MR. BROWN: And you were a fairly rambunctious lad.

MR. KAY: Well, yeah, I guess, talkative and spoiled probably, a little bit. There was, you know, a system -- first of all, you know, you wore a necktie and a shirt, automatically. You couldn't even think of not coming to school with a necktie. If you stepped out of line or spoke out of -- you know, whispered to a classmate or something like that, you could get -- depending on the teachers' discretion, you could get a so-called misdemeanor mark.

For each misdemeanor, this was recorded and on your report card. If you got something like five of them, you were sent down to the office. If you got seven of them, you almost automatically got a censure. If you were censured more than once, you could very well be expelled from the school. It was a serious business, and people learned to play very close to the line, you know, of maybe getting four marks or five marks and not having to go to the office.

It was a very tough -- and some teachers were much more Martinette than others. Some were more permissive, of course, and they were not the ones who were always the most respected.

Gad, I just can't remember what the fifth subject was. That really annoys me.

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose that -- what about the -- you said you admired, that you all admired more the disciplinarians at Boston Latin. Why do you think that was?

MR. KAY: No, I didn't say that.

MR. BROWN: Oh?

MR. KAY: What I said was that sometimes the more permissive teachers were less admired. There were -- well, it's perfectly understandable. There were teachers who were strict, but very fair, and you felt you knew where they were. There were some who were rather -- how would I say? -- volatile, quixotic, and where you didn't really know. You might drop a pencil one day and get a misdemeanor mark for it, and another day that kind of thing would go by.

Then there was one teacher that I remember very well who really was -- he was a language expert. But he was really a terrible teacher from a pedagogical point of view. He couldn't keep any order in a class of unruly boys, you know. The result was that the class was total chaos all the time. Nobody learned anything. This was a German class. And we went from that class into the hands of a very, very well-organized, very strict teacher, Herr Weinert. And he -- you know, many of us perished in that transition.

The fact is that there were some very permissive teachers, and they were not -- in some cases, were not respected. There were others who almost could be called sadists. I never had that kind of problem, but friends whom I respect a great deal, who are now very good professionals in other fields, claim that some of these people with whom I studied were really terrible people. And not just strict disciplinarians, but people who took a certain amount of pleasure in inflicting pain on the kids. I didn't have that feeling at any time through the six years I was in the school.

I should go back and say that the other subject that I omitted was science, in the first year. And significantly, all through the six years, there was never a course on art; there was never a course on music. These subjects were not in the curriculum, but clubs existed, and they were important in the school. They were clubs only in the sense that they were extracurricular activities. Anybody could join. This was not an exclusive situation. So if you had an interest in art, there was an art club. And somebody came in from the outside. Actually, it was somebody who was teaching at Mass Art at the time, or was a student at Mass Art.

MR. BROWN: The Massachusetts College of Art?

MR. KAY: Yeah. And he made demonstrations on the blackboard and so on. We had projects to make posters for the dramatic club, and so on. But that was the entire extent of the education in art or in music. It was not considered an important part of the curriculum. I'm not sure that this was a terrible thing at all. I mean, currently Latin School does have an art program. I've visited there and been asked to speak there.

But you know, I don't know that, given the way art is usually taught in public schools, private schools as well for

the most part, I'm not so sure this was a great loss for me personally. It might have been for other students.

MR. BROWN: Why do you say that?

MR. KAY: Well, because a great deal of what is taught in these courses is worse than useless; it's misleading, this business of pasting chicken feathers on spaghetti and spraying it with some kind of acrylic paint is not my idea of giving -- I would visualize a useful art education program for high school students to run more or less the way the English department runs.

I mean, you don't expect a kid to write a perfect sonnet. On the other hand, if he reads Shakespeare and if he's asked to write decently, he can be taught to write a decent composition, certainly clear expository prose. He can have an appreciation for the great works of literature, both ancient and modern. This can be taught. This can be communicated by a good teacher.

It's very useful in that process -- necessary, not just useful -- to have the students make an effort to write a poem, to write a short story, or something like that. I don't see why the art education shouldn't be the same thing. But they never spend very much time giving any kind of a coherent notion of the history of art. Never mind if it isn't comprehensive. They don't do that in literature, either. You're not taught everything from Chaucer or from Homer up to James Joyce. But on the other hand, they do give you some of the great works.

English class at Boston Latin School from the first year of high school, what they call class four--

[END CASSETTE 1 SIDE A.]

MR. KAY: -- that took to read one of the plays, *Macbeth*,*Julius Caesar*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, whatever. One play, it was analyzed. You were supposed to know the vocabulary. In *Macbeth*, you were supposed to know what were kerns and gallow glasses, you know. And they were all liberally footnoted, these little texts.

And in the process, some people might say you lost some of the poetry. I think perhaps that was true for some people. But I don't know what's to be gained by reading and not knowing what the words mean. So I never resented having to look up some of these words.

MR. BROWN: And the equivalent could have happened in art, you're saying?

MR. KAY: It certainly could have, and should have. And Dickens -- there was usually a Dickens novel, or George Eliot, or something like that.

Now, you know, this wasn't always undertaken with a great deal of pleasure and entertainment. There was a certain amount of drudgery involved in all of this, and the school has been criticized for that. I do not criticize it. I think it's -- it takes a good teacher to make *Silas Marner* interesting or Joseph -- to take the kids through *Lord Jim* [1900]by Joseph Conrad and make it really relevant to a 14-year-old kid. I mean, why are we concerned with these -- but a good teacher can do it. they had good teachers there and many of them did it. You went home really on fire with some of this stuff, arguing with friends about whether Jim should have done this or that.

I don't know why Giotto or Matisse or Rembrandt or El Greco cannot be made as engrossing as Dickens or Shakespeare. And that is never attempted in these courses. Kids are given sandbox exercises to do and they think they're becoming cultivated. That's why I think it's generally a total loss, whether it's at Shady Hill or whether it's at Roxbury Memorial High School.

MR. BROWN: Right.

There have been occasional high school teachers who have really made something out of these courses, but it's not usual. And that's why I said I don't think I missed a lot.

The curriculum changed at Latin School. Once you went through the first two years, you then -- on the so-called high school level, or class four on, you added French to the subjects. And everybody took, I think, at least three years of French. Then in the next year, you were obliged to choose between Greek and German. So by your sophomore year you were taking, what? -- English, Latin, French, and German -- four languages. You were taking math, which was, by then you were up to trigonometry, I believe. You certainly had done plain geometry.

Then you could -- there was one option that you had. It was the one place in the program where you could -- the second place in the program where you could make a choice. You could choose between Greek and German. Then you could choose what the so-called tech course, which was to add a year of math and also physics and chemistry. And you dropped Latin in the last year. So you only got five years of Latin instead of six.

You went through that school, you wound up -- many students wound up with six years of Latin, four years of French, three years of German, and then assorted math courses, and at least plain algebra, plain geometry, and

trig. You would have had American history. You'd have had ancient history and, strange enough, you would have had a year of English history -- War of the Roses, all the way back to Bedesia.
But the thing is that you -- that, to me, speaks to a kind of interesting -- oh, what should I say? -- a kind of relationship to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, which I think is not common in the United States. I don't know how many high -- I don't know if Latin School even still teaches English history.

MR. BROWN: Did it seem strange at the time?

MR. KAY: Not at all. I mean, you just took -- like any subject. They could have given me Bulgarian history and I wouldn't have thought it was strange.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: I mean, the only thing I worried about was -- well, you know, you came to that school, and you signed a contract when you first entered it, with your family. Your parents and you each signed an agreement that you would spend at least, at minimum, three hours a night on home assignments. And you were graded every month. You got a report card with, not letter grades, which were the usual things in the Boston school, but numerical grades.

So you -- the passing grade was 55, but that was considered very, very dangerous, and you were in great hazard of being dismissed. But 55 was passing, and, you know, a respectable grade was up, anything 80 and above.

There was also a subject, which I think was important, declamation, where every month you were obliged to memorize some literary selection. You chose it, and it was either approved or not by the English teacher. And then, in alphabetical order, each member of the class got up and recited this thing, whichever thing he had chosen. The English teacher graded the performance. It was to be done with dramatic or rhetorical effect and when you went up to recite, you gave the text to the teacher. You were supposed to be letter perfect in the text, no improvisation, nothing.

MR. BROWN: Now, you would have had training in this in rhetoric or talks, public speaking?

MR. KAY: No. No. You were corrected on the platform when you finished -- you know, too loud, too fast, too slow. But really, no classes in diction, no classes in -- no. It was just -- it was really a memory exercise more than anything else. But it also taught you to stand up in front of a group and speak your piece. One was nervous every month. And after a while, those of us who got to be more hardened in the process put off -- procrastinated and waited sometimes till a couple of days before.

There was always a date set for these things. It usually took two or three days to get through the whole class. I was in the middle. You were seated alphabetically in this place, you know. I mean, A at the front right-hand corner and Z way back on the left. I was generally, as my name began with a K, in the middle of the class. I could usually count on the first day going by without being called.

I became -- I was a very good student my first year. I won the -- there were two prizes annually given, one for classical studies and one for modern studies. And in classics, the modern prize was computed by an average of all the subjects save Latin.

MR. BROWN: So did you take the modern prize?

MR. KAY: I took the modern prize. There was one other prize called the fidelity prize, I think it was called. If you got no misdemeanor marks, no absences, no tardy days, and, I think, all your grades had to be above 80, you got what was called an approbation award. If it was over 90, I think it was, you got approbation with distinction. And if you got those each report card session, each month, you won the fidelity prize in the class.

But that was sort of regarded more or less as a second-class award as compared to the modern and the classical prizes, which were strictly on your achievement. I mean, you could have gotten five -- and I did get four or five misdemeanor marks each term. But if your grades justified it, you could still win one of these other prizes.

MR. BROWN: And you did this despite the fact that you had to help out your father sometimes?

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah. Well, yeah.

MR. BROWN: It was kind of unusual. Were most of the other students of a similar background?

MR. KAY: Well, it was a very mixed population.

MR. BROWN: It wasn't just the City of Boston. Was it Greater Boston?

MR. KAY: Well, it was, I think, only the City of Boston politically. Yeah. I don't think it included Newton. I know it didn't include any of the other political entities.

MR. BROWN: Oh, okay.

MR. KAY: So it was the Boston area. It didn't include kids from Cambridge. But there was a mix in the class. There was an ethnic mix, a lot of Irish kids still, still a lot of old-line Yankee kids, and quite a few Jewish students, some of them from rather more prosperous families, many like mine coming from recently arrived families that had certainly much greater financial strength.

There weren't -- you were not allowed to be absent, in theory, save for real emergencies of health or familial ones, like mine. I had to bring letters in from my family, to be excused. In fact, for example, as I recollect it, there never were snow days. Other schools could shut down for snowstorms. Latin School was always open. They said, "Don't even listen. Don't even ask. You just get here." And we did. One way or another, most of the class assembled. You were excused for holidays of a religious nature. Jewish holidays saw a real drop in enrollment in my classes. And otherwise, you know, you found everybody in place.

My absences, I could usually make them up. I usually knew in advance that I would be pulled out in December and in late spring, and I told the masters, and they gave me additional work. I never really felt it as a terrific burden at all, nor did it in any way disconnect me from my group of friends in school.

There was something that did occur that changed things for me. And that was, I had the good fortune or misfortune in my class four year to be with Mr. Foley who was in his first year as an instructor. He was a young, attractive -- he looked rather like Joseph Cotton. He was a young, attractive instructor, taught history. We had English history with him. He was a little bit less informed or less of a veteran as to administrative procedures in the school. And every morning, the teachers picked up a sheet, a briefing sheet of announcements, which they read to their classes. You know, it would be things like, assembly will be at 2:00 o'clock this afternoon, or declamation -- public declamation will be next week, or something like that.

He read the thing out and said, "There is going to be a competition for places in art classes at the Boston Museum." Read it publicly, and then afterwards during the homeroom period, he had me come to the desk. He said, "You know, I think you should go out and apply for that. You're interested in art."

MR. KAY: I had done some posters and things like that for the class.

MR. BROWN: You were known to be somewhat interested.

MR. KAY: Yeah. My notebooks for history had, you know, elaborate drawings in them, as one does sometimes. So he suggested that I go over there.

I went. And that was my first introduction to the vocational art classes at the Boston Museum. The competition involved doing one drawing from a Greek cast, which they had in what they called the cast court at the Boston Museum; and then a drawing from memory or from imagination on any subject that we wanted.

So I passed the two drawings in and got a postcard about a week later saying I was accepted to the classes. I started attending. You went three times a week.

MR. BROWN: And you were what, in your freshman or class four?

MR. KAY: No. I was class four. That was my first --

MR. BROWN: Your freshman year?

MR. KAY: Freshman year of high school, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: We went three days a week?

MR. BROWN: After Latin School?

MR. KAY: After Latin School. You walked over to the museum from Latin School, which is close enough. Avenue Louis Pasteur. And got there at about, oh, 2:30, quarter of three. The Latin School class ran till 2:30, but sometimes I was excused a few minutes early. And I would get over to the museum, with another boy who was from Latin School, Meredith Klein. You'd go three days a week. I think it was Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

I was there for about three months before anybody noticed that I was a freshman in high school. Then an

instructor said to me, "You know, this program is not for freshman. You're supposed to be a sophomore." And I said, "Well, are you going to throw me out?" He said, "Well, you may as well stay. You've done half the year already." So I stayed through the rest of the year.

Their program, ostensibly, was for students for three years. You'd come in as a sophomore and stay through your entire high school career, if your work was up to standard and your behavior was up to standard. Well, I wound up going there for four years because of the mistake that my homeroom teacher had made. But I was very glad to have that opportunity.

MR. BROWN: Did you take to it right away and like it?

MR. KAY: Yeah. I liked it a lot right at the beginning. I was a little apprehensive because I found some of the work extremely new and difficult for me. The first day of the week, one drew from the casts. At that time the Boston Museum had a very large hall, which went up two stories high, which is where the special exhibition galleries are now, facing back towards the Fenway. And in it, they had very good plaster cast reproductions of the major Greek or Greco-Roman sculptures, Myron's *Discobolus*, the various Hermes, and so on.

We were given 19 inches by 20 inches -- all the materials were furnished by the museum. The museum ran this program in collaboration with the Boston school system. It was a joint program, jointly funded, I believe. They gave you the easel; they gave you your equipment; they gave you materials. In this case, they gave you a piece of charcoal paper 19 inches by 25 inches and some hard charcoal and a ruler. And you did all your measurements. You dropped your plumb lines and tried to make as careful a copy of the cast that you selected.

They also gave you some manila paper. You could do some faster pencil drawings, preparational to this. But the major work was to do one of these very finished charcoal drawings, which could take up to two months to complete. Well, you were only there doing that one day a week. But anyway, it was a great exercise in detail and in discipline. And I had a hard time with that.

MR. BROWN: You were just set to it. Did the teacher hover around or anything?

MR. KAY: Oh, yes. There were two teachers and an assistant besides.

MR. BROWN: Because you hadn't used charcoal before?

MR. KAY: No, I had never. They would come around to each easel and make suggestions or corrections and so on. The teachers were Alma Lebrecht and Ralph Rosenthal. I've forgotten the name of the assistants. They varied. They must have gone --

MR. BROWN: What were they like? What was Alma Lebrecht like?

MR. KAY: Well, Alma Lebrecht was a tall woman with a rather dignified demeanor, spoke well. I had rather less contact with her than I did with Ralph Rosenthal, just by happenstance, I think. And he was somewhat more critical and would make more concrete suggestions, often making -- offering points of criticism, maybe four or five points of criticism on one drawing, which I think in retrospect, he'd have been better off to confine himself to two or three major points. It often left me feeling as if I ought to just throw the whole thing into the wastebasket and start all over again, which was frowned on. So --

MR. BROWN: He was critical.

MR. KAY: He was very critical and had very, very high standards. I suppose, you know, was being very substantially corrective. And I think it was very useful, but it was a good combination because she tended to be somewhat more generalized in her criticism. She'd talk about, "Get the rhythm of the figure," or something like that. Then it would be rather more complimentary and supportive. Ralph confined himself to what was wrong. He assumed you knew what was right.

[Laughter.]

MR. KAY: And there was always plenty that was wrong, of course. So that was the drawing class. Occasionally, they would substitute one of the students, ask you to make a drawing of a student posing, for quick sketches instead of working on the cast.

The second day was composition day. That was Thursday, and it was held in a classroom. And you were given the notebook paper and soft pencils. You were asked -- Ralph would put a subject on the blackboard, "picnic" or "journey" or something like that. You were asked to make small sketches, maybe six-by-eight inches, a dozen of them, now, on that subject, from imagination. They would come through and make suggestions or corrections. If they liked the particular one that you did, they would put a checkmark or an initial next to it, and you were invited to enlarge it on a half sheet of paper.

MR. BROWN: But you were asked them to do a dozen different depictions of that theme?

MR. KAY: Exactly.

MR. BROWN: So that really called upon imagination.

MR. KAY: Right. And it trained you to -- it trained you in the idea of a kind of free variation on a particular visual theme, so that you didn't get hung up in a lot of detail and a lot of rendering, but rather, more in the orchestration of the various units in the picture. So that you tried different things. And it was more frankly experimental, I think a very, very useful exercise.

Then the third day was so-called design day. And you were -- we were given short talks on some of the elements of design, as they were understood those days, things like repetition, alternation, progression. They then asked us to go out into the museum collections and find examples in the collection of the use of these devices.

So you might go to a Greek vase, where there was a border of repeated spirals and make a copy of that -- yeah, a brief drawing of it, and note the source, Greek of the fourth, fifth century, whatever, and label it: Repetition. Then you would look for something that would show progression. You might go to a Poussin painting that would show an enlarging spiral of activity or something like that. And if you could analyze it and show that it was a progression of a single motif, that would qualify.

So you were given this as an assignment to build up a notebook of design devices, as they had been used by various artists or artisans represented in the museum collections. What it really did was to get you out into the museum, looking. And you saw. I mean, I remember making copies of Japanese carvings and of Flemish tapestry borders and designs on early American silver and things like that. So you really got a sense of where the collection reached, where various items were located.

And in part of the year, you were asked to select the particular thing -- it could be a tapestry or something else -- and make a watercolor rendering of it. That was a difficult --

MR. BROWN: It got you looking. I mean, it got you to look at things in works of art?

MR. KAY: Exactly.

MR. BROWN: More intensively than you might have before.

MR. KAY: And to look -- yes, more intensively, but, perhaps even more important, to look at them, not for a narrative content in the work, but rather for a purely aesthetic or structural device in the work. So that you were not looking necessarily, at a crucifixion as an image of a man nailed to a cross in agony. But you might be looking at it from the point of view of a repeated motif, let's say, of a particular triangle that came up over and over again in the painting or in the bas relief or in the sculpture.

MR. BROWN: Looking back, do you think they overemphasized these formal aspects of art at the expense of meaning or subject?

MR. KAY: No, I don't. No, not at all because --

MR. BROWN: Because they stressed the other as well from time to time?

MR. KAY: Well, it didn't require much stressing. You're talking about high school students whose idea of art is essentially -- at least mine was -- essentially an extension of illustration.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. KAY: I mean, you look at a wedding scene, and you're looking at the position of the people, and so on. It's -- no. It's a discovery, I think, to most people, and especially to kids, that there is something more going on than a story, you know, that there's an arrangement of shapes or colors or directions, and that this is planned, it's conscious, and it's contributive to the mood and to the effect that the picture makes.

So this was news. I mean, who had ever heard of -- of course, looking back, I think, now that some of these things that they emphasized, like the device of repetition or the device of alternation -- I mean, you could write pages of -- I mean, there's more to it. They had -- there were about five different key elements of design that they informed us about. One could invent many more. I mean, I don't think it's a gospel that repetition, alternation, and progression are the major things that are considered, let's say, in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* [1537-1541]or in Picasso's *Guernica* [1937]. You know, I think that different painters have had different ways of dealing with this structural element of painting.

But the big news was that there was such a thing as a structure to painting, you see. And that, I think, was worth a third of the time that you spent in the museum in those days. That went on pretty much for four years, with variations. I mean, there were times when we did other things. But this was the real -- this was sort of the tripod on which the whole program stood.

Additionally, these teachers had private classes, classes of students who paid for their tuition. They met on Saturdays and on Tuesdays in the museum. Well, after a year or so, I and about three or four other students were invited to join those classes if we wanted to come, without paying, so that we were welcomed to their private classes on Tuesdays and Saturdays, Jason Berger and Jack Kramer and Dave Aronson and I.

MR. BROWN: And this is where you met them for the first time?

MR. KAY: Well, I'd met them in the regular classes.

MR. BROWN: Oh.

MR. KAY: They were there after my first year. They showed up while I was in the second year. In my second year there, that was their first year. We were all contemporary in high school, except that their homeroom teachers knew enough not to send them as freshmen. But the contact was made largely because we came out of the same part of town. We would go home on the streetcar and run into each other. Then it turned out that Jason lived a block away from me on Devon Street. By that time, my family had moved to Womback Street, which is right near Elm Hill Avenue and Warren Street. Jason lived one block down on Devon Street, and Jack Kramer lived one block still further on on Crawford Street. David Aronson lived in Dorchester, which was like another country to me. I mean, I never went to -- hardly ever went to Dorchester, and it was strange territory.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I see.

MR. KAY: But we were very --

MR. BROWN: Territorial.

MR. KAY: You have no idea. For example, nobody in my family had an automobile. Well, my uncle did. But he lived in New York. Most of my friends came from families which had no cars. We went everywhere on the streetcar or we walked. In those days, kids could walk around Boston. We would go -- a little later on, we would go out to T Wharf down by the boats and make drawings of the boats and climb around on the docks and everything else, at the age of 13,14. Nobody thought anything of it.

There was no -- there were a lot of poor districts in Boston, but, you know, they weren't sinister in any way. I don't say that because I came from one. I think they were really respectable areas. The families were all hardworking people who demanded a lot from their kids. And there was a great deal of parental supervision, maternal parental supervision, I should say. There may have been roving gangs. I don't know. I never came up against any of them.

Once in a while, I used to -- you know, I used to get into fights. I suppose you could regard some of them as anti-Semitic incidents, but the fact is, I think it was just roughhousing the way any kids of that age and that period and that social class roughhoused. I mean, when I was about seven, I was sort of put in the middle of a circle of kids, you know, and told to fight it out with Jackie Duffie. I was scared witless, you know. But out of sheer desperation, I beat him up, and I never had any more trouble again. It was just the purely hysterical desperation that pumped up the adrenalin.

But I don't think -- although, there were all kinds of racial epithets applied to me, being Jewish, but they yelled at each other in similar terms, only they didn't call them Jews. They gave them other names. It did not really seem to me -- although Nat Hentoff disagrees with me there. He cites all sorts of incidents of getting attacked for being Jewish. I never ran into that in my boyhood.

MR. BROWN: Do you feel maybe the same may have happened to the Irish, say, in another setting?

MR. KAY: Might have. Generally speaking, in the Jewish neighborhoods there was considerably less combat. I think -- my recollections of the years from the time I was four to the time I was about eight or nine, in the neighborhood that was principally Irish there was a great deal more sort of fighting around, physical wrestling, hitting, and all of that. It was just sort of taken as a natural state.

There was far less of that, maybe because I was older. From the time I was 10 on, I was already in Latin School, and things were a lot -- they were very competitive on the basis of scholarship. I don't think for a minute that there was anybody in those classes who wasn't somehow struggling for the best grade that he could manage. Some cases, it was just a case of just passing, getting through the school, which was a stiff school and people

worried about it.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. KAY: On another level, there were some of us who really thought we had a crack at some of the prizes, and we wanted them. That sort of competitiveness, I think, was rather encouraged by the system. These days it's considered to be a not-very-good thing to do.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: I'm not so sure. Well, yeah, it stresses competition and eventually elitism, and the claim is made that this makes other people feel inferior and it's not really a very good way to develop good citizens. I don't know. All I know is that the people I was in school with, most of them have been people of considerable achievement on leaving school.

MR. BROWN: Even if they weren't prizewinners, they at least were very assiduous, were they?

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah. Well, you did learn -- you learned to work.

MR. BROWN: A good work ethic.

MR. KAY: You learned to memorize. You learned to sit in a committee meeting and sort of be able, after the meeting is over, to write the minutes of the meeting almost verbatim, reporting almost verbatim what had been said, if that was necessary. And you also learned that it's worthwhile to be uncomfortable for a little while in the learning process because what you learn has a certain amount of utility.

Although it might have seemed to many people -- I recollect a sort of argument in my father's house at one time when a neighbor came in, and she said, "What is the boy learning all of this Latin and French and German? You've got to go out and make a living, for God's sake. You should become an accountant." My mother and father said, "Look. Anything you learn turns out, usually, to be useful." They didn't know how prophetic they were. Actually, had it not been for the French and German that I learned, I might have perished in World War II. I was very lucky that I could speak the languages. They had a practical value that I had never expected at the time.

But everybody in my family thought that, you know, it made you a more understanding -- it made you able to draw on the wisdom of many cultures if you had many languages, that this sort of unlocked many doors. To be restricted to one language was to be provincial, essentially, and limited. And I think these are people who were proletariat in every sense of the word. But I think they had a great appreciation for a kind of classical learning. I don't think they drew a line between it and utility learning, learning that could be put to practical purposes.

As a matter of fact, there was a considerably higher value placed on learning that wasn't immediately practical. There's an old saying, "You shouldn't use the Talmud as a shovel." That is to say, you should not use higher learning as a means to making the living. In any case, I think it was a practical education in many ways. The discipline was useful and it continues to be so.

I have to say, as you might have guessed from other things I've said, that I've been in very strong opposition to many of the changes in education that have occurred since the 1960s in this country. We moved to Brookline -- we had been living in Cambridge -- this is much later, of course -- when our son was born, because at that time I didn't think that I would ever have the income to send the kid to private school. I was not satisfied that the public schools in Cambridge were very good.

So we moved to Brookline, where the schools were said to have been better. And they were. At the time that we moved here, there was a school superintendent who ran the whole system almost single-handed, Dr. Cavalry -- Calvary? I'm not sure. And he was here only, however, for a couple of years during my son's enrollment. He retired, and his place was taken by another man who had much more progressive ideas. But the old system was run pretty much like the Boston Latin. It was run somewhat on the model of a decent prep school, like Andover, Exeter or someplace like that -- not too many elective choices, a certain amount of discipline, and a very high expectation of achievement.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Frieda came back one day -- Johnny was, I think, in the third grade -- and said, "My God, they're changing the schools." She said, "They're unbolting all the desks and all the chairs. It's all going to what they call individualized instruction." And as soon as I heard that, I said, "Oh, God, we're going to be in for it. We'd better start saving our money. I don't know how long the kid will last in this school system." Sure enough, in the end we sent him to Roxbury Latin.

But it just got mushier and mushier and, I thought, less and less substantial. But I feel so much indebted to the Boston schools. It was a free education. It gave me enough of a general education so that I could later come into the university as a professor and still serve on committees with colleagues in various departments and have some notion of what they were talking about, despite the fact that I never got to college myself. So we could stop there for a while.

MR. BROWN: Continuing the taped interviews, this is Tuesday, January 16, 1995, in Brookline, Massachusetts. Reed, we were talking already about the Saturday -- the classes at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, which you were enrolled in as a teenager when you were in high school. You were given time in the afternoons three days a week?

MR. KAY: Well, originally three days a week, correct.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: It was to have taken place, oh, roughly between 2:30 and 4:30, as I recollect it, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday of each week, for normally, a period of three years. In my case, it was four years, by an accident.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And --

MR. BROWN: And then you could have private lessons? Did you begin that first year with those private lessons?

MR. KAY: Yeah. Well, what happened was, not that we were encouraged to pay or anything. We were invited to attend the private classes that the same instructors were giving on Saturdays and Tuesdays in the museum, so that I wound up going most Tuesdays and Saturdays, in addition to the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday.

The instruction really was not quite so structured on those days. The -- Ralph Rosenthal taught a good deal of sculpture, clay modeling, on Saturdays, and some watercolor painting from still lifes and the like. It was up in the attic, way up at the top of the museum, under the skylight.

It was very interesting because I met some other people, some other students at that time in those private classes. Some of them were considerably older. I suspect some were already out of high school and some very pleasant personal friendships developed out of this. I was invited to people's homes. Some of them had small collections of books that were nicely illustrated, I remember very well. They also had other interests -- Gilbert and Sullivan, things like that. I had seen one or two of the operettas at Latin School, but these people really knew all the lyrics, all the words, you know.
It just was a group that had, as a central interest, something really quite different from what I encountered in my neighborhood at home, you know, where politics and sports were the general atmosphere.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: The instruction itself was sort of helpful, low key, encouraging, but not tremendously critical or anything like that. Pretty soon, Jason Berger and David Aronson were invited to these classes as well.

MR. BROWN: Did they come into the classes the same year as you?

MR. KAY: No. I didn't know any -- I really practically knew no one in my first year at the museum classes. I sort of went solitary. I was younger than everybody.

MR. BROWN: That would have been a big difference.

MR. KAY: I didn't know that that was making a difference. I just -- and also, other people seemed much more experienced than I. They had art classes in high school. The high school that I went to, Boston Latin, had no art classes. So there were people there who had already a certain degree of fluency. And I just looked with great admiration at people like Bob Burks and Matthew Horner and some of the -- Horner it was -- and some of the others, and didn't really get to know anybody very well.

The second year I was there, however, Jason Berger, Jack Kramer, and David Aronson arrived in the classes. They all came from roughly the same part of the city as I did. And gradually, we got to know each other. They attended -- Jason and Jack attended Roxbury Memorial and studied with a man, Morris Glazer, I believe, or Grazer -- I'm not sure which it was -- who evidently pushed them pretty hard to do their best, and had their work in the local high school magazine and encouraged them to do linoleum cuts.

I have actually a calendar that was done by his class with several woodcuts -- linoleum cuts by Jason Berger and some by Jack Kramer. So they knew their way around when they arrived in the classes. David Aronson came

from Dorchester High School, and also, I believe, had high school classes in art, though I don't know how intense they were. We would sometimes go home together by streetcar. And after a while, we -- Berger and Kramer and I would walk home from the museum, wasn't that much of a walk. We'd get home at about six. Meanwhile, we'd talk, discuss whatever had happened in class and what we had seen in the museums and so on.

MR. BROWN: They would, most likely -- they would have had, or could have had, art classes as well as participated in art activities in their high school?

MR. KAY: In their high school, and maybe outside of the high school as well.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Because there was a very active settlement house in Dorchester, the Hecht House. I never went, but I believe David did and perhaps Jason did; I'm not sure. But there were these settlement houses around Boston at the time. Some of them had some really very good people teaching the kids. Though I never had any contact with these particular places, I heard about them from my friends.

So I have the feeling that at least in Berger's case, he was already very sophisticated. As a high school student, he knew where the Art Students League was. He knew where the museums were. He had an uncle who worked for, I think, the *Record American* as an illustrator, Uncle Jack Seville. He gave -- he coached Jason, I think, a little bit on painting with oils. So that during those years in the -- my recollection is that I learned about as much from being with these very ambitious, intense, interested friends as I did from the very kind instruction from Alma Lebrecht and Ralph Rosenthal. It's really something in your teens to have a small group like this.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: It reinforces your own interests. And it could be -- it was very competitive. But it was very friendly at the same time. We visited each other's houses. Jason's mother in particular was very welcoming and sort of was amused by the people that Jason brought home, and seemed to be a woman of much more sophisticated tastes and cultivation in terms of decor in the house and so on than was the case in my family. My parents didn't care at all what kind of furniture they had or what the apartment looked like.

MR. BROWN: Well, they were interested a great deal in political attitude.

MR. KAY: My parents were.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And were very knowledgeable -- much more -- I was, I think, more knowledgeable than Jason in that regard. But, you know, when you came into his house -- I would come over there, and his mother would be redecorating the living room and Jason would be there with a four-inch brush, painting the walls French gray or taupe, you know, colors I'd never heard of -- decorator colors. There would be discussions about black-and-white cutouts of the Colonial scenes that she had on the wall. It was just a different world to me and a very hospitable one at the same time. Jason had the idea that we should go out and paint landscapes, and so we got our stuff together in cardboard boxes.

[END CASSETTE 1 SIDE B.]

MR. BROWN: Talking further about your friends Jason Berger, Jack Kramer, David Aronson.

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: I wanted to ask -- could I ask one question?

MR. KAY: Sure.

MR. BROWN: You went to Boston Latin, the elite of local high schools. Was that a factor at all in your -- the early years of your friendship with these other boys?

MR. KAY: Well, it was in one sense. And that was that there were demands on my time. So I could not always -- there was a certain minimum of time that had to be given to the Latin translations or the history reports or the math, geometry originals. I would get home from the museum and have supper, and then be expected to go right to my room and do the home assignments, which were supposed to take a minimum of three hours a day. You signed a contract when you went to that school, saying that that would be done, starting with the seventh grade.

I have to admit that, though I was a good student in my first years at Boston Latin, by the time I got into these

art classes, I was cutting as many corners as I could safely do. I say "safely" because my mother was always very vigilant about this kind of thing. I would be called to account if my grades dropped a great deal. And I knew myself that I wasn't doing as much work as I might have done.

So as a result, I was sort of betwixt and between. I wasn't getting the prizes that I had gotten the first -- at the beginning of my career at Latin School. At the same time was not always available for every excursion that my friends proposed.

That's the only thing that I recollect.

MR. BROWN: But you didn't stand out, at least potentially in their minds, as someone who was going to be a scholar, as opposed to --

MR. KAY: No. I don't think so. We -- I don't think we were that self-conscious about things. There were attitudes that we had about each other in terms of personality, certainly.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KAY: Jason was regarded as being the most -- how should I say? -- relaxed and ebullient. And Jack was extremely reserved and sort of buttoned down, even as a young kid. He lived alone with his mother. I never met his father. I don't think he -- I don't know at what age he died. David also -- well, David was rather more a remote figure for all of us. First of all, he lived in Dorchester, which, though it's very close to Roxbury and in my life experience I realize it's only a few blocks away, but in those days it seemed like another country, really. It was a different community and had different streetcar lines going out there. For all I knew, you might have needed a visa to go there.

I went to Dorchester on occasion to Franklin Field or to go for a long walk along Franklin Field, Blue Hill Avenue Boulevard there in summer nights when people congregated on the sidewalk and so on. But I really had nothing to do with the community. David was himself sort of, I think, more attached to other groups in Dorchester than -- so the three of us, Berger, Kramer, and I were rather closer to each other. As I characterize them in a very superficial way, they also undoubtedly had ideas about me. Whether they thought I was naive or bookish, I don't know.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: We were all -- we all read. I mean, Jason was probably as -- better read than I was at the time. Maybe not in the classics, but in the -- he had James Joyce's *Ulysses* [1922], I think, under his belt by the time he was out of high school, you know. He had really a good knowledge of where the important work was. He was interested in jazz rather than classical music. I was becoming interested in classical music. Anyway, and Kramer was probably the most athletic of the three of us. He would go up to the Young Men’s Hebrew Association (YMHA) and play football and things like that.

We would -- as I started to say, we'd go out on these excursions, and sometimes to the Arnold Arboretum. There was a graveyard down near Dudley Street where we did some painting and some sketching. We would go down to the wharfs, down to T Wharf, which was very accessible in those days. And nobody thought anything about going to any section of the city. I mean, it seemed really quite -- it was taken for granted that you could walk anywhere at any time of the day or night. Even our parents didn't worry about us. They were worriers on the graduate level, you might say. My parents were, anyhow.

So we did get around and we worked out of doors. Then we would take the work in and show the work to Lebrecht and Rosenthal and they usually encouraged us without correcting very much of what we did, which I think really was a very conscious and beneficial stance to take.

MR. BROWN: Do you think -- you mentioned earlier to me that you felt their teaching was perhaps limited, but in the favorable sense? Maybe it was -- as you just said, maybe it was wise perhaps that they were restrained in their criticism?

MR. KAY: I think that they -- they were, I think, both products of the Museum School. I'm not sure, but I think so. I know Ralph was. And I think their ideas, like anyone's, were limited by the period during which they matured. This sort of -- they were very strong reverberations of kind of turn-of-the-century -- not Art Nouveau, but the influences that informed, I think, the first 30 years of American culture.

They -- for example, when we drew the casts, there was a lot of discussion about how many heads high the classic Greek cannon demanded -- you know, seven-and-a-half heads. You were equipped with a piece of charcoal paper and a stick of hard charcoal and a ruler.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And you learned to measure the figure, find out where halfway was in the figure -- usually, at the pubic synthesis, as they put it -- and then you measured four-and-a-half heads down to that, and then the other three heads down to the anklebone, and so on. And it would vary. Sometimes my measurements didn't at all conform to what they should have been, I suppose. But in actuality, of course, many of those casts were -- I mean, a Leucippus cast would not be the same as a Myron, in proportion. But that was sort of overlooked.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KAY: It was a question of trying to understand some of these cannons as they might have applied in late -- I suspect that they really derive, originally, from the nineteenth century academies. And they might have gotten attenuated, they might have gotten modified, they might have gotten informed by other interests, like the rhythm of the figure, and so on. But that was still very much there, I think, although we didn't know the source and didn't think of it very much, and often didn't pay that much attention to it, either.

I mean, there were some awfully good draftsmen in those high school classes. Robert Burkes could do a charming conte crayon drawing, you know, use a conte crayon on a large piece of paper, and then smudge it with a chamois cloth and then pick out the highlights with an eraser, and come up with something that looked astonishingly professional for a high school student, you know? And there were other people like that. Vincent dePalma was another one who was very, very fluent, whose work I remember particularly in my first year there.

MR. BROWN: And that would certainly not accord with what Lebrecht and Rosenthal were teaching?

MR. KAY: Well, it wasn't really -- it was more of a technique and they always warned you about getting too involved in technique. Don't get hooked on little stylistic things -- blurs, accents, and so on. It didn't necessarily conflict with the notion of finding the right measurements and being optically accurate with the thing. So, no, it didn't really conflict. And they also were very flexible, I think, in adjusting their instruction.
It should be remembered that there was very, relatively little instruction that was given on a group basis. In other words, there would be perhaps a brief talk at the beginning of a class about some aspect of drawing. And then everybody went to work, at which point the instructors -- there would be at least two, and sometimes two with a couple of assistants -- would go through the classroom and review the work on a one-to-one basis with the student. This is traditional art school instruction, which they carried into these high school classes.

So by the time they got to you, if you had gotten some work done, they would adjust their comment, I think, to the level of the work, because there was a mixed group. They didn't segregate the people who had been in these classes for three years from those who were just beginning as the first-year students. We were all together. And that, I think, was a very good thing.

It wasn't a very big group. I would guess -- oh, I don't really know. But I would be surprised if it was more than 50 kids, I think probably rather less. I don't know. I just remember that in the composition class, we were all in one room -- Classroom C, as it was called. And we pretty well filled the room, but I don't think we jammed it. So there were probably under 50 kids there. They could adjust what they had to say to each one.

So what was said to Robert Burks, for example, who was extremely easy with conte crayon and rendering volume, would be very different from what would be said to me, who was struggling with a hard pencil or soft pencil and newsprint, trying to get some semblance of an image on the page.

But you know, you stay there long enough, and they, of course, respected interest and hard work. All of the three of us put in at least as much time outside of class as we did in class. We brought the work in and we became a sort of nucleus group. As a matter of fact, the good students who were in the year ahead of us, who went to the Museum School ahead of us -- Esther Gellar was one, Charlotte Zarney was another. They told everybody at the Museum School that they ought to get themselves ready to expect these three or four guys that were coming up next year from the high school classes. So our admission to the school was a sort of event, I guess. At least we were sort of known by reputation before we got there. Not always in the best way -- I mean, we were not the quietest group in the world.

MR. BROWN: Well, you could be that way around your teachers, too?

MR. KAY: Well, up to a point, up to a point.

MR. BROWN: I think it's interesting that they didn't try to ram theory or anything.

MR. KAY: No. They really didn't. But they repeated certain things, you know, about proportion. They had these significant elements of design which they talked about -- repetition, alternation, progression, and so on. And they asked you to look for that in the work that you saw in the museum. But mostly, mostly they made sure that

you looked at a lot of different kinds of work in the museum and that you had the time to put in.

After all, you're dealing with high school students. I think the biggest thing is probably that we were encouraged to just do a lot of work, and cover a lot of pages of paper. They didn't do a great deal of tacking the work. They did some. You put the work up on a tack board occasionally, and there were comments made about everybody's, particularly in the composition classes, where you were asked -- you were given a subject like "party," and you had to make about a dozen little sketches in pencil on manila paper.

This was a way to sort of stimulate a confidence in one's own originality, and a way of getting you to realize that painting wasn't a question of -- or picture-making wasn't a question of just copying nature, but that you had to invent. And that when you invented, you were also encouraged to think of things like the compositions in Japanese art, for example, or Greek vases that refined or distilled the data that you perceive in nature.

So they, I think, did a very good job in getting us started in thinking, and especially in thinking of the possibility of a lifetime of this kind of thing. I mean, they never sold -- nobody ever came to me and said, "Well, you know, you should spend your life as a painter." I don't think they ever said that to Jason or Jack. But just by encouraging us as much as they did, it just seemed like a very, very likely option for us.

MR. BROWN: You said earlier that Jason, Jack, and perhaps David, although he's a bit different, were all ambitious.

MR. KAY: Well, I think we were.

MR. BROWN: You were, too?

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah. I think that in this very limited way, as I recollect it, limited for me, I never really looked very far ahead, I suppose. But I always liked to win the match close up. So if there was a question of a scholarship at the end of this period, I think we were all putting together portfolios in the hope of getting scholarships to enter the school.

MR. BROWN: The Museum School?

MR. KAY: The Museum School, right. We had been told, actually, by the teachers that there were such things as scholarships. And actually, they asked us if we were going on to art school. When we talked about it, we said, "well" -- each one of us, I think, had in mind a career in some sort of commercial art. I think I wanted to be an illustrator. Jason said he wanted to be an industrial designer. And I think Jack, too, talked about commercial art.

They said to us, "Well, that's all fine, and you'll probably do well enough at it. But if you really want to do very well, you should get a basic education in fine art. Then you can always apply that to the commercial field. But you will be very much ahead of somebody who only knows how to lay out lettering and do certain tricks with the airbrush, and so on. You want to learn how to really draw well and paint well, and then go into whatever commercial area you want. For that, of all the schools around, probably the Museum School in the Boston area would be the most suitable, and you might get a scholarship."
So -- and they offered to help us put together a portfolio to submit.

MR. BROWN: You mean Ms. Lebrecht and Rosenthal?

MR. KAY: Rosenthal -- said that they would select work done in the classes with us, and we could bring that over on the appropriate date and apply for a scholarship. As a matter of fact, we were even encouraged to compete for scholarships in some of the other art schools. I remember we all went together to the Vesper George Art School, which was offering scholarships and -- I don't know -- you had to draw a teacup and saucer, I think, that they had set up and do something else. We all were offered nominal scholarships from Vesper George. The idea was just practice, to practice drawing and working under the pressure of an exam like that.

We did present our portfolios. I had a little bit of a problem because I needed a day to put it together, and told my homeroom teacher that I would absent myself from Latin School. He said that he could not give me that permission. So -- then he advised me to go down to the office and speak to Mr. Powers, who was the headmaster, which I did. And he -- the headmaster told me this was totally unacceptable; that, first of all, he glanced at my file and said, "I see on record here that you took your college boards last year and you're slated to go to MIT. What is this business about art school? Latin School boys go to Harvard or to MIT."

Well, he didn't say that, but that was the implication. "And in any case, this is not a legitimate excuse for an absence." In context, it should be said that I believe during those years, they never shut the school down for snow days or anything else. You were expected to be there all the time.

MR. BROWN: All the time, um-hm.

MR. KAY: Absences and tardiness were considered to be, you know, very negative things on the record. You didn't come late, and you didn't absent yourself.

Well, I took the day off anyway. I prepared the portfolio, and I think I told you what -- my mother came down to the art class and was told --

MR. BROWN: You mean at the museum art class?

MR. KAY: At the museum art class --

MR. BROWN: Because they were --

MR. KAY: -- because I had my family's support at this time.

MR. BROWN: But they did want you to go to college, didn't they?

MR. KAY: Well, they did originally.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: But when I told them that I was going to submit this thing for the art school, they didn't oppose it. And in fact, I think they -- I got the impression that they were pleased.

MR. BROWN: So your mother went to the art class?

MR. KAY: Oh, well, she -- well, this was sometime before when I had made noises about perhaps going to art school. And she was concerned that this might lead to a life of starvation and deprivation. So she went down to the museum and got an appointment to see Alma Lebrecht and Ralph Rosenthal and expressed her questions, her concerns. They wound up saying to her, "Well, Mrs. K, you know, if your boy wants to be an artist you're not going to be able to stop him, you know." She seemed to accept that, came home that night and said to my father, "Well, they say if he wants to be an artist, we can't stop him. So it's fine."

So it wasn't that she was passive about it. But I think she just wanted a little bit of support and reinforcement herself . They, I think, were immensely proud of having a child who would go into a field that was culturally advanced, so to speak. They believed in cultivation and --

MR. BROWN: And you said earlier that they believed -- their tradition believed that the more impractical something was, in general --

MR. KAY: The more useful it might turn out to be.

MR. BROWN: -- might turn out to be, but also the more respected it --

MR. KAY: Exactly. Exactly, but particularly in the arts. Fortunately for me, they -- as I told you, being politically to the left, they were in no way -- they were not tied to the religious community at all. And the prohibition against image-making didn't bother them at all.

But I think it may have in David Aronson's case, whose father was still a practicing rabbi. Jason's folks were assimilated enough and I think were not at all concerned about the conflict between making images and the religion. Jack Kramer's mother was rather like my parents, I think on the left side of the spectrum politically. So there was no problem for the three of us.

We all brought our portfolios in, and all four of us received -- I got a full scholarship, they got half scholarships. Of course, tuition was really quite low in those days. But it would have been a very substantial amount for my family to have -- they were very relieved that they were not going to have to get the money up for four years of art school, although I think the tuition at that time was something in the neighborhood of between $300 and $400. But you must remember that's 1941, so those dollars meant a lot more than they do now.

MR. BROWN: 1941?

MR. KAY: Um-hm.

MR. BROWN: That would have been -- yeah, yeah.

MR. KAY: I finished high school in '41, and in September, and to the Museum School, the year 1941. I had just turned 16. So we got to the Museum School, and --

MR. BROWN: September of '41?

MR. KAY: September of '41. I believe that the school was really almost a new school at that time, interestingly enough.

MR. BROWN: In what sense?

MR. KAY: Well, the primary instructor had been Yakovlev, who had dominated the scene. And then I don't know whether he left or he died or what. But in any case, I think in 1939 or '40 -- I think it was '40 - Karl Zerbe came to the school at the principal painting instructor. Yakovlev wasn't there anymore. I believe Russell Smith came at very close to the same time, perhaps a year or two before, as the director of the school.

So all of these people had been on the scene, on the ground, so to speak, at the school very shortly before the three of us arrived. It was a young faculty. Tura Banks taught drawing. He had been a student of Yakovlev --

MR. BROWN: At the school?

MR. KAY: At the school -- and had stayed on as the principal drawing instructor. There was Karl Zerbe teaching painting. There was a man by the name of Allen, last name Allen, and I never learned -- I don't remember his first name -- a sculptor with whom I had relatively limited --

MR. BROWN: Frederick Allen?

MR. KAY: Fred Allen.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: That's right. That's exactly right. Eleanor Barry was at that time a young woman who was both librarian and design teacher, one of the design teachers, not the principal one. They hired a man from Rhode Island School of Design to come in and teach design twice a week or once a week. E. Blanchard Brown was his name. I was always impressed by that.

MR. BROWN: E.?

MR. KAY: E., initial E. Blanchard Brown. He brought an assistant with him, a young blonde woman, in design. Joseph Sharick taught jewelry and silversmithing. He was a practicing silversmith himself, with his own shop outside of the school. And a man Arsenault taught ceramics, but I forgot his first name, I'm afraid.

But our principal contacts were the drawing and painting instructors and the design instructors in the first year. There were two other people of significance. One was a young -- I think he had just recently graduated, Peter Dubaniwicz, D-u-b-a-n-i-w-i-c-z, I think -- a very serious and very polite man. And Conger Metcalf, who was, I believe, still in his fifth year at the Museum School as a student when I arrived as a first-year student, and I believe was already badged to be an assistant in the painting and drawing, but particularly in drawing classes. So he actually was an instructor in some of my first-year drawing classes. I don't think I've forgotten anybody.

MR. BROWN: When you went there, was there a prescribed curriculum the first few years?

MR. KAY: Oh, yes. Oh, it was very little optional choices in the school at that time. It was a very structured school. And I think Karl Zerbe had imposed that structure on the school, pretty much. He had his sequence of problems that he wanted taken care of in the painting area, and I think he -- well, I don't know. I'm just guessing. But there was a coordinated program, and I can tell you what it was if you're interested.

MR. BROWN: Sure. And you came in there -- when you began, all students did --

MR. KAY: The same thing. All entering students took the same courses. There were no -- in the first year, I don't believe there were any possibilities of electives or substitutions. Everybody took the same thing.

MR. BROWN: Um-hm. [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Principally, while it was built on drawing, the largest number of hours were in -- was in the drawing area. You took basic drawing with Tura Banks [phonetic] and his assistant. And if I'm not wrong, it was five mornings a week or at least four. I can describe the particulars of the course later, but you took drawing. You took painting only, I think, once or twice a week. It might have been twice, two afternoons a week. You took design a couple of afternoons a week. And that design included some three-dimensional problems as well as two-dimensional problems. You took an art history course perhaps twice a week or perhaps three times a week at lunchtime. It was an hour lecture.

MR. BROWN: So it was just a lecture with slides?

MR. KAY: Slide lecture with -- Russell Smith gave that course. He had been educated as an architect at Harvard. But he gave the art history course. And I believe there was one other course in jewelry or ceramics. But that may not even be the case. That might have waited for the following year.

In any case, this was mostly drawing. Oh, I know. I'm pretty sure jewelry was second year, not first. What you had in the first year were auxiliary courses to drawing. In addition to the regular drawing classes, there was a separate course in perspective and a separate course in anatomy.

MR. BROWN: These were all related to drawing?

MR. KAY: And they were, of course, yes, adjunct to the drawing program. The perspective course was taught by Dubaniwicz, and the anatomy course was taught by Banks, who did a virtuosic job with that course.

So that was the first-year program, and everyone took it. The second year --

MR. BROWN: Excuse me.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Was this quite a -- perhaps not a shock to you because you knew pretty much a good deal about the school, didn't you?

MR. KAY: Well, I didn't know a lot. I mean, it amazes me how little we looked into anything in those days. I mean, how much we were sort of led into everything without being aware of it.

We had visited the school on invitation -- I think Lebrecht had arranged it -- and walked through the corridors, seen the student work on the walls, and been given a catalog of the school's offerings, which had in it the courses, the instructors, and some photograph reproductions of the product, end product of most of the courses. That's about all I knew about the school.

As to looking into other art schools, we sort of -- it's the way you learned about sex, in a way. You talked about it to other kids. "Well, what do they do there in the Art Students League? Or what do they do at RISD – [Rhode Island School of Design]?" We never went. I never went to visit any of these schools. Teaching all these years at the university I, year after year, would see groups of students coming through the school to see what it was like. And they had already visited Yale, and they had seen the Maryland Art Institute, and so on. Evidently, that's common today. It wasn't really done by the group that I was in, anyhow, back in 1940. So we just arrived there because we liked the stuff we saw on the bulletin board.

MR. BROWN: So the load of work was much greater than in your experience before; is that right?

MR. KAY: Yes and no.

MR. BROWN: But you had been working very hard before.

MR. KAY: We had been working very intensively before at the -- it was really a very easy slide. I mean, any spare hour that the three of us had went into the studio. That didn't change when we got to art school. In fact, you know, we took our classes, and we generally -- evenings we, as a matter of fact, did extra work at home, or Jason had his own studio. We were invited after a while to attend the printmaking class that Tura Banks gave. We were invited to come into that in our second year, maybe at the end of our first year, although it was usually not open to students of that level.

So, you know, we would two nights a week, Tuesday and Thursday night, we'd stay in town and work in printmaking class.

MR. BROWN: Well, what, then, if it was an easy slide -- what distinguished it for you? Did either of you at that time think, "My Lord, is this really -- should we just keep on doing the same thing?" Or did you ever consider, then, dropping out or doing something else?
MR. KAY: Oh, no.

MR. BROWN: Not really?

MR. KAY: We never thought of doing anything else.

MR. BROWN: What was the glue?

MR. KAY: Well, I could answer it in several ways. First of all, we began -- I began to hear about painters and aspects of painting that I hadn't heard of in the art museum classes. In art school, you know, Zerbe was very

much a product of the European scene at the time, his own work very influenced by Picasso's Blue period and Harlequin period. And he talked a lot about Picasso and Braque and the expressionist painters and so on. Now, that hadn't really been much of a conversation in high school classes at all.

MR. BROWN: But you had Zerbe in that first year?

MR. KAY: Yes. He taught the basic painting class.

MR. BROWN: Okay.

MR. KAY: With some assistance. But, no. I had Zerbe, and all of us had Zerbe as an instructor for four -- in my case, six years. There was not the idea of a spectrum faculty at that time. So you went in, and there was the principal painter, and you worked with him. Later on, that changed. I began to teach the first-year classes; David Aronson taught the second-year classes; and Karl Zerbe taught only what was called advanced painting, third- and fourth-year painting.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: But when we were coming through, he taught all four levels. He introduced us, not only to the work of individual painters whose work we hadn't known before -- I didn't know anything about Kokoschka or Beckmann before I came to the Museum School -- he also emphasized, I think, different aspects of art than I had considered before. And in general, you know, that's the first answer, is that it brought us into areas of visual art that I hadn't been aware of.

But more importantly, even if it had been the same thing over, it's a little bit, I think, like studying music. I don't think one should expect radically different concepts as one advances in the field. What happens is, I think you go deeper and you look for a higher quality. Higher quality doesn't always mean a radical departure. It sometimes means gaining more and more understanding about the very thing that you started with perhaps 10 years ago or four years ago or two years ago.
So you may have drawn a head in high school classes, a portrait head. You would do a portrait head in your first year in the art school, and you would do a portrait head in the second year and the third year and the fourth year. One expects a different result. In other words, the answer becomes more complex. The question is always there, you know, in a sense, the same question. So you simply rise a little bit more to the challenge.

Of course, of course, there would be people who would argue that the questions change as you advance. I suppose in one sense they do. Maybe the springboard doesn't change. You're still doing a head, but maybe what you're looking for in that head becomes different as your understanding advances.

So, you know, there was no reason to feel that any of us -- for any of us to feel that we were in a terrible hurry to get out of that school.

Another thing about it is, none of us, I think -- or at least I never really had a very clear idea of what we might face when we left the school. There's a world out there somewhere. What do you do when you get there? You know damn well nobody's going to be breaking down the door of your studio to wrestle away one of your pictures from you.

I suppose subconsciously I just sort of pushed all of that somewhere under the rug and didn't give it too much -- I've been successful ever since I could remember. I was a good student, all right? So I think I am -- I imagined that if I did my work well, and if I emerged as one of the better students graduating from the school, something would take care of me. I mean, that was the assumption I think we all had. You could state it in different ways.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: I think in Berger's case, I think he was ready to conquer the world even before he left the school. But Jack and I had rather more conservative feelings about the reception we would get in the world. And even so, I think we just thought that, you know, if you did your work well, somehow your work would get shown. You'd survive. Other people survived. Why shouldn't we? So there wasn't really a great feeling that we ought to run around and see what was happening in other schools or in other places. So we just went through those first two years, anyhow, very intensely involved with doing what we were asked to do as well as we could possibly do it.

There were times. There were courses where we -- I wouldn't say we were rebellious. But there were some aspects of the program which we questioned among ourselves. I don't think there was any question of going to the office and asking that an instructor be removed or a course be changed. But we got our A's in the courses, and at the same time didn't have very much confidence that they were tremendously relevant.

I was particularly able to sort of go ahead and do the work and not worry too much about it, because that's the way a great deal of the time at Latin School had been spent. But some of the others, particularly in regard to the design course, were very skeptical. The design course was sort of Yale derived -- well, I don't know if it was Yale derived. There were color juxtaposition exercises, exercises with shape making, exercises in going from dot to dot, and all of that.

MR. BROWN: Do you think some of your fellow students felt those were a little -- not very useful?

MR. KAY: Not relevant.

MR. BROWN: Not relevant?

MR. KAY: Not relevant. Would never make you into a painter like Rembrandt.

MR. BROWN: To become a painter like Rembrandt, let's say, there was a quest? There was a mastery of skills?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: The sort of freedom, but within close -- with a lot of hard work as well?

MR. KAY: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. BROWN: Is that what you all assumed was necessary?

MR. KAY: Yeah, except not everybody was interested in becoming like Rembrandt. I mean, everybody had his own favorites.

MR. BROWN: Sure, sure.

MR. KAY: I think we all were very much encouraged to go to the museum and to look. We had our -- some of us had our enthusiasms. God knows why. But in any case, each one of us eventually developed a kind of tendency towards a particular aesthetic direction, headed by a particular master, whether it was Rembrandt or Hyman Bloom or Jack Levine or El Greco or something like that.

No question about the fact that we knew that you had to work very hard. Nobody had to tell you this because you would draw a hand and compare it to the hand in the El Greco, and it wasn't as good, you know. And arrogantly enough, I think we felt that we could make it as good. Why not? He only had two arms and two eyes. So you feel that that possibility exists. That's what you're shooting for.

There was no -- not a great deal of restriction or guidance from Zerbe in this regard. He really didn't care whether you loved El Greco or whether you loved Braque, just so long as you were intense enough in your own work with it.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm, mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: So that was pretty much what occurred in that first year.

MR. BROWN: Zerbe was a fairly -- you were fortunate to have him as a teacher in those first years then?

MR. KAY: I think you could do a lot worse. I think you could do a lot worse. He put you in touch with the tradition, with the museum. He was not prohibitive. He also was very -- he encouraged you to think very professionally in terms of standards and achievement. He encouraged intense work habits. All those things are good.

And he did not communicate, it seems to me, in a very polemic way or very didactic way a set of canons that he felt really ruled in the art world. He had a few things that he did communicate, kind of perspective of drawing, a kind of use of the brushstroke to express a volume directionally, and a sense for paint quality, as he put it, using the paint itself as a variable through the canvas which would have an interest of its own.

Some of these things I agree with still; some of these things I think are rather less important to me now than they were back then. None of them were hurtful. And there were not huge omissions. I mean, his taste was nothing else if not eclectic, so that he was quite willing to admit the possibility of a Modigliani being as important aesthetically as a Bronzino or a Piero della Francesca. I mean, he had a very wide range of interests himself as a teacher and a painter. And I think that made all kinds of work accessible to individual members of the class. That's very important.

But he didn't -- for example, I don't think he taught us very much about color in the sense of atmospheric color.

He himself, I think, was -- at least, in school we never got the sense of -- we were never pointed at the Impressionists at all. There was -- that, I think, was a generation of French painting that he had relatively little interest in. I may have mentioned this before. And strangely enough, that became -- that group became -- I don't know whether it's historical or personal -- one of the major interests for the three of us later on.

MR. BROWN: For you and Berger and Kramer?

MR. KAY: And Kramer. You know, I think almost in spite of Karl Zerbe, we became interested in French painting of the last half of the nineteenth century, in different ways and for different purposes and with different results, I feel. But it is interesting that we went through the one door that he didn't open for us.

MR. BROWN: But he more favored the posts?

MR. KAY: The post-Impressionists and Expressionists and the School of Paris.

Also, being an urban art school, we -- let me just say briefly what the painting program was. The first problem we were given was to make an abstract arrangement of shapes on a 15 inch-by-20 inch gesso'ed panel with oil paint, and to stress different textures in each area. In one area you might paint rough, in another one very smooth, one with a sable brush, one with a bristle brush, one applied with a palette knife, one area glazed, one area scumbled, and so on. So you found out what the range was, what you could do with oil paint.
The second problem was an 18 inch-by-24 inch panel on which you rendered a series of geometric forms which you composed from imagination, without reference to a still life or anything. But you had to include a sphere and a cylinder and a cone and a cube, and various other geometric forms, and render them as realistically as possible, again in the oil paint.

The third problem -- and each one of these problems took a trimester. That is to say the year was divided into three parts, and you only did that texture problem the first third. The second third of the year was the form problem. And the last problem of the year was a trompe l'oeil, a "fool the eye" still life, where you hung up -- where you put on the wall various objects in shallow space, and then you reproduced them as realistically as possible, using every trick that you had learnt in handling paint in the first two problems to make this a very, very realistic effect like a Harnett or a Peto.

MR. BROWN: This was all in one year?

MR. KAY: That was the first year.

MR. BROWN: The first year?

MR. KAY: And that was just about the whole first year painting course. The second year course, you were asked to do a free still life and a portrait head. Forgive me. That trompe l'oeil problem was not in the first year; it was in the second year. The last problem of the first year was actually a still life painted from actual wooden geometric forms. So the same thing that you had imagined first and done from imagination, you then were given the forms themselves, and you were asked to paint them from nature, so to speak, from the setup.

Then in the second year, you did that trompe l'oeil. And that was followed by a free still life, where you arranged objects that you brought in and painted them. Then the last --

[END CASSETTE 2 SIDE A.]

MR. BROWN: But now, meanwhile, you've been drawing.

MR. KAY: Right. You should remember that the drawing program worked in tandem. And in the first year, you began making drawings first of geometric forms -- cube, cone, cylinder, sphere, and so on. And they were set up, actually, in class for you to study. The next exercise was to have a model pose for the class, a nude model. One was to analyze that model in terms of geometric forms. So you'd look at the leg, the thigh, for example, and reduce that to a cone, and set that cone into a section of the sphere and then set the sphere, in turn, into another cone for the lower leg, and so on. So that the drawing that you produced indicated the masses -- the main masses of the figure, as you saw them in terms of the proportion and the rhythm and the particulars of the gesture of the pose, but translated into purely geometric terms. You were not asked to break the thing down very small. In other words, it wasn't necessary to put a little ball in for each knuckle or something like that.

The main thing was to get you to perceive the way these volumes, these forms, geometric forms sat in relationship to each other and the perspectival changes that they went through as they extended towards you or away from you or tipped a little bit to the right or a little bit to the left. You had to draw the cross sections of these things. This was done just -- at the beginning just in outline, in line. Then you were asked to model them in chiaroscuro, in light and dark. And finally, after doing the few weeks of that kind of work, you were asked to

simply work from the model, have the model pose and then make drawings from the model in as real and expressive a way as you could.

So that really paralleled a great deal of the thinking that was going on in the painting exercises at the time. And I think in that relationship, it was a very, very good program, the relationship between the drawing and the painting.

Second year drawing was pretty much just working from the figure. It was assumed that you had to do a lot of drawings from the figure. It wasn't necessary to jazz the program up and put in a lot of gimmicks. You just drew from the figure pretty steadily.

Every now and then, maybe one week in every five or so, the model would not be brought in, and instead you'd be given a three-week period to develop a drawing without the model, whatever you wanted -- a beach scene or a cafeteria scene or a war scene or anything you wanted to do. This was to keep you from becoming too dependent upon the model for your drawing ideas.

The design class, theoretically, was to work with the other two courses, too. There, too, there were some exercises composing these geometric solids and trying to develop them in a way that the pattern would be exploited and would rest well in the frame. There were exercises for -- but it degenerated, it seemed to me, into exercises that became kind of manipulation exercises. We were given sticks of graphite and asked to see how many different kinds of marks we could make on a newsprint pad, by wiggling them, by making lines with them, by making blended areas with them. It just seemed silly to me. And these things were not things one could really use in any way. But we went through them and did them presentably.

Then there were exercises with shapes, composition of shapes, scale, the composing a shape that would not have unpleasant [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: But you were able to stick with such courses?

MR. KAY: Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: As opposed to some of your mates, who [inaudible]?

MR. KAY: Yeah. We all stuck with them. Some of them just in private made scathing remarks about the course. But we all passed the course and did better than passed the course. Of course, in a course like that with a sequence of problems, occasionally something would come up that everybody would do very well with. Brown gave us an exercise to use pastels to show the subject distance. Kramer did a remarkable thing with sort of converging perspectives of railroad semaphores and things like that. It was really quite a very surrealist kind of thing. I mean, we just used those things as springboards as we would for a painting, in many cases.

They were -- it isn't as if at that point the instructor would say, "Oh, this isn't what I want at all," or anything. So, no, it wasn't -- it was okay. But it wasn't -- the theoretical aspects of the courses, for example, the color juxtaposition thing, was not something that any of us, I think, found interesting or useful. It became the foundation of the course at Yale, of course, with Josef Albers and his squares. We did those squares of color composition at that time. I don't think Albers was at Yale at that time. He was at Blackmount.

But anyway, we were not unaware of this effect of the complementary color being an after-image, you know, and affecting the surrounding color content. So, you know, we didn't leave the school totally ignorant of color theory, but it wasn't something that any of us thought was tremendously useful.

MR. BROWN: In hindsight, you would say that's -- you felt that --

MR. KAY: I think it could be covered in a much briefer way. And for me personally, I don't have an awful lot of use for that.

Jason always was somewhat attracted to that. I mean, he would like to play games with putting down a red and then surrounding it with a gray or something to make it look redder or something like that. But he was doing that, I think, in high school before he ever heard of any of these color theories. But when he heard of them, I think he got the sense that they could be useful.

MR. BROWN: At MFA School, at least when you began, there was no elevating to sort of a sacred theme and elaborating on various theories, was there? I mean, you [inaudible].

MR. KAY: In this regard, no.

MR. BROWN: No?

MR. KAY: No. I think what was considered, in the painting department anyhow, as perhaps -- you know, if there was a unifying idea, it was the idea of an individual personal expression, whatever that could mean, you know. That could be a very broad principle. But if it didn't have this kind of personal point of view, it wasn't art. And if this had to be obtained by a mannerism of some sort, that was okay. I mean, nobody said that, but that's the impression in hindsight that I have. A lot of -- there was a certain straining for an original idiom. But that was true not just of that school, but of American art in general at that time.

MR. BROWN: Do you think that is because they were thinking, there's Paris? And how are we going to --

MR. KAY: Well, it wasn't so much, I think, of competition, but maybe it was a question of understanding of, that was perhaps the American -- or, let me put it that maybe around -- in the 1940s, that's what most people thought the School of Paris was all about. So you get a painter like Ben Shahn, sort of getting into what I would regard as mannerism.

You know, what are the main influences ? They're French painting, maybe Modigliani, somebody like that, Soutine to some extent, using American subject matter perhaps, and giving it this little twist of -- and at the same time, retaining some respect for the picture plane. But there was never a great, great interest among such painters as Kuniyoshi and Shahn and that generation -- there was never that much interest in a painter like Cezanne, perhaps. Raphael Soyer did have an interest in that. But the others?

I think there was a general sense of what I would call -- and perhaps I'm all alone in this -- would call a kind of mannerist approach to art. But, you know, there would have to be a kind of fingerprint or a kind of gestural bravura about each individual painter that lets you identify a Guaffne [phonetic] versus a Shahn versus a Levine versus [inaudible]. And each one had his own nuance, certainly. But it was, I think, rather a limited application of what was going on in Europe at the time, or perhaps 15 years earlier.

Anyway, you got through the second year, first semester. And I believe at that point, if I -- no, I believe at the end of the first year, one made a choice of major at the school. And you could become a painting major or a sculpture major or commercial art major or a major in jewelry or a major in ceramics. I think that covers it.

MR. BROWN: You had fine arts?

MR. KAY: Well, you had painting and sculpture, you had commercial art, I guess it was called then, something like that.

MR. BROWN: And that was in the MFA School? They did commercial art?

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah. Sure. Ben Nason was the teacher there. We didn't -- nobody saw him till his second year. I never had anything to do with the department. And they had occasionally other people in. Somebody taught furniture design for a while. Montague was his name.

MR. BROWN: So there were these useful vocational courses.

MR. KAY: Correct. Applied.

MR. BROWN: I wonder if that was fairly usual at that time for art schools?

MR. KAY: I think it was. I think you could probably count on the fingers of one hand art schools that didn't have some applied art. There are a lot of reasons for that. One is that it's, I think, always been considered to be necessary to encourage people to design for industry. And usually, this would take place in the same -- in America -- this took place in the art school. There are relatively few schools of design that were independent of the fine art major.

Perhaps RISD began that way. RISD was a school which emphasized very heavily designing for industry, and I think it might have been started by various industrial concerns in the Rhode Island area who wanted good designers for textiles and other things.
But by and large, I think most of the art schools had these design programs in commercial art, certainly illustration, things like that, which were very big in the '40s, still. It wasn't until the '60s that the photograph and the typography design thing sort of displaced handmade illustrations. And they were used for everything from books to refrigerator ads, you know. I mean, although often in an art school, book illustration would be separate from commercial illustration, selling tomato soup or something like that.

MR. BROWN: Did you ever think of going into some aspect of commercial art?

MR. KAY: After about two months. Well, I don't even know if it took two months. It just never occurred to any of us not to stay with painting. Zerbe was the most eminent instructor there. The work was richer somehow. I mean, the field of painting just seemed to us all encompassing. There was no -- I think by the time we finished

our first year, there was no question about going into commercial work, at least at that time. I suppose all of us might have thought -- I thought now and then that, yeah, possibly I might get into stage design or something like that. I was crazy about theater at the time, and actually worked a little bit in a theater company here in Boston, Tributary Theater.

MR. BROWN: Tributary?

MR. KAY: Yes. Duval Eliot was the director. I had friends who were doing some stage designs there, and I thought, well, I kind of liked the idea of applying my interest in a kind of expressionist idiom to the stage. But I never -- there was no easy road to that, I mean, as they're seen today. There was a well-worn path into painting and all my friends were there. I mean, I think half of the decisions in my life have been taken because I was in company that I liked and I did what they did.

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.]

MR. KAY: I'd say we sort of operated as a group. So Jack Kramer did a little bit of stage designing for a school that he was teaching at. I never did anything with it. And we stayed in painting. But then, you know, I don't know what would have happened had the war not come along.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: At the end of that second year, the whole thing stopped for all three of us.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. About '42-43?

MR. KAY: '43.

MR. BROWN: By then you were of draft age, weren't you?

MR. KAY: I was draft age in March of '43, and I was drafted -- I was sent a notice right away, and I was actually in the army on July 1st, I think it was, or July 7th, of 1943. They allowed us to finish whatever year we were in. And then you went into the service, so that at that point Jason, Jack, and I were all drafted. David wasn't. And then that was the end of that chapter.

MR. BROWN: So that was a complete thing, yeah.

[tape stops, re-starts]

MR. BROWN: This is January 23rd, 1996, the third session of the interviews. We've talked about, Reed, your first two years at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. And then sometime in 1943, you got your military call-up, I guess.

MR. KAY: Yeah. I had turned 18 at the end of March of that year and got my notice in the spring. And I was drafted in, I think it was, July. I reported to Fort Devens and then was shipped to Camp Carson, Colorado.

MR. BROWN: Was Fort Devens sort of the local --

MR. KAY: It's the Massachusetts base. I just was there one night. And I guess they were putting together a new unit, and it was to be trained in Colorado. It was a combat engineer unit. Most of the people, the enlisted men, were from Massachusetts or Maine or New Hampshire. It was a New England outfit with very few exceptions. The non-commissioned officers, the cadre training the unit were from all over the country. There was somebody from New York, somebody from Texas, and so on. But most were like myself, 18-year-old or 19-year-old draftees who didn't have any sense of what the army was all about; none of us had.

MR. BROWN: Was it merely inevitable? Did you want to figure out -- did you want to go in a certain kind of unit, or --

MR. KAY: Well, not really. I mean, I think most of us simply accepted whatever -- there were some who were -- some people that I heard about who were more knowledgeable about these things, and they exerted themselves and got assigned to different outfits, Air Force outfits which were supposed to provide better living circumstances and so on.

I didn't have any notions about what might be more or less advantageous. So I just went along with whatever came up.

MR. BROWN: Many of your classmates and many of your friends were already or about to be going anyway?

MR. KAY: Right. Jason was drafted just about the same time I was. Jason Berger, Jack Kramer both finished the second year, as I did, and were drafted during that -- after that. And we stayed in the service about the same length of time.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Jack got limited service because he had an eye problem, glasses, that evidently put him outside of active service. So he wound up -- but he did go overseas. He wound up in England and stayed -- was in the army just about the same length of time as I was. Jason also was drafted. There were all kinds of, you know, possibilities, different outfits. But none of us got any kind of assignment related in any way to being artists.

MR. BROWN: How did you and your -- in particular, your family feel about your going in? Was it inevitable? Was it just such a mess?

MR. KAY: Yeah. We had -- everybody had been talking about it and thinking about it for a year anyhow. We were almost surprised that we were going to be allowed to finish the second year. I mean, I turned 18 in March 29th, and expected that perhaps in April I'd be in the service. But they let you finish the year out, the extra couple of months.

It was such a common thing. I mean, just about every media outlet, all of the newspaper reports, and so on were reporting about draftees and so on. It was very much part of the culture. And at least we'd never thought about not being in the army or in the service of one sort or another. I didn't know anybody who went to navy or looked for a Coast Guard service at that time. A few people I knew were turned down as 4-F. And then as far as the family was concerned, well, as nearly as I could tell, they were concerned. My mother was a great worrier anyway.

But I don't think there was anything like the kinds of reservations that people had later on with Vietnam or even with the Korean War. It seemed a very clear thing, especially to people in my family and their circle, that this -- being Jewish, that they -- that this was something that was a necessary thing to do; that the war was a just war and was a war for the opposition of the German Nazi war machine. So that there was no overt protest about being drafted or anything like that, that I ever heard.

There was just the general fear that most of us had. I certainly was extremely anxious and worried. But once I was in the army, it was just sort of like going to another school, you know, in a way. You had to learn new things. You had to somehow adjust yourself to the social context of the place. And it was all very new and blurry to me.

I mean, I met people that I would probably never have met under any other circumstances. I mean, had there not been a war and I had gone to college, let's say, I would have been more or less with people that I knew from -- or at least types that I had known in high school and so on.

But this was totally different. I met -- most of the people in my outfit were people who had grown up in little towns, mill towns like Dalton or South Adams, North Adams or something like that, Leominster, Fitchburg. And they were not intending to go on to college. It wasn't in the tradition of their families. Many of them had parents who worked in the local industry, for GE - [General Electric] or whatever the large factory was. They were in many ways much more sophisticated in a worldly sense than I was. I found during those years that I had led a pretty protected -- or let's put it another way, a pretty limited life within a social context that was, not universal. Although I knew that intellectually before I went to the army, you know, being firsthand contact with these people, it was really quite an education in itself.

And -- well, to be very brief about the whole three-year experience --

MR. BROWN: You were used to discipline, weren't you? I mean, you had that.

MR. KAY: Well, discipline, yes, in the sense that you were given a Latin assignment of 30 lines to do and you damn well better get it done by the next morning, but --

MR. BROWN: Also, you and your friends worked many hours at your art.

MR. KAY: Yeah, but this was also at something that we wanted to do. What I wasn't used to was being screamed at and told to get off my butt and get down here or get over there or pack it up or -- you know, I mean, there was, during the training period especially, a great emphasis on doing unpleasant work at the behest of an unpleasant person, and not reasoning about it or discussing it or weighing its benefits. You just do it.

I can't say that I was used to that in any way. But I don't think any of the other people were, either. I mean, the army is a law unto itself that takes a lot of getting used to. And the officers and the noncoms that we had were

also -- there might have been one or two regular army people there. But most of them were 90-day wonders, you know.

We had one officer, Lieutenant Hoff, who bragged about being the very young second lieutenant who had ever been commissioned in the United States Army. I mean, he was really a very immature kid, really, with more power than anybody had a right to and he made a lot of people miserable.

But, you know, you survived it by sort of crying on each other's shoulders. And it was strenuous. And fortunately, I didn't have a problem with that. Well, at age 18, you know, most people don't. But there were a few people in the platoon who really suffered a lot just physically -- the hikes and the -- a lot of heavy lifting in that outfit. Combat engineers function partially as light construction engineers and partially as specialists in detonation and in pulling mines and things like that, blowing up bridges, and then filling in for infantry if they should be needed. It was a small battalion.

MR. BROWN: You were trained in two things. You were trained in this construction of things and also in combat?

MR. KAY: Right. And that's the way the outfit functioned, actually, through the period that I was in it. The training period was only for three months or so. And we were shipped overseas to England. I think I had one furlough during all that time before we left the country. I got --

MR. BROWN: Were you able to come back home?

MR. KAY: I did come back home once, after maneuvers in Tennessee. Then we left from New York and went to England and stayed in Wales, actually, for -- oh, I don't know, a couple of months, which was very interesting to me. Well, I was fascinated by England in general, you know. I had never been overseas and it was a very different culture. We stayed -- we were billeted in a pub over the pub itself. It was a small town, Rexon. People were very welcoming, and really, it seemed to me, very much out of a Peter Whimsy novel or something like that, you know, a very different kind of culture, not just the accent, not just the architecture, but a lot of it just the way they did things.

They had, of course, you know, been on the receiving end of some very bad years. We had never seen anything like it in the States in our lifetime. Not that the place had been bombed or anything like that, but, you know, everybody knew what was going on in the rest of the country.

In any case, we didn't stay there very long, and we wound up going over to Normandy a little bit after the invasion. We were not in the first wave, but we were D-plus, I don't know, 13 or something like that, a couple of weeks after the invasion. And we came down the peninsula through Lessaize Coutons Avenange [phonetic], pulling booby traps and mines and things like that and just sort of trying not to get shot, you know.

MR. BROWN: Was that part of the routine, would you say, is self-preservation?

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: For most soldiers?

MR. KAY: At least the way -- we were not in heavy fighting on the way down. But there was always a racket of -- there were always sort of rear guard actions and small arms fire and things like that. People -- we did lose some people going down. But it was often an unnecessary -- one of the nicest officers that we had, a really good young guy, Lacy Westfall, from Virginia, I believe -- young man, and a very good -- and his squad sergeant, Scully, who came from around here -- I think in Cambridge.

They went off in a jeep for no particular reason. They were just sort of reconnoitering. But I think you could almost call it joy-riding. And by sheer chance, just received a shell, you know, that was coming down the road. I guess there was an artillery barrage for that particular road that had been intermittent. They caught the shell just, bang, like that. They were the first casualties that the outfit had.

Occasionally, somebody, like Walter Carlson, stepped on a mine and got -- he didn't -- it wasn't fatal, but he got wounded pretty badly. So, you know, on the other hand, you know, we would go through these towns. The Germans had left already, there wasn't a lot of action, and the French came out, and everybody was in a great celebratory mood. And we were on trucks that moved us from town to town.

They came out with these bottles of clear liquid. We had canteen cups which hold about a pint of liquid. We held them down from the truck. They filled them up or half-filled them. We didn't know what it was. It was Calvados, which is -- and it was very recently made. It was clear. It was not the amber-colored liquor that we buy now and love, but this was pretty raw stuff. Within about three-quarters of an hour, there wasn't anybody in that platoon that knew where he was going, what he was doing. It was just a mercy that we didn't run into any

hostility at that point.

But then we went through Normandy and down to -- we were assigned to go down near Brest in Brittany. Stayed there for a while, and then crossed France, went through Paris, and got to Belgium by the fall.

MR. BROWN: The fall of 1944?

MR. KAY: '44.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: We were set up in the Ardennes Forest on a very, very thin defensive line, which was broken by the German attack in December, so-called Battle of the Bulge. It was a kind of brutal surprise, and people are still arguing about whether -- you know, whether it had been planned that way or what.

But in any case, at my outfit -- we were right outside of St. Vid at that time, which is near -- St. Vid is near Bastonia, but actually was a more crucial point for the Germans to take because it was a railway -- it was a town at which several railway lines crossed and it really commanded the traffic arteries. It was a little town, but it was a very important point. We were assigned to keep it and hold it.

And, well, that breakthrough was just impossible, I was rather badly hit in that engagement. I was only there for two-three days, maybe, and was taken back. I caught a lot of shrapnel and was taken back, flown back to England to -- well, first to Liege, I guess, and then to England, and was in the hospital there for a couple of months. The rest of the outfit was pretty much captured and went on a very long march into Germany and were very badly treated.

I was given the opportunity for limited service when I recovered in England, but just as a measure of my own immaturity at the time, I said -- all I could think of was getting back to my outfit. Those were the people I knew. They were -- that was the one oasis of some kind of security in an otherwise strange organization, the army. So I asked to be reassigned to my outfit, which they let me do.

MR. BROWN: But it was obliterated, right?

MR. KAY: That was the point. When I got back, it was at the end of February, and it turned out that practically -- I didn't know anybody. There were very few people left from my original platoon, a couple of the non-commissioned officers and one or two of the enlisted men. We went on from there.

But I might have just as well saved myself the trouble of trying to get back to them because practically none of my friends were there anymore. There had been -- what did they call them? New men had been assigned to the outfit to make up for the terrible losses that they sustained during the Battle of the Bulge. I got to know a couple of them quite well. Mulroy and Clark -- Mulroy came from New Jersey, Clark came from Connecticut and we sort of buddied up.

For the rest, it was -- there was one guy, Dana Hashy, who was still around from Maine who was one of the old enlisted men. He and I played chess a lot together. We went on to make a Rhine crossing at Weisbaden in Germany. We were ferrying infantry across the Rhine at night for the crossing. And Mulroy and Clark were in the same boat with me. We figured, with a Protestant, a Catholic, and a Jew, we couldn't miss. While it was a whole line of these assault boats that went across with three engineers in each one of them, and the rest were all infantry, and we got about halfway across and they opened fire on us. My boat got badly hit. And there was a bad crossing, badly executed somehow.

I went in the water, and I got back. But I don't think anybody else from the boat did. Both of my friends never got back.

MR. BROWN: You went back to the south side, east or west?

MR. KAY: Yeah, west side. The outfit got over and took the other side, took the bank eventually. But it was a bad crossing. And from there on, nothing much was left in the way of resistance. I mean, we got, I think about as far as Erfurt in Germany. And after that, we mostly did routine jobs, guarding motor pools and things like that, not much in the way of excitement.

MR. BROWN: You got -- as far as [inaudible] at the time of the surrender?

MR. KAY: Yeah. VE day came and went, to everybody's relief. We did liberate a concentration camp, Ohrdruf, which was absolutely hair-raising and we liberated a couple of prisoner-of-war camps, and actually found some of our own outfit there. They were in very bad shape -- malnutrition, and some of them had -- during the winter march had gotten frostbite and had all kinds of problems with their feet and so on. They were hardly to be

recognized. I've got some photographs of some of them, you know.

MR. BROWN: These were quite unexpected, both the concentration and the POW camps, what you might see? Or would your officers try to prepare you as to what you might be coming across?

MR. KAY: No. Nobody prepared us. Nobody prepared us.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Well, the POW camp wasn't -- it was just the shock to see somebody that you knew that might have weighed 180 pounds down to something like 140 pounds. I mean, he looked -- Gene Langraff [phonetic], for example, looked very, very thin. But, you know, he was a moving person.
The concentration camp, Ohrdruf -- I've got photographs here I can show you afterwards. You couldn't imagine anything. Nobody could prepare you for it. Even if you were even shown the photographs, you couldn't be prepared for it. It was really grisly. Some of the people were still alive. A lot of piles of dead people. They took us through, I think, very deliberately, to make sure we understood that these things had really happened.

As I say, then we were given sort of -- we were moved around. We were attached to various outfits and given chores to do, essentially, with all us trying to guess where they were going to ship us -- when we would wind up in Asia.

MR. BROWN: So that was the expectation?

MR. KAY: Well, that was the expectation at the time.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Everybody was concerned about it. I had a wonderful break at that time, though, because evidently the machinery to get -- to transport the European theater troops to Asia -- you know, it was a massive job and it was going along slowly.

In the meantime, the army, in its infinite wisdom, had devised various programs, for what purpose I'm not absolutely sure. I think partly to keep soldiers busy, partly also to funnel some American funds into the European economies. They had something they called TWCA, training within civilian agencies. And they had, I guess, quite a few different programs.

But the one that came to my attention was something that had to do with art. My commanding officer called me into the headquarters room and said, "You know, I'm putting you up for a training within civilian agencies. How would you like to go to Paris to the art school there?" I said, "I could try very hard to do a good job there." "Well," he said, "they are going to take a few people from different parts of the European theater and send them to the Paris art school and I'll put your name in. I don't know whether it's going to come through."

Well, it did come through, and the next thing I knew I was in Paris with about -- I don't know, eight to ten other American soldiers who had -- some from Italy, some from southern France, some from Belgium, and so on. They had been in art school in the States. They were all more or less my age and we were put into a studio with a French instructor at the Ecole de Beaux Arts. We were given materials and, you know, instruction, and a model. It was like heaven. I mean, we just couldn't believe our good fortune.

Of course, you know, you're talking about Paris in 1945. They've, you know, just seen the end of a terrible period in the life of the city. And American -- except that, you know, the Germans had gone, great. But meanwhile, the economy and everything else was in shambles. All kinds of shortages, of food, of cigarettes, of clothing, and so on. The American army had all of those things, gasoline and things like that. So there was no end of sort of trafficking, black-marketing, and so on.

The French were still euphoric, as far as we could tell, anyhow, about Americans. There was absolutely no hostility. You come down the street in an American uniform, and everybody seemed to smile at you, and so on. So it was a sort of heavenly environment. We made friends, many of us, with local people in Paris. I got to know well a couple of art students who were -- whose families were Parisian, Jean-Paul Delieumot [phonetic] and another man.

MR. BROWN: These were French natives?

MR. KAY: These were, yeah, French art students who asked me to come to their house and meet their families and so on. Didier Around [phonetic] was the other one. And, you know, I would bring whatever I could -- cigarettes and occasionally a bottle or sometimes army rations or whatever, whatever was around. We were billeted in the City University. And we were given sort of a room, a dorm room and so on. So, you know, life was great.

It turned out I was the only one who spoke any French, thanks to that impractical education that I had at Boston Latin School. Not for the first time, I was sort of detailed off to be a sort of utility translator. So I would go around with the instructor to each person's easel. He would speak French, and I would tell him what I thought he said. If I didn't know, I would make it up anyhow. [Laughs.] So it was a great couple of months.

Then they asked me if I -- you know, normally they would rotate that group out and bring another group in. And I was asked if I wanted to stay on for another rotation or two because I could be useful as an interpreter. At that same time, however, the army had a system of points by which you could, on the strength of your record in the army, be returned back to the States. I guess VJ day had come to pass.

So what happened was that they gave you a certain number of points for the number of months in service and a certain number of points for each campaign that you went through. If you were wounded, you got another point or two or something like that. We had gone through five European campaigns. I had a Purple Heart, and I'd had nearly three years into the army. So at that juncture, I was ready to come home. I mean, I had enough points to be allowed to go home. And I had to choose between staying there in the middle of Paris in an art school, supported by the United States Army, in what you might call a very friendly environment, or go back to Roxbury. I didn't even think about it for five minutes. I said, "I want to go home."

You know, when I look back at it, I'm amazed, absolutely amazed, at the choice. [Laughs.] But I mention it just to give you an idea of how very homesick probably all of us were, you know. I mean, it isn't that we weren't having a very good time in Paris; we were. But the idea of getting home and getting out of the army -- one dreamt about that. One dreamt and talked about it so much over the three years that you almost made it into something that could never happen, you know. It was sort of a yearning that you expected would never be fulfilled.

And then when you're offered the chance, you take it even if it means turning your back on French friends and so on. I was glad to go. After a relatively short time, I was back in the States and I was out of the army on December 17th, 1945.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. That taste of art school in Paris -- of course, it wasn't, properly speaking, art school. I mean, it was a setup? [inaudible]

MR. KAY: Well, it really was. I think what it was was pretty much the Beaux Arts system as it might have been -- it wasn't that different, I believe, from what was going on in the school for an ordinary French resident. The only thing that was different was that the selection process for the classes, which I think for French civilians, was probably complicated and rigorous in a certain sense, was of course totally suspended for this group. I mean, these people just went --

[END CASSETTE 2 SIDE B.]

MR. BROWN: -- the third session as well, January 23, 1996.

MR. KAY: One incident that I ought to recall is that, after VE Day, we were guarding some sort of motor pool or something like that in Belgium again, at Mons. And I remember playing Chess with Dana Hashy [phonetic], and somebody came in from the orderly room and said, "Kay, you're wanted." I went back to the orderly room, and they said, "There's somebody here to see you." I couldn't imagine who that could have been -- Jason Berger walked into my life.

MR. BROWN: Wow.

[Laughs.]

MR. KAY: He had been with some outfit in Southern France, doing absolutely nothing as far as I could tell during most of the war. And he went AWOL. He got bored, I guess, and went AWOL and came up --

MR. BROWN: That was pretty serious during [inaudible].

MR. KAY: It was very serious. I would never -- I'd never had the nerve to step out of line once while I was in the army. And there's Jason. He said, "You know, I heard" -- he had kept up a correspondence with me and with Frieda. I'd been writing to Frieda, she to me, and the three of us, and Jack Kramer.

MR. BROWN: Wow. And Frieda was someone you'd grown up with and you knew?

MR. KAY: Well, yes. I had known her since we were about 11. She was writing to all of us, but particularly to me. Jason had written to her to ask where I was, and she gave him news of me and where she thought I was at the time. And so he said, "I had Frieda's letter, and she said you were up around here somewhere, so I came up to see you." He said, "I thought we could go to the museum in Brussels and see the paintings there." "Jason, for

Christ sakes," I said, "we're in the army." I said, "I don't have a pass and I can't get a pass. What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, I don't have a pass either, and I've come all the way up from Southern France to see you."

MR. BROWN: How was he doing that? How was he able to get around?

MR. KAY: He just hitched rides on various army vehicles as they were going up the highway and --

MR. BROWN: He must have been missed. He must have been away for --

MR. KAY: Well, I guess, you know -- actually, there's a letter of his that can get for you that he wrote to Frieda about this whole journey. We have it here. Or we have a photocopy. I gave it to Jason, actually. Maybe it's in the archives by now. But in fact, he had hooked rides, gotten up there, and he persuaded -- I said to the sergeant that was in charge of the orderly room, "Any chance I could get a pass?" He said, "What are you talking about? Of course not. No pass." But he said, "I don't think you're going to be doing anything for the next day or two. I don't see who's going to be looking for you." I took that as a covert kind of invitation to take off.

So for the first time in my whole army career, I said, "Okay, let's go." And we hopped a ride and got to Brussels, did get to the museum, which was in fact open, although lots of stuff wasn't up. But we did walk through, and went out to a café, had a cup of coffee and some lunch, turned the corner and ran into two military police at peace, who asked us, "Well, where's your pass?" I thought -- you know, I had been scared during a lot of the shelling and things like that. But I was never as scared as I was at that moment.

Well, Jason just talked them out of it. He said, "Well, you know, I came up and this is my old buddy. We were in school together," and so on. He kept jabbering at them. They finally, I think, got so sick and tired of hearing him, they finally said, "Okay. Get out here, both of you. But don't -- you know, get back to your outfit. Don't walk around here." So we did get back unscathed.

MR. BROWN: Did Jason presumably go back to his outfit?

MR. KAY: Eventually, yeah. I don't know. Something happened to his saxophone at that time. He plays sax, and I think they were glad when somebody broke it or something like that. I don't know. But he got back. I think this whole thing was being done while his instrument was being fixed or something.

Anyway, he did get back. That's about -- I wanted to just put that on the record.

The other thing I might mention is that shortly before I was -- before the Battle of the Bulge, when we were in the Ardennes, I got word from the chaplain that my father had died, and a letter from my mother indicating the circumstances and so on.

MR. BROWN: Was it expected?

MR. KAY: Well, yeah. He had had strokes, a number of them, oh, from the time that I was about 15. And he had been sick before. He had recovered and gone back to work and so on. I would often come in and help him in the shop during those episodes. There were, I think, at least three or maybe four strokes before and I think at the age of 41, he died. I made a pro forma inquiry as to whether there was any chance of my being sent back, because my mother was left without support, and my brother was at the time around six years old. But evidently, nothing could be done about it, and I was not returned back to the States at that time.

MR. BROWN: Did it turn out there were other local measures for helping your mother?

MR. KAY: Not that I know about, no. She pretty well took care of herself. She took a job in the bus line here as a nurse's aide. And when I got back, I told her that, you know, I was willing to go right out to work and, you know, put together enough money to keep everything going. She insisted that I go back to school.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KAY: And that she could manage without my interrupting my education any further, which she did.

MR. BROWN: Well, being mustered out of the army -- was nothing to it? You took the option and came back?

MR. KAY: Yeah, came back.

MR. BROWN: December of '45.

MR. KAY: Right. I was out, and home, back to Roxbury. And it was a great relief to be back. Oh, that's the

greatest understatement in the world. Of course, I went back immediately to the Museum School just to say hello, and spoke to Zerbe, and he said, "Well, what are you going to do?" And I said, "I'd like to come back to school."

He said, "Well" -- and I said, "Should I wait until next year in the fall to come back, or should I come back after the New Year right now?" He said, "If you want to, you can come right back in. It will be probably just -- it will add a half of a year to your education because you will still, to graduate, have to do two full years in addition." But he said, "You're probably a little rusty, and it would probably do you good to come back for a semester," or two trimesters, actually, "and, you know, get sort of adjusted to civilian life and to the school routine again."

I wasn't quite sure what he meant, but I did find out that, you know, coming back after three years, you're three years older. You've been experienced in other ways than school ways. And it was certainly a very different feeling to be back in school, for all of us at that time. I think for that whole generation, they had the GI Bill. I didn't need it because I had a scholarship. But I took it anyway because they had a stipend at that time. If a soldier went back into an accepted school, an approved school, you got a certain amount of money each month to live on and a certain amount of money for materials, books and the like. So it was really a very generous help, going through.

I also got married.

MR. BROWN: Fairly soon?

MR. KAY: In February. So I was home for two months and we got married February 19th. At that point, my allowance from the GI Bill increased to $90 a month, and that's what we were going to try to live on. Not really, because Frieda was working as a bacteriologist at the time for the state antitoxin and vaccine lab out in Forest Hill. So she had an income. It wasn't great, but it was sufficient. We lived in an attic in Roxbury in a house that was owned by friends of my mother and Frieda's family, the Racklises, and they had an apartment in their two-family house that they rented, and they rented it to us. We spent two very happy years there -- three, actually.

MR. BROWN: Did you find that in general -- I mean, there was not -- readjusting to life back here, was it difficult from time to time? Would there be -- did you get into a funk or --

MR. KAY: No.

MR. BROWN: Nothing like that?

MR. KAY: No. No, I don't know. I was too unaware, probably, to get into that kind of mood. I was very anxious to get painting. And also, the school was rather different when I got back. First of all, it was in a different building. It was in the museum itself, actually, for a brief time, because the school building, which, I think as you know, is next to the museum, a separate building -- but during the war, I think had been rented out to the navy as some kind of therapeutic unit. I don't know what.

MR. BROWN: Occupational therapy?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: That sort of thing.

MR. KAY: Right. In any case, it wasn't available in January of '46 when I went back. So classes were being held in the museum itself. And I was familiar with that space. It was the old cast court, actually, where I had spent all those hours drawing Greek casts as a high school student.

There were new people. A lot of the people in my freshman and sophomore years were not anymore around, and there was a whole new group, some of whom I never got to have anything to do with, and others with whom I became very good friends. Glenna Miller was there, Barbara Swan, Dick Boyce, Jack Wolf, Arthur Palonski, Mike Tulashevski [phonetic], a number of people who were either in the third or the fourth year as painting majors. And they hadn't been in the school at all when I had left for the army.

Then some of the people with whom I had enrolled in the school back in '41 did come back from the army. Jack Kramer and Jason Berger came back. David had graduated, had had an immense success in New York, had a New York gallery.

MR. BROWN: He had not been in the military, right?

MR. KAY: No.

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. KAY: He had had a show at the Museum of Modern Art. He had been, I think, one of nine American artists who were shown at the Museum of Modern Art. I think he was 19 at the time. So this was a great coup. And he was actually on staff, faculty, at the time. Zerbe had given him some classes to teach. So there was a little bit of a chasm or a gap between us and him because of different status, and perhaps a different experience over the last three years, he having become really quite professional in the art scene, and we having been overseas.

Bernard Chaet was in the school at the time and hadn't been when I had left. I don't know. There were probably a few people whom I've forgotten to mention. But it was really quite a lively group. Joe Ablo and Henry Schwartz, I believe -- they were in the school, but I don't remember what year. They weren't in the advanced classes.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: They might have been freshmen at the time. So there we were. We started out in the third-year painting class, which was mixed with the fourth-year painting class, mostly worked from the model. And then we sort of --

MR. BROWN: You mean, was this customary or was this new?

MR. KAY: No, that was always the case. It was, so to speak -- at third and fourth year was the advanced painting group.

MR. BROWN: Third and fourth.

MR. KAY: And they occupied two studios, but you could float between. You could just go into either of the studios, depending on which model you liked or what pose you liked, or so on. And that had, I think, always been the case.

Conger Metcalf was in Boston, but had been out of the school for some time. We did see him from time to time.

MR. BROWN: He wasn't teaching then?

MR. KAY: He wasn't teaching at that point. But he had been teaching when I was a freshman and a sophomore. Anyway, it was a pretty exciting couple of years at that point. Everybody was working very hard, and I daresay, very competitively. We all thought we would stay around long enough to compete for the traveling scholarships, which we became aware of at that point. Maybe we had been aware of them before; I don't really recollect. I don't think there was much on my mind in the first and second year. But by the time third and fourth year came around, this was a major focus for several of us.

MR. BROWN: You mean the traveling?

MR. KAY: The traveling scholarship. The Museum School had several grants, which they gave at the end of the fifth year of study, to students in painting or in sculpture or in -- one grant was for ecclesiastical design, supposedly. But they changed that after a while. They broke the will in some way, or they gave it a very broad interpretation, you know. They told somebody who was really a printmaker that he could get the ecclesiastical design fellowship. "Just go and look at the windows in Saint Chapel and make a drawing," or something like that.

Anyway, we had in mind that these things were there. They hadn't been, you see, given during the war. So there was an accumulation of money, and it was expected that there was a certain flexibility at that point for the faculty to give -- they usually just gave one in each category each year. But at this point they had enough money so that they could have given three in one category in a given year.

But Dick Boyce's class -- that's Dick Boyce, Barbara Swan -- who else was there?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Several others. Palonski and Tulashevski were all competing for it in their year. Jason, Jack, and I would come up in the following year for that. And nobody knew whether they'd give three or two or one or what was going to go on.

Meanwhile, I was, in any case -- I had it in the back of my head as a nice opportunity. But really what was worrying me is, I didn't seem to be able to get what I wanted in the paintings.

MR. BROWN: In terms of your work.

MR. KAY: Yeah. I was just having trouble. I knew how to paint the figure and paint the head. The fact is, I had stopped at the end of the second year with still lives, which were moderately successful. In fact, in my absence one of them won a prize in some USO show or something like that that was here in Boston under the auspices of, I think, the Institute of Contemporary Art; I'm not sure. But I won some sort of prize for one still life that I had done in school, a rather large painting.

But when I was faced with the model and with the portrait head, it was sort of working from square one for pretty much all of us. So we were struggling with that. I perhaps struggled -- we were starting from a lower point than either Jack or Jason.

Jack had spent most of the war in England and had gone to art school in England, Reading, and came back very enthusiastic about the instruction he had gotten there. It was really rather different from the Museum School's approach -- more French, more planar. That is to say, a kind of Cezannesque drawing out of the surface planes and so on. He came back and looked at what I was doing, and he said, "It's all sausages, Reed. You're just drawing sausages. Look at the planes!" And Jason said to him, "Jack, you should simplify more. You're doing every little facet on that thing." And Jack said, "You do it your way, Jason. I'll do it my way." [Laughs.] And we were all friends, but there was a touch of asperity, perhaps, in some of the responses.

Anyway, we saw quite a bit of each other during those two years. I being married, we would meet at my house. More often than not, Frieda would make supper for us. Snowy days, we would take the -- the school would be dead practically in the middle of the day, so we'd come home early, buy some delicatessen on the way home and some beer, maybe, or something like that. By the time Frieda got back from work, we'd had a very nice little party going.

MR. BROWN: She didn't mind all of that?

MR. KAY: No, she didn't at all.

MR. BROWN: She knew your people very thoroughly.

MR. KAY: Yeah. No, it was family really.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And then by the end of the fourth year, we were then released from the obligation to come to classes. We could work in our own studios at home, or anywhere we liked, and Zerbe would come by periodically to look at the work and to make suggestions and criticisms and so on. Actually, during that year, I was already teaching. He had me teaching in the freshman first-year painting.

MR. BROWN: So that would be in '48-49, something?

MR. KAY: '49 -- the year, the academic year '49-50. The fifth year, I was still there.

MR. BROWN: The fifth year -- in your fifth year you were teaching as well?

MR. KAY: Yeah. Which was not an unusual arrangement. They didn't pay you very much -- I don't know, five dollars a class or something. It was ridiculous. But they were very liberal in giving you lots of responsibility.

MR. BROWN: And how did you take to teaching?

MR. KAY: Very naturally. I mean, I didn't -- I was well organized and had always been pretty responsible and took my responsibilities very seriously. And I was probably articulate enough to make my points in class well. I think, looking back, I certainly thought I knew more than I knew. I mean, that's a bad way to put it. I was surer that what I believed was really gospel, you know? I mean, I had no doubts that when I told a student something that I really was helping him and that I was right and that I was just passing on knowledge, which I believed in very much, that I had gotten from my teachers, you know. No doubts, no attitude that maybe there was something else that had equal validity.

I think as such, I was a very convincing instructor; put it that way. I think I formed many relationships with students at that time that have endured to this time. I still see some of those people. And I think I made a good impression on the students, and I made a good impression on the school. I was asked to stay on later on.

I got the scholarship, the fellowship, the William Page fellowship, and Jason and Jack got theirs.

MR. BROWN: These were all for travel?

MR. KAY: These were expressly for travel in Europe. You had to leave. You had to go to Europe. You got -- they

gave you -- how much money was it? -- $2000 or $5000, and you were expected to stay for two years and study in Europe. That was the -- it was given the broadest kind of charge. You were not specifically obliged to take any classes or do any particular work or anything else. Study in Europe, whatever that meant to you.

MR. BROWN: And this would be after your fifth year?

MR. KAY: That would -- had to be after the fifth year, the end of the fifth year. In fact, I was really there -- that was my sixth year in a sense, if you leave off the fall of 1945. I came in in '46, and then I stayed for the year '47-48, '48-49, and I left in '50 in October-September.

MR. BROWN: Meanwhile in that last year, you taught as well?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did you also teach at this time the summer schools?

MR. KAY: Yeah. Two summers. There were two summers.

MR. BROWN: You said 1948, maybe?

MR. KAY: Yeah, summer of '48 and summer of '49, I think, or is it the summer of '49 and the summer of -- no. Yes, that's right.

MR. BROWN: You hadn't been out, the summers out with the school?

MR. KAY: Previous?

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: No, no. As a matter of fact, the school hadn't done anything. There had been one summer before '48. I believe that was the only -- and they had Ben Shahn as the instructor at that time. I didn't go out there that summer.

MR. BROWN: And what was the setup? Where was it?

MR. KAY: It was at the Pittsfield Museum, was the physical plant. They gave us the top floor of the museum to hold classes in. You lived where you could in the town of Pittsfield, or one of the surrounding towns. It ran, I think, July-August, something like that, for eight weeks. And the first year, I believe, then Shahn was the principal instructor. The next year -- my first year out there, Mitchell Siporin was the principal instructor and I was there as his assistant.

MR. BROWN: Did he come over from Chicago? That was before your time?

MR. KAY: I don't know if he came from Chicago or whether he had settled in New York and came here from New York. But he's originally certainly from Chicago.

MR. BROWN: Was he a fairly well-known figure at this time?

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, he was. I mean, he was in the Downtown Gallery. He was showing with Edith Halpert. And he was, you know, considered to be a reputation comparable, let's say, to Zerbe's or to Jack Levine's. Perhaps not -- he was younger and I think perhaps not quite as well known around Boston. But I think in New York and the Midwest, I think he was known quite well. He came that summer and brought with him his wife and his brother-in-law and sister-in-law. His brother-in-law was a sculptor, Leonard Baskin, and they all lived together in a place close to the Cummington School outside of Pittsfield.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative]. The Cummington School was another art museum?

MR. KAY: Another art museum, that's correct. But they had nothing to do with that. It's just that their place was sort of in that direction. I had a car that my father -- Frieda's father made us a present of an automobile, a used Dodge, 1936 Dodge. This was in 1947, I think, that he gave this -- '46 or '47. I used to drive Frieda to work in it every morning and then continue on to the Museum School for classes. That goddamn car broke down just about every other day. Twice a week, at least, fuel pump would go on the Jamaica Way out here, which was then and is now a dangerous, curvy, fast-lane place.

I used to go out there and tinker with the fuel pump and get the thing going and come in, inevitably, a half-an-hour late to my life class at the Museum School. We took this wreck out to Pittsfield, where nobody else had a car. So I was sort of the taxi guy. Mitchell and Leonard both -- and their wives, all of us were crazy about

music and we would go to Tanglewood every chance we got in the evening.

But the ride between Pittsfield and Lennox, you know, with the hills in between, was such that my heart was in my mouth every time we went because I was very diffident in view of Mitchell's reputation and everything. And I thought, "Jesus, this is going to be a disaster. I promised to get the guy out for the concert, and here I break down on the road." It never happened, but somehow or another, it was always a cause for anxiety.

Mitchell was a very, very funny man. I mean, he really could have had a career in theater. He was an old-time -- his style -- he wasn't, but his style was very much the old-time Yiddish theater burlesque kind of humor. And he was expert at it. He was a marvelous mimic. He was a great storyteller. And the best thing was just his extemporaneous talk. And he was also a very serious artist and communicator in that regard and always found a very vivid phrase to communicate his ideas.

His brother-in-law Baskin was more of a Talmudic, incisive debater, and still is, if you've ever interviewed him. I don't know if you have him in your archives. But Leonard was one to challenge any idea, especially Mitchell's. The two sisters sort of kept what seemed to me a kind of wobbly peace between these two guys. And it was a very lively summer session.

The next summer session, Oskar Kokoschka came out and taught. And again, I was an assistant. Dick Boyce was supposed to be there as his assistant and was present. When Kokoschka came in, he sort of dissolved all the differences between beginners and advanced students and took everybody together as one group.

MR. BROWN: Was that known to be his way?

MR. KAY: I think so. He was very iconoclastic about -- well, about everything, really, but particularly about these hierarchical divisions in institutions. And he really questioned, I think, in many ways the authority of any art school that he ever was associated with, either as a student or as a teacher. And he had a very definite idea of pedagogy for training artists, very somehow spiritual in its orientation.

MR. BROWN: He was quite a well-known figure at that time, wasn't he?

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes, internationally known.

MR. BROWN: Zerbe had been the man who had gotten -- or Shahn, Siporin, Baskin and now --

MR. KAY: I really don't know because I wasn't on the inside. I would suspect that Shahn and Siporin came on Zerbe's suggestion. My suspicion is that Kokoschka came from another source altogether. There was to be a show of his work, I think, in New York that season, at the Museum of Modern Art, if I'm not mistaken. And he also had contact in the Boston area with the old man, George Swarzenski.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Who was the director of the Frankfurt Museum in Germany and had come over to this country and was given an office as, I think, researcher or lecturer in Medieval art or something really very strange. But it was -- I don't know if it was a sinecure or he was a participating member of the museum staff. But in any case, he was here.

There was some talk of Kokoschka doing a portrait of him for his retirement. In any case, Kokoschka came -- I don't know that Zerbe had anything to do with that or was awfully sympathetic to it, even.

MR. BROWN: Why would you doubt his --

MR. KAY: I guess --

MR. BROWN: They were different in their --

MR. KAY: Well, they were -- of course, they were different. But I think one of the things about Kokoschka that has to be said is that he was an immensely charismatic person. I mean, you went in the room with him for five minutes without being absolutely charmed -- I remember when he first walked in on us, Frieda and I had rented this house. He was brought over there, came in, and was so courtly and cordial to Frieda. I mean, you know, it was a sweltering hot day, and we were sort of standing around in our underwear, practically -- not really, but in T-shirts and things like that. He was in a blazer and pressed pants. And he said to Frieda very formally, "Would you permit me to take my jacket off?" You know, and he bowed.

He was just -- and then when he talked about art, he was absolutely mesmerizing. I mean, he was -- he talked about -- well, the thing about it is that most of us had apprenticed through this five-six years of art school and were rather -- I shouldn't say matter-of-fact, but, well, apprentice-like in relationship to our studies.

MR. BROWN: And you'd also had the same four teachers.

MR. KAY: Right. And one talked about craft issues, things like, "What kind of under-painting white do you use?" Or "How do you prepare a gesso panel?" and all of that. The assumption always was there that you were creative and that you would do imaginative work. But somehow that wasn't talked about very much. It was almost avoided as an embarrassing subject; should I put it that way. Well, I don't -- yeah. I think that's a fair statement. There were heated arguments about who's doing what painting and, how did you like this or that show?

This man came in and he started talking about soul. He started talking about, "You look at her face and it's like a waterfall coming out," you know. "You have to realize there's a human spirit there. That's what you're painting." You know, it isn't a question of planes. It isn't a question of measuring proportions. It's not a question, above all, of correctness. It's a question of penetrating to the essence. And, "You'd better know what that essence -- you know what that essence is. You're an artist. You're a student of art."

Well, this was a whole new ballgame for everybody that came near the man, especially for the local types in Boston, although there were students who had come from other parts of New England and of the country, I daresay.

MR. BROWN: But it jolted you, too, as a junior instructor, right?

MR. KAY: Oh, certainly.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Oh, certainly. And Jack, who was out there that summer, and Dick Boyce. Jason was not. Jason was in Europe. He might have profited more than any of us from Kokoschka. But in any case, he was an electrifying teacher. And he didn't -- it seems to me, in a certain sense, if one wanted to be negative or critical, one could say that he didn't really so much want students as disciples. He, you know -- I don't know whether he wanted them or not, but he sure as hell collected them.

I mean, people who worked with him for six or eight weeks went back, you know, feeling as if they had touched the garment of the saint. Consequently, they tended to be somewhat -- I shouldn't say skeptical; I would rather say contemptuous of the routine instruction that they had been getting before. This was often the case. Naturally enough, the instructor, who was now regarded as routine, wasn't altogether happy with that development.

MR. BROWN: You're speaking particularly in the case of the MFA School?

MR. KAY: Yeah. And when that man got on the receiving end of a little bit of this stuff, he started talking about these students who were "Kokosch-cackling" around, and all of that. So I think what --

MR. BROWN: "Kokosch-cackling"?

MR. KAY: So I think there was just a little bit of irritation, if not with Kokoschka, then at least with students who too-unquestioningly came under his spell. There were several people from the Museum School there. Harry Cohen was another, a very talented fourth-year student. Barney Rubenstein, who is still in the Boston area, was there that summer, along with Dick Boyce and his wife, and Edwina Curtison, and some other people.

MR. BROWN: And most of the students in those summer schools in those years were serious art students? They're supposed to [inaudible].

MR. KAY: Yes, mostly from the School of the Museum of --

MR. BROWN: Not entirely.

MR. KAY: Not entirely. And there were a few older people who came in, some of them serious painters, some of them sort of would-be amateurs.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: It was a mix.

MR. BROWN: But it was by no means a local community class from the Pittsfield area?

MR. KAY: No, no, no, not at all. There might have been more -- I don't think there was -- maybe there was somebody from the local community, but I wasn't aware of it.

There was a girl whose mother was -- whose family was in Pittsfield and whose mother was really very helpful to the school. Mary Lou -- oh, god, I can't remember her name now. But she had been in the wintertime a Museum School student. So there was not the business of just some local amateurs attending these classes.

MR. BROWN: Now, what about -- were some of the students from other art schools who came?

MR. KAY: There might have been, but I was not aware of the -- you know, where they came from exactly. They were a couple of older painters who -- it was interesting. He, Kokoschka, was very, very sympathetic, particularly to younger beginners. There was a boy -- I think his name was Prince, last name was Prince -- who was just out of high school. And Kokoschka, you know, treated him as if he'd been in an art school for five years.

There was an older painter who was doing landscapes and actually came because of his interest in Kokoschka's work who was on the receiving end of some brutal criticism. I mean, he told him his work was tired, academic. You know, he wasn't looking with his own eyes. He didn't open himself up to the spirit of the natural scene and all that. Eventually, the guy just sort of gave up. He couldn't do anything but what he was doing, and Kokoschka couldn't do anything that was based on that. So that there was a complete mismatch in that regard.

MR. BROWN: Do you suppose that it's impossible when most people are teaching to surmount that and become --

MR. KAY: No. That was just --

MR. BROWN: Kokoschka.

MR. KAY: I mean, he was -- he had one message, essentially. It was a brilliant one and a very attractive one. And he believed passionately in it. He was not adjusting that for anybody. He came through the studio the first day that he -- he came in a week late. He'd had some commitment in Europe. And that was fine; everybody understood that. Came in after the classes had been going a week. And some of the kids had tacked up, as art students do -- had tacked up art reproductions on the wall. There was a reproduction of a Picasso mother and child of the Classical period.

As he strode by it, Kokoschka looked at it for a second, said, "Oh, isn't that sweet?" I mean, he was devastating. As far as I know, he had an immense knowledge of history of art and artists. I mean, he talked, referred always to the great masters of other periods. But I never heard him say a good word about a living painter. You had to be dead. [Laughs.] Soutine was fine; he just died too young; what a pity. But if you mentioned somebody who was alive -- Matisse, oh, god.

I took -- he returned to Boston a couple of years later en route from, I think, Minnesota where he had done a portrait of -- I don't know -- a businessman and his family, I think. On the way back, he stopped and he gave a talk in the Boston Museum to the Museum School students. And after the talk, he said he wanted to see the Fogg Museum, and I offered to drive him over there. I had a better car by then.

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.]

MR. KAY: I drove him over. We went through the collection together. And it so happened that a lithograph of his, a woman's head, was hanging right beside a drawing of Matisse's. And he looked at the two of them a couple of times. He said, "Mine will live longer." I mean, he just was that way all the time, all the time. He just never could get over the fact that he was never given the status that the French school painters, like Picasso and Matisse, were given. At the time -- and I think maybe even now -- I feel he was right. I mean, I think he was a great artist.

Somehow or another, the art establishment -- you know, the funny thing is that Boston was -- painters in Boston, I think, were much more aware of Kokoschka and Beckmann, for example, than the New York school was. I think that they had an attraction here where Expressionism was a pretty well-established thing, starting probably around 1938 or so.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Probably through the Institute of Modern Art, right?

MR. KAY: Probably through the Institute of Modern Art and --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: -- and its exhibitions. There had been a large Kokoschka show in Boston before the summer that Kokoschka came out, organized, I think, by Jim Plout. And although there had been a big ruckus about the Boston Art Institute -- Boston Institute of Contemporary Art, which was attacked primarily, I think, by local painters because it wasn't showing local painters' work. So Jack Levine, Hyman Bloom, Karl Zerbe, David Aronson, and the architect there, Kennedy, had made a meeting down in the -- I think the old North Church, or

was it the South Meetinghouse?

MR. BROWN: The South Church.

MR. KAY: Yeah. I have a photograph of all of them together. And they accused the Institute of all kinds of crimes. This was at the time, I think, when the Institute changed its name from the Institute of Modern Art to the Institute of Contemporary Art. They took that as a starting point, plus a statement that the Institute issued, which essentially, you know, said that there was a great deal of charlatanism going on in the modern art field, and painters really should do what they had always done and go back to nature and express themselves about what they felt about it.

But a mistake was made in the statement, I'm sure inadvertently, where there was a line in it that says, "We in the Institute enjoin the contemporary artists to look at nature and to express himself." Well, the word "enjoin," which really means to order somebody -- it doesn't mean encourage, it doesn't mean exhort, although it sounds vaguely like both of those. That was --

MR. BROWN: Like a red flag.

MR. KAY: -- a red flag. And so that gave them what they wanted. There was this protest meeting and eventually, I think they managed to get some administrative changes made, and the poor institute really took a terrific whacking.

MR. BROWN: Were you actually at that meeting?

MR. KAY: No. I didn't attend it. And I didn't really know much about the workings of the thing. But I read their statements afterwards and so on, and I never felt I could really agree with them, with the artists. I didn't think the institute's statement was at all off base at the time.

They also recommended a kind of collaboration between business and art. The idea was, if you could firms like Steuben Glass to employ artists to make designs for them and things like that -- there has always been a recurrent theme, I think, ever since the Art Nouveau movement, at least since Ruskin, that industry and art ought to get together for their mutual benefit. I didn't think this was anything new at the time. I had read English theory enough to know this wasn't a new or a horrendous idea. But that was attacked as trying to commercialize art.

MR. BROWN: And that bothered a great many of your contemporaries or the slightly older artists?

MR. KAY: Yeah, the older ones. I don't think any of my contemporaries were really involved in this except for David Aronson. Jack and Jason, I don't think attended the meeting or even knew it was going on; neither did I. But there are a lot of people who really did feel -- of our generation, who felt, "Gee, it would be nice if the Institute of Modern Art in Boston did a little bit more in the way of showing our work, you know, or work of our generation, or even the slightly older people." But it wasn't that we thought in art school that we could jump right into the Institute of Modern Art. At least, I didn't think that, and I don't think Jack did. Jason probably thought he was ready for the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

But the fact was that there was this fight. And everybody in Boston would sort of say something about Jim Plout and spit. That summer, when somebody mentioned Plout to Kokoschka in a negative way, he drew back and said, "Well, he's the man that organized my exhibition. I think he's wonderful."

MR. BROWN: How was he to teach with? Because that summer you --

MR. KAY: I didn't. I was supposed to, but I never because what he did was to say to me and to Dick, "I will take all the students myself, advanced and beginners. I'll be happy to take them all. And you can come along, too, if you want. We'll all go out and do landscapes," which is what we all did. I mean, he found a waterfall in the vicinity of Pittsfield, and he got people to bring easels out there and set themselves up in this grotto.

It was a kind of amphitheater of stone, with a middle-sized waterfall tumbling down from the top of it. And the kids set up their easels at different levels all around the thing. He went hopping from one easel to another like a monk. The man was, I think, probably 60. This was '48, right, so he's born -- I don't know. I can look it up.

MR. BROWN: It was '49, wasn't it?

MR. KAY: Yeah, '49, second year.

MR. BROWN: The next year, yeah.

MR. KAY: And I would guess he was born around 1886 or 1889, something like that. So he was over 50,

anyhow. I couldn't -- nobody could get over the man's physical capability and condition. He -- you know, he'd have a breakfast. He'd go out to teach. And he would not eat in the middle of the day. He'd have maybe a glass of tomato juice or something like that. Then he'd have a main meal at night. And he'd stay up late hours over the meal and some wine.

[END CASSETTE 3 SIDE A.]

MR. KAY: I left out -- are we getting some feedback here? I didn't mention that Joe Ablo was there that summer.

MR. BROWN: Joe Ablo. Now, he was a student just behind you?

MR. KAY: Well, several years. I think three years.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Younger than I. And had come through the school. He had come through young enough so that he wasn't in the army. In any case, as students, we really didn't see each other at all. But after the war, I got to know -- he was around the school at that time, and I got to know him then. We became quite friendly for many reasons, principally his interest in music and his knowledge of literature.

MR. BROWN: You shared that? I mean, you kept up a rather intense interest in music, didn't you?

MR. KAY: Yeah, but I wasn't the only one. Dave Aronson also was very interested in music. Jason read a great deal. So that all of us had, you know, interests outside of painting, which nourished the painting, really. And Joe was there that summer at Pittsfield. I mention it only because you might want to check with him about some of these impressions of Kokoschka. He certainly was very impressed that year with him.

Jack Kramer made a very strong impression and was impressed that summer, and it sort of took him completely away from that whole business that he had taken up in England of the kind of rather muted --

MR. BROWN: Palette?

MR. KAY: -- palette of kind of gray and so on. And actually, Jack wound up going to Europe later and working with Kokoschka at Salzburg, as his assistant teaching drawing. So that contact was maintained later on.

Now, after that summer --

MR. BROWN: Tell me.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Kokoschka had -- this was just about his first time for an extended stay in the United States?

MR. KAY: I believe that's correct. I don't know that he'd ever been here before. He said he was very impressed by some things in the country. He said people in Europe think United States has no style and so on. He said, "I was driven through some of these New England towns." He said he thought that they were very beautiful, very much like some of the -- having a style, not like, but of equal grace to some of the places in Europe that he knew. He had respect for that.

On the other hand, he said, "Look at the shoes they wear here." [Laughs.] Incredible. Well, he had certain things that he was --

MR. BROWN: A very elegant man.

MR. KAY: He was an elegant and cultivated person, not a snob in any way. And in many regards, made a great career out of being rebellious all his life, and had to start over again, as many of his generation did. I mean, he made a reputation in middle Europe and in Europe, in Germany, and then left, I guess, at the very last minute, left Germany or Austria -- I think he was in Austria at the time -- and went to England and stayed in England all through the war, where he was practically unknown, and had to develop eventually a reputation there and here.

So the hard lines for that group of painters, had a really tough time. Beckmann, the same way, went to Holland.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Anyway, after that summer, Jason was already in Europe.

MR. BROWN: He had received the traveling fellowship?

MR. KAY: He had received the traveling fellowship, Jack did, and I did. The three of us were off and running.

MR. BROWN: You were still competitive, were you, you three old friends?

MR. KAY: Well, yeah. We sort of --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: We wished each other all the best, but we -- I think all of us felt, you know, that we certainly wanted to maintain a standard, and you tried to do the best you could. You knew who else was doing the good work.

Anyway, I might mention that in that last year, the last few years, starting in '46, Ellsworth Kelly was in that class also. We were never very close. He was never part of this little circle. But Ellsworth and I often would walk home from school -- from Museum School together. He lived somewhere near Roxbury because we went through John Elliot Square, at least that far, and then he turned off. And we would walk and talk. He was very pleasant and friendly. But we were never really close during those years.

MR. BROWN: Did he seem to be pretty much to himself at that time?

MR. KAY: Well, I really don't know that I was that aware. I just --

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: There was never a great point of contact. Also, his work struck me at the time as being enormously competent, but somewhat cold. I mean, I was very interested in this -- I was interested in -- Jason and Jack went to New York, I think in '46, and brought me back a Kokoschka book because I was so impressed with the Kokoschka's -- the few Kokoschka's that I had seen reproduced. And my first Kokoschka book was a little book that had been published in South America, I think in Brazil. I still have it, and I got Kokoschka to write on the fly leaf for me, which he did. He was delighted to see that I had the book. He said, "Oh, that's one of the best books anybody ever got out about me," you know. Anything that was about him was wonderful.

So we were all sort of involved in this very heated, very steamy expressionistic, fervent kind of work that you might find in Kokoschka. Among the French a painter like Rouault or Soutine was important to us. Locally, Hyman Bloom was very important to Jason and Marilyn, whereas Jack Levine was very important to me. And I thought -- you know, we all thought -- I certainly thought that both Bloom and Levine were terrific.

So Ellsworth was doing -- I still remember a really very strong painting from the model, from Dee Dee, that we all did, same pose. But Ellsworth came out like a gray piece of marble. It was beautifully modeled. It was very Picasso-esque in a way, had the large generalizations of form, of volume, that you see in Picasso's classical period, the women on the beach and things like that.

And it seemed to me, I thought at the time, "Gee, what frigid painting, really. But how very good he is at doing it," you know. I never had any idea that he would turn to the kind of thing that he has turned to.

MR. BROWN: You didn't, but as you look at what he's turned to, you're not utterly surprised?

MR. KAY: I'd have to say that I found it -- I find it difficult. If you look at his drawing, I can see where it comes from, in view of what he did in school. When I look at these very purified geometries that he does, I don't know where that comes from. And I don't understand them, really, I'd have to say. I haven't seen Ellsworth in -- I saw him once, I think, about 25 years ago. He was going to have a show in Boston, maybe at the Boston Museum, or an opening of some sort. I said I'd come, and he seemed genuinely pleased to see me and to hear that I would come. And then I didn't show up because a family thing came up with my brother, and I just couldn't get there that day. And I've not seen him since. Anyway, I think someday we'll bump into each other.

In '49, that's the end of that year, we went to Europe in October, I think, or November.

MR. BROWN: What did you have in mind, a review?

MR. KAY: To go there?

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Did you have a plan?

MR. KAY: Well, we had a plan up to a point.

MR. BROWN: You didn't have definite plans, as far as the school was concerned?

MR. KAY: No, but for us. And for myself, I didn't really know. I thought we would get over there. We knew of a

studio that we could rent that George Sheraton, who was a Museum School student, had rented years back, had either bought or rented or leased or something. And he often sublet it out to people from Boston. We had made an arrangement with him that, when we arrived, we would get that studio, I think in the month of November or December. We had a period of about three weeks when we couldn't get into it.

But we expected to be in Paris and stay there for a while. And then we would sort of play it by ear and see what the future brought. I thought I would paint. I brought painting supplies with me. We brought clothes enough for a couple of years, and we were hoping for the best.

We also had very good friends who were living in Paris at the time. The woman who rented our attic apartment to us, Mrs. Rachlis, had two sons. And they were all close friends of my family and Frieda's family. The oldest son, Gene, was a writer who had been working -- well, he had worked for various newspapers earlier on, *PM*. He worked for Arthur Kipplinger in letters or something like that.

MR. BROWN: The business report magazine.

MR. KAY: The business report magazine, and *PM* was a newspaper out of Chicago, I think, Marshall Fields owned. And he wrote for them. Then he worked in Washington and got the job for the Marshall Plan of information officer for the Hague. Went to the Hague and then did very, very well for the job and was put in charge of the whole European operation.

By the time we arrived in Paris, he was living in Paris with his wife.

MR. BROWN: How do you spell his last name?

MR. KAY: R-a-c-h-l-i-s, Eugene. He was in charge of coordinating various media dissemination through all of Europe, films, posters, information releases. I don't know very much about what he did, but I believe he worked -- as Marshall Plan, he worked for State Department.

MR. BROWN: But he was a good resource, as well as a friend.

MR. KAY: He was a wonderful resource. He was also a great -- and he had an encyclopedic knowledge of jazz, of American jazz, and had introduced us -- when we first got married, we went to New York and Washington for our honeymoon, for a trip. And when we were in Washington, we visited him. He was playing some Bessie Smith records that I'd never heard and it was a whole new world for me.

He had married a girl from Texas, a minister's daughter, who was an English major and very, very literate and very well educated. They became our closest friends in Paris. When we first arrived, we stayed with them for a few weeks. And they had a wonderful cook. They had a beautiful apartment on the Left Bank at the beginning and a great cook, Thieft [phonetic], who introduced us to French omelets made with a quarter of a pound of butter, each omelet.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And wine and Camembert cheese and, above all, the great French patisserie, which, although I'd been there during the war, there had been very little of that. This was five years later now, here we are in 1950, and the life in Paris had become a great deal more comfortable. And my French was still fairly usable at the time. I hadn't forgotten it. We had a very good time with the Rachlises and then moved into George Sheridan's studio on Citie de Fleur.

MR. BROWN: And Sheridan had been a student or was a teacher?

MR. KAY: He was. He was a student in my class. He'd come into the school the same year I did.

MR. BROWN: He must have had means then if he had a place [inaudible].

MR. KAY: I don't know -- he was -- I don't know how he managed. But he did have this place. He had not gone to the army, so he was through with school when I got back, and he was already in Europe. He was at the time spending the winter in London and we rented from him. I promptly got very, very sick with a kind of stomach situation that sort of laid me out flat. I don't know whether it was the change in food, the cheese, or what. It lingered for a very long time, maybe five years, and there were periods of time when I was sort of out of it completely. But the first few months of that episode, I was really quite ill. Frieda got a doctor from the American hospital. He came down and gave us paregoric and some kind of antibiotic that didn't do much good.

But the thing faded away, and I managed to get to work. I went down to the Grand Shomier, which was a sort of open studio at that time -- no instruction unless you wanted it, and you could use the model. And I ran into Lenny Baskin there. He was there that season. And we --

MR. BROWN: Was he somebody you could strike up where you left off?

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah. He was -- we talked about, as I remember it, about the *Magic Flute*, which I was just getting into the Mozart -- Mozart operas at the time. Lenny knew all about them, of course. And I visited him. He was already beginning to do those woodcuts that he became very well known for afterwards.

We spent the winter in Paris, bought a little car with Jack Kramer. We bought a new French Simca, which had the same motor as an Italian car, so that if we traveled in Italy, we knew we could get parts -- same as the Fiat. And it wasn't terribly expensive, but we split the cost half and half, and we drove around the Il de France.

We also took a trip to the low countries. Jack and I and Frieda and Frank Carboni came in. He had been in the Museum School a year or two before us, same class as John Wilson. And we all went to Brussels and Amsterdam and Rotterdam together by train. We had to get out of Paris at the end of, I think, three months. If you didn't get out, something happened to your visa. You were supposed to be a visitor, and you couldn't stay for more than a certain duration without -- you had to cross the border and come back in at that time.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] Yeah.

MR. KAY: So we went to the Low Countries for that.

MR. BROWN: Did you have any inclination to show Frieda and others your -- where you had been in wartime?

MR. KAY: No.

MR. BROWN: That was another life.

MR. KAY: No, I didn't. Not germane to the business at hand. I mean, I was trying to learn about painting and art.

MR. BROWN: Well, you had gone to Paris.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Was that the goal? I mean, on the other hand --

MR. KAY: Only because -- only because we knew a few people there and there was a studio, a place I could rent. I didn't really want to take Frieda, you know, just like that out to Albi or Louvre where I wouldn't -- at that time, I didn't really feel -- I had nowhere to find my feet.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: So this was a starting point, and I thought, we'll see what we do there. We stayed for six months there. And then we -- oh, we also knew another Museum School student there, Juliet Mills, whose husband was a professor at MIT, and was at that time working, I believe, for the air force. And they had an apartment. I think they were also government employees at the time, and they had an apartment on the Right Bank, and a very elegant place it was.

It was decided that Julie -- that Bert had to stay in Paris to work. Julie would accompany Jack and Frieda and myself as we drove down and did a tour of Italy in the spring. So in April, we left Paris.

MR. BROWN: This was in 1950?

MR. KAY: '50. Left Paris in April and drove down, straight down south to the Avenaul, and then over to Nice, and then right down the coast, the west coast of Italy, and wound up in Florence, and stayed in a pensione, the Pensione Niva Pieta Independence.

Well, to summarize, what we did was, to stay in Florence a good part of that summer. We rented half of a villa from a Swiss sculptor who was there just outside of Florence, and had our little car, did a little bit of painting, and then decided to sort of travel through Switzerland, over through Spain and over -- through France and over to Spain, and then to loop back to Italy.

Julie dropped out in Italy in the first leg of the trip. Bert came down and picked her up. And I think she found that the hotel accommodations and so on that -- and restaurants that we were living with were a little rough for her. She was a little tiny bit older than we were, and accustomed to hard work. She came from a Mormon family, as did Bert. They'd been working since they were kids. But I think they felt that they deserved a little better treatment.

We were living in student lodgings and student restaurants. We'd go to a town and we'd go to a university near the town and eat in the student dining room. It was pretty rough.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: But it was cheap.

MR. BROWN: Were you still welcomed, as you had been in ‘45?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: I mean, beginning in Paris, but also in Italy?

MR. KAY: We found no problems of any sort. Everybody was just enormously kind to us. I don't know. I've never had to face overt hostility in Europe after the war. I don't know whether it's because we tried to make an effort to speak the language and to adapt to the local customs. I think that that's sort of a natural thing to do, for us. And we always found people who were very welcoming.

MR. BROWN: What was your routine in Italy? Going out and sketching or painting? [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Well, Jack did a certain amount of landscape. I did drawings, largely, and then brought them back and did a few compositions. To tell you the truth, we traveled a great deal. This was our first year of two that we were going to go. And we had thought in a general way that we would spend most of the first year seeing the museums, seeing the work, and then settle down somewhere that was sympathetic for the second year, and roll up our sleeves and get to work.

In the meantime, we did sketches and, you know, nothing terribly sustained. But Jack did rather more than I did in the way of landscape. And we both enrolled in a fresco class at the Institute Ostetali [phonetic] there in Florence, hoping to pick up a little bit of the fresco technique, which we did, at the time.

Then what happened was that in August -- I think it was August or close to it -- a letter came from the Museum School. And first, I heard from David Aronson that they very likely would want to hire me for that fall. What did I think? This wasn't an official offer or anything, but I knew that David spoke a lot to Karl Zerbe and that Smith -- Russell Smith, the director, would probably accede to any suggestion that Zerbe made.

We talked about it, Frieda and I, and agonized about it, frankly, for a good deal of time. Here we were thinking to spend another year in Europe, and it might, for all we knew, be the last year that we would have independent income that would allow us, you know, to paint and do what we wanted.

MR. BROWN: And this was fairly late in the first year.

MR. KAY: In the first year. It was just about at the end of the summer. And they wanted me back in September. The decision had to be made, and I really didn't know what to do. I couldn't turn to anybody for advice, really. I talked to Frieda. Frieda talked to me. And I nibbled my nails and all of that.

Well, in the end, we took the coward’s way and decided to come back. And I had gotten, in the meantime, a letter or a telegram from Russell Smith saying, "If you want the job it's yours. Come back by a certain date." I wrote back saying, "Gee, it's awfully late in the season. I can't get third class passage, and I'm going to have to pay more for my steamship passage." You know, we didn't fly in those days. And he said -- I said, "Can the school do anything to make up the difference for me?" He said no.

And we went back, sold the car, and got back just everybody -- got back about $200 more than we paid for it because in those days French cars -- French citizens had to be on a list to buy a new car. It was still a shortage of automobiles.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And priority was given to anybody with American dollars. So I could buy a new car very easily with American dollars. But the average Frenchman couldn't buy a new car without waiting for a couple of years. Consequently, an automobile that had only been driven for several months, and maybe -- I don't know what we put on it, maybe 10,000 miles, 20,000 miles -- was better than a new car because you eliminated the waiting period and so on.

As a matter of fact, where we bought it, I think it was called Pacific Motors or something, in Paris, they had given us a contract that they would buy the car back. So we went back, and we got a very good price for the car, changed the francs over to dollars, and came back home in September.

I had been so naive about the whole process that, in talking about the decision as to whether to come back to teach, I hadn't ever even asked for how much money they were going to give me. Came back to the Museum School, was handed my teaching schedule, which involved full responsibility for the entire first-year class, which was four sections, plus a second-year class -- class in second-year electives. That's students who were majoring in commercial art, who took painting. I had all of them. And I had one other course; I've forgotten what it was. My salary for the year was $1672.

My heart really sank at that point, and I felt kind of dreadful.

MR. BROWN: Because this was --

MR. KAY: Even for those days, that was a dismal salary. I mean, when we had left that apartment in Roxbury, we were paying only $32 a month rent, but still, $1600 a year was not really very much.

MR. BROWN: And you taught before you had finished your fifth year?

MR. KAY: I had taught at the school.

MR. BROWN: Plus you taught at the summer.

MR. KAY: I taught at the summer session with Mitchell. And I had actually taught at the Boston Museum, helping -- Harold Rotenberg had private classes on Saturday for kids. They wanted an assistant instructor, and I had been sent over for that job.

MR. BROWN: Was this part of the same deal as Ralph Rosenthal?

MR. KAY: Well, it wasn't the same class. But there was a kind of constellation of private Saturday classes.

MR. BROWN: Rotenberg, he was another --

MR. KAY: That's right. He was a rather well-known teacher around Boston at that time. I just saw a show of his work on Newberry Street a couple of months ago. He's still painting, a vigorous man. He was a very, very supportive teacher for kids.

MR. BROWN: But now your boss in painting was going to be Karl Zerbe?

MR. KAY: Well, yes, of course. He was the principal painter and head of the department of painting. But all the business of the job -- that is to say setting the schedules and the salary -- that was Russell Smith.

MR. BROWN: Russell Smith [inaudible].

MR. KAY: The director of the school.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: You know, I forgot that. But, you know, Zerbe was your principal teacher in painting, right?

MR. KAY: My principal, my only teacher in painting. He was the only painting teacher as I went through the school. We had the same instruction for five years. I was not unusual. I mean, not at the Museum School, and not unusual at other schools, too.

MR. BROWN: Well, you said that you -- I'd like to ask a little bit more about him.

MR. KAY: Sure.

MR. BROWN: I think we've talked off record. But -- that he was rather liberal in many ways. And yet, he favored the School of Paris?

MR. KAY: Well, I think his -- yes. I think his work reflected the influence of the School of Paris and German expressionism. There was a sort of amalgam of the work of, let's say up to 1940 the rather modernistic work that was coming out of both Germany and Paris. So it was a sort of hybrid, I think you could reasonably say that the Picasso influence was very much there. And at the same time, I think he was very aware of artists like Otto Dix or George Gross [inaudible] Kirschner, and then particularly Beckmann -- Beckmann and Kokoschka.

When I came back from Europe to teach, the Museum School organized -- and I think with a great deal of encouragement from Karl -- organized the show of Max Beckmann. It was, I think, the first Beckmann show that

was held in Boston. It was held in the gallery of the Museum School. Shortly after that, there was a rather large show that was held in the Busch-Reisinger Museum over at Harvard.

But I think the Museum School had a very handsome Beckmann show, and it was a substantial one. It must have -- that gallery probably held, oh, probably in the neighborhood of 25 to 30 pictures, good-size pictures, I would guess offhand. There had been a continuing program of exhibitions at the Museum School of various artists. And I have some of the catalogs here. I'll be glad to show them to you.

MR. BROWN: These were [inaudible]?

MR. KAY: Zerbe, I think.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: The reason I think Zerbe had a lot to do with them is that many of them were from the Downtown Gallery where he was showing.

MR. BROWN: Where he was showing.

MR. KAY: And so you had shows of artists like Bill Zorach; Gustin had a show. There were contemporary American paintings. Let's see. Well, that's not the one I'm thinking of. Contemporary American Expressionists -- you had Lionel Fininger, Stuart Davis, Grouper, George Gross, Guglielmi, Sigmund Menkes, Jack Levine, Niles Spencer, Franklin Watkins, and Max Weber. All of them, I think, pretty much were at the Downtown Gallery, or many of them were, if not all. So --

MR. BROWN: In this sense, this is expressive of Zerbe's broad taste, which he imparted to you students.

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: When I first heard of him and his years there, though, people would say, "Well, he was very keen on media and particularly on the encaustic.

MR. KAY: He was. That's true. But that isn't --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Well, he was very interested in all of this. But that certainly doesn't tell the whole story or even the major part of the story of his influence. It's the kind of thing that people remember because it was rather unusual. But to give you an example, he taught -- when I was going through the school, there was something called the technical painting course, which he taught. Now, that course met in the third year, I think for one hour a week. And he gave a lecture during that hour. Mostly, it was just reading from the Doerner book. He had a copy of Max Doerner's book in German.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: He would give a sight translation of a section of it to us, if he was talking about pigments or oils or whatever. And there would be maybe a workshop session some of the time. We would be allowed -- we would be asked to make a gesso panel or make varnish. He'd show us how to make varnish by suspending the resin in turpentine or something like that. Or he'd get a little pigment and some oil and grind it up on a slab to show us how paint was made. And we'd each push the muller around for a couple of minutes, and that was the paint-grinding thing.

Well, as I say, that took an hour a week, usually at lunchtime. We'd bring our lunches, and he would talk. And at the end of that, we'd all go over to the studio and start the afternoon session of painting. We painted five mornings a week, 15 hours a week. We drew two afternoons a week. We had sculpture a couple of afternoons a week, and then one afternoon of some elective, like jewelry or silversmithing.

So, you know, the technical end of it was a very, very small part of the program. However, it was unique in American art schools, pretty much. There was really nothing quite like it that I was aware of, anyhow. So people remember that.

The following year and the fourth year, you went to the Boston Museum and you picked -- there were three projects for that whole year. The first one was to be a copy of an egg tempera painting with gold leaf. So you bought some wood, and you gessoed it, and then you made a drawing -- and you did all of this in the -- you prepared the panel in the school, but you brought the panel to the museum, set up an easel, and proceeded to draw on the panel, ink it in and encise it. You did the gold leafing back at the school, and then you came back with your pigments and your egg, and you made the egg tempera paint and made the copy in front of the

original.

Then you copied, after that, a painting in the so-called mixed technique, which meant under-painting with a tempera mix of tempera paint and oil paint, half and half. And you used that for your white in under-painting. And then you glazed that with oil paint. This was the technique that Doerner assumed was used by El Greco and the Venetian painters like Titian and Bellini and so on. There are a lot of people now who question Doerner's assumption, but in any case, we went very often to the El Greco in the Boston Museum, copied that, or the Rubens, which was done as a resin oil copy.

So there were three paintings -- a tempera painting, a mixed technique, and a resin oil picture, that were required of all painting majors in their fourth year. And that was the technical course. Now, that, you were allowed one or two, at the most, afternoons a week to do that museum work. As I say, in contrast, you were in the painting studio five mornings a week, additionally. So as you see, it was kept very much a subordinate component in the curriculum. Though he was known for that, and in his own work exploited what I suppose could be called exotic techniques like an encaustic and gouache -- well, gouache wasn't exotic, it was used a lot -- but encaustic and then the very early polyvinyl acetate emulsion paints, and then the acrylic paints.

MR. BROWN: He was into that very early on?

MR. KAY: Well, he was.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Yeah. Well, what happened was, he was experimenting with duco enamels early on in the '40s. And then he got into this encaustic. He did a number of paintings, which were rather well known at the time, in duco. That was being experimented with by the Mexicans. Siqueiros used it. Zerbe didn't use the airbrush stuff that Siqueiros used on top of the duco, but he used the duco material, which is a very fast-drying, heavy-build-up kind of paint.

He got off that, and he went in the early '40s onto encaustic and painted in encaustic, I would guess until probably something like 1945, '46 surely. Let's see, I got out of the army, yeah. He was still working with that stuff and then he developed health problems.

He had always, I think, had some asthmatic problems and so on. And he became, I think, very sensitive to either the wax or the fumes from the solvents and found that he could not continue with encaustic. So he began to fool around with polyvinyl acetate emulsion, which was really being investigated by Al Duca, a student who -- a painter who had graduated during the war from the school. Al had worked up this technique of using polyvinyl acetate emulsion, water, and pigment, and had actually put out a line of paints that he sold through Hatfield's Color Shop. And he later used some Styrofoam materials that he applied to sculpture processes. He was a technical experimenter, researcher.

Karl was very happy to let him do the research. He said -- Dave or somebody said to him, you know, "You should get a commission on these PVA paints that Al is selling through Hatfield's." And Karl said, "Let him sell the paints. I'll sell the pictures." He worked with that medium for a while.

Just about that that time -- must have been around 1949, just before I went off to Europe, I believe, that Bocour came out with his acrylic paints, the acrylic emulsion paints that he called Aquatec.

MR. BROWN: Aquatec?

MR. KAY: Yeah. And he sent samples down to Boston. Karl had some; I had some; David had some. We all fooled around with it a little bit. Karl really got into that. Well, he had been very strongly involved in the polyvinyl acetate paints. The trouble with them is that you had to mix everything yourself. You couldn't make a prepackaged paint with that material because it wouldn't store well in tubes.

So Al sold the medium, which looks like Elmer's glue. It's just that -- and Elmer's glue is polyvinyl acetate emulsion. It's just not as pure as the stuff that Duca was using. But he sold the medium in one jar. And then in another jar, he sold a water paste of the pigments. So you took the various pigments, ground them up with water, and you had a kind of slurry, a kind of paste. Then you took the paste out of that jar, put it on a glass palette, dumped on some of the medium, mixed it together with a palette knife, and you had the paint. It could be built up very thick. It had many advantages. It had a few disadvantages, too, but they didn't bother Karl. And he was working very industriously with that stuff. He put out a lot of work with the PVA.

MR. BROWN: Polyvinyl acetate?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Then when the acrylic paints came out in jars for -- squeeze bottles, jars, and tubes. First I think they came out in jars, then they came out in squeeze bottles, and then they came out in tubes. They were completely prepared colors. So you just squeeze them out of the tube, put them on the canvas, great. And then Karl went over to that. He worked mostly in acrylics after that.

All of these things had repercussions, I believe, in his work. I think that in the encaustic technique, he -- you think a little bit differently. It's a different instrument, so to speak, and the effects are different. And I think his style changed considerably when he went over to these other media. The other media, the PVA and the acrylic, they're all thinned with water, like gouache. Some of his best work, I think, in early, early years was done in egg wash. Karl was always a studio painter, pretty much, but he would take gouaches or watercolors out on trips and do landscapes on the spot.

I think some of his nicest things that I've seen -- there was a retrospective, sort of retrospective show at Mercury Gallery here last year of Karl's work. And some of the work was really back into the '30s, I believe, late '30s. There were a couple of little gouaches that were really just, I thought, very, very fine. So you always had a feeling for the kind of graphic quality, the calligraphic turn of a water paint, of the gouache. That isn't really exactly the same as the PVA or the acrylic, but it's very related. It also dries very fast, as does the acrylic and the PVA.

Karl was never a painter who liked oil paint, I guess. He used to say in class that he didn't like this sort of shmeary blendy effect that oil paint had. And he liked the fact that he could paint very incisively and quickly one layer over another in the water techniques or in encaustic, which behaves in that sense rather like a gouache, drying instantly.

MR. BROWN: Water -- not water in that case?

MR. KAY: No. Encaustic, of course, is hot wax. You melt the wax on a griddle, so to speak, on a hot electric palette.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And you add to that dry pigment, mix it up with a palette knife, and you've got a paint that remains brushable only as long as it's hot. It's therma-setting. So you pick it up off the palette with a brush and put it quickly on a panel, and you have to move very fast because it will dry on you in the very motion of transferring it from the griddle to the panel.

MR. BROWN: Is it fair to say, do you think, in light of water soluble and wax medium, that Zerbe liked things that could be done quickly?

MR. KAY: Yeah. Definitely. Effects that could be gotten quickly and could be worked over quickly. I don't think he always worked for a quick finish to the picture. But I think he liked to have -- for example, to paint the sleeve of a coat and then to feel that he could quickly go over that with another color, to lighten it to accent it or to deepen it or to paint a stripe on it, and not to have to deal with wet paint and wait for it to dry, if you wanted to work over it crisply. I think he very much depended on that in his work.

Now, other painters liked the paint to stay wet so that they can brush into the wet paint and get a kind of fusion, a kind of blur, if you like. But he didn't lean on that at all, and he wanted paint to set up as rapidly as it could. And that, I think, is what attracted him to those particular mediums.

There's another thing, though. I think that by 1950, which is when I was in Europe, it had become very evident, not to me -- Jack and I. Well, let me start at the beginning. When Jack and I were in Florence, we saw some paintings by American painters hanging out, you know, over, I think at the Bar Walter or one of those places. And they looked absolutely strange to me. I mean, these were nonfigurative. They were not particularly structured in terms of formal devices, the way a Brock would be. I mean, it isn't that we were unaware of Abstract art as it developed out of Cubism, let's say, in Post-Impressionism. But these things really looked wild to us.

When I got back in 1950, I remember going to New York and going to Downtown Gallery and seeing some paintings by Philip Guston that were Abstract Impressionist paintings. I didn't know what to make of them. I didn't spend a lot of time reading the art publications like *Art News* and so on. But it soon became very clear to just about everybody around that Abstract Expressionism had been going on for quite a while, but now was in full bloom in just about all of the galleries, taking up the interest of just about all of the critics, and that this was the dominant mode of American painting by that time, by 1951.

And my view is that it wasn't only the fact that Karl changed his apparatus, his media, from encaustic to the synthetic resin paint. It was also that the scene had shifted in New York and that he was, in a certain sense, accommodating himself, or at least rising to that challenge. Let's put it that way. I think his work became increasingly abstract, increasingly involved with pure patterns.

[END CASSETTE 3 SIDE B.]

MR. BROWN: -- 16, 1996. I want to bring in two date corrections. First, the Kays were in Europe from the fall of 1950 to the fall of 1951. And Reed Kay began teaching at the MFA School in September of 1951, not September of 1950.

I thought we might begin today by continuing to talk a bit about Karl Zerbe. First, you had him, of course, as a teacher. But as a colleague -- you told me that he told students to go look at museum objects. He encouraged them to always be looking at other work. But he would never try to make them just look at certain kinds of things. Was he very quite broadminded in his --

MR. KAY: I think he was. I think he was definitely willing to include just about everything in the museum as work that would nourish the development of an artist or of a student. And he really didn't direct people to one or another school of painting.

The museum collection being what it is, there would be some gaps. But interesting enough, I think in spite of what seemed to me a very natural and conscious effort on his part to be inclusive and universal in his endorsement of various approaches to painting, I think somehow or another that he was less excited about or interested in the painting of the last quarter of the nineteenth century in France. So that Impressionism got very little emphasis or notice in his lectures or in his directions to students. I don't think he -- I didn't get the impression that he was very sympathetic to or interested in the kind of color discoveries and the kind of approach that the Impressionists exemplified of working directly from nature.

I mean, he was, after all, in sum, very much involved in a traditional way of developing a picture; that is to say, with preparational drawings, color sketches, and the final development of the picture itself on the canvas, at least for students. I don't know that his practice was necessarily that routinely step by step. But this is what he encouraged people to do, and to make separate studies for figures and so on to get information for the final paintings.

MR. BROWN: Well, you were, on the other hand -- you and your friends Jason and --

MR. KAY: Jack Kramer, yeah?

MR. BROWN: -- had done plein air painting. You loved it. You went on [inaudible].

MR. KAY: Well, we did as --

MR. BROWN: How did you feel when you came up against --

MR. KAY: Well, this was -- we had done -- we had worked out of doors while we were in high school, had gone on out landscape sketching trips with watercolor, with oils, and so on. When we got to school, we didn't really feel that we were being told not to do this in any sense. It's just that the problems within the studio and the problems of assembling a kind of compositional expression was not new territory, but was being emphasized, and we felt that it was, you know, very useful to become involved in that. And we didn't even think -- I don't think we even thought about it.

We did work directly -- it should be said, these were not things that were completely synthetic. We worked all the time from the model. I mean, the point, however, was made that you worked form the model to learn, to learn about structure, to learn about characterization, volume, and so on, to solve painting problems -- technical painting problems such as expression of volume, such as the human anatomy, even things like compositional arrangement of the figure on the canvas.

But these were studio studies, and they were not considered, generally speaking, to be an end in themselves.

MR. BROWN: Did Zerbe work very closely with you? Would he be hovering around?

MR. KAY: Well, no. Actually, he came -- the class met five mornings a week in the painting studio, from nine to twelve, as I remember it. And he would come in three times a week, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, I think it was. You expected to see him in that studio, and he would go from easel to easel, as was traditional in an art school, making comments, making suggestions, sometimes hardly saying more than a couple of words of encouragement, other times spending perhaps a half-an-hour with a given student.

Class size was not very large. I mean, you had about 15 painters in the third year -- 15 third-year painters, and about the same number of fourth-year painters in that studio. There were two studios, and one circulated between them at will. So the total was about maybe 15 people in a studio. And Zerbe would go from one studio to the other, usually covering both studios on one day. He would be in three days a week.

Well, that meant that as a student you could expect to see him all the time. You very often heard what he was saying to other people. And I think sometimes that was as instructive as anything he might say to you.

But there were times when he would pause and go in great detail or in great depth into the issues of your particular painting. Other times, you know, you might go two or three weeks in a row getting rather perfunctory notice, which is, I think, very healthy because one felt that, you know, one could work out the problems at a given pace as the pose or as the painting process allowed. And you didn't feel that Big Brother was hovering over your shoulder and saying, "Uh-uh-uh, don't do that" or "Try this."

But at the end of a phase of the picture, he would probably come up and say, "Well, you know, your idea looks very good. You may be getting in your own way by breaking up the foreground too much. It may be taking away attention from the middle distance," or something like that. He also would supply technical advice as the picture developed, suggesting sometimes a change of medium or a different application of paint, perhaps a redrawing of a part, something like that.

But the crits were usually, I think, aimed at reinforcing the notion that this was all material to be used in a personal way in other pictures, perhaps, or to be developed in a personal way in this particular painting. So -- and he did show up three times a week. And one got to know pretty well what his attitudes were because, after all, this was the only painting instructor. So in our class, in any case, we saw him as -- when we were freshman and all the way through to the time we were fifth-year students.

MR. BROWN: Do you think this was possibly a weakness of the school at that time?

MR. KAY: It is regarded as a limitation now. I don't think it's a weakness at all, really. Well, you mean institutionally, if you're talking about the structure of an institution, it is risky because you have to be very sure that the person in charge of the department is really a broadly educated person himself. I could see it as a weakness if you got a rather limited, didactic painter in there who insisted on everything coming out as he understood painting to be. But it was not an uncommon situation. And I don't think it produced a bad result.

If we contrast it with the alternative or compare it to the alternative, which is so common today in American art schools, where you have a very big spectrum of faculty deliberately chosen to be a spectrum -- you get one realist, one expressionist, one abstract painter, one political painter, and so on -- it seems to me that there is very little cohesiveness usually in the curriculum. The only thing to be said for that approach is that it could wind up, depends on how it's managed.

The Art Students League had a system where they had a number of painters who were professionally recognized. And you signed up for one or another studio. You decided to work with Kunioshi or Weber or whoever was on the catalog list. If they accepted you, if that particular artist accepted you, you might work with him for two or three years and then go on to somebody else. Nobody ever asserted that that was a sequential and coherent curriculum.

Zerbe, I think, really changed the system when he came to Boston and tried to make a curriculum that would be sequential and progressive and in which the various disciplines came together and moved towards a particular point. In other words, the drawing program was supposed to reinforce the ideas in the painting program and in the sculpture program. The problems in design were supposed, in a way, to illuminate the particulars of -- the procedural problems of composition in the painting, and in the sculpture program as well, for there were three-dimensional problems in the design course as well as two-dimensional ones.

So the idea of an integration of the various subjects was, I believe, relatively new in the country, and certainly new in the Boston School. Up till then, I think there were painting studios, there were drawing studios, more on the European system. But there was not a kind of educational pedagogical sequence that supposedly all came together.

And I think, you know, that idea is particularly useful in a department which gets rather large, and where you really have to have a great number of faculty, because if then there is a kind of community of ideas, and this faculty agrees that certain material has to be covered over the four-year period, then it becomes a kind of sequential thing, with a first-year, second-year, third-year sequence where you don't have the kind of competition, in a sense, that you have in the Art Students League system, where each person teaching painting, in a way, is trying to teach everything about painting.

With Zerbe's system, there were first-year problems. And it almost got to be that the instructor could be

interchangeable. I mean, you taught a pure form modeling problem. You taught an abstract design problem, to be executed with different painting techniques, and so on. That was supposed to give the student experience to make it possible for him to move to still life painting, and then from the still life painting to figure and portrait painting.

So you could characterize it as a kind of academic approach. That's supposed to be a pejorative phrase today. But the academy, of course, in the old days depended again on this kind of sequence of starting with drawing and casts, and only when the student was proficient in that regard could he take those skills into the painting studio.

Some very fluent painters were developed in that system in nineteenth century France. And it was only slightly modified in the more radical studios that were independent of the Beaux Arts, you know, so that there's a lot to be said for a kind of sequential program. However, the problem with it, I think, is that it can ossify. It can become a sequence of problems, textbook problems, that goes from one to the other, with everybody assuming that they have -- that the guts of painting information has been covered. But that isn't necessarily true, and it doesn't -- it also assumes that students develop at the same rate and according to the same sequence of stages, which I personally believe is not always true.

I mean, sometimes you can begin a student with color and teach him drawing later. Other times, you know, it makes great sense to give the student great competence in drawing before he really attempts any complex color development. So there was perhaps inherent in Karl's system perhaps a danger of inflexibility in the end, from a pedagogical point of view, I think.

MR. BROWN: And under him, that never occurred?

MR. KAY: I don't -- well, you know, he was there for quite a while. I think he left in '52. So this would mean that he was around for something on the order between 10 and 15 years. I would say towards the end. I would say that towards the end, the ideas seemed to lose a little bit of the kind of intensity and freshness that perhaps they had in the early '40s. I saw them as a student in the '40s, from '41 to '43, and then afterwards from '46 to '49.

It seemed to me that, as more -- you see, eventually he turned over the instruction of the first and second years to other people, to David Aronson and to myself. And I think that diminished in a certain sense a kind of excitement, because working as a freshman with somebody who you knew was an exhibiting artist in New York, you know, and had come from Europe and put you in touch with the modern European tradition was an exciting thing.

In fact, you know, we talked about this. We were conscious of it. And I'm sure that, although there were some advantages to putting the courses in the hands of -- in my hands, for example, and I tried conscientiously to communicate what I knew -- I think it must have been a little different for those students than it would have been working from the beginning with Zerbe.

Of course, they saw Zerbe later when they were third- and fourth-year students. Those courses he always kept for himself, although David assisted him in the advanced painting classes, too. Eventually, they got so large that it really took two people to cover all those students decently. So Aronson, along with Zerbe, taught those advanced courses in the last years of Zerbe's tenure at the school.

MR. BROWN: Well, now, you mentioned at one point that Zerbe seemed to favor the talented students.

MR. KAY: Well, that was my personal impression. I don't know if other people felt that way. I always was aware that there was a little -- call it a cadre or a clique, whatever you want to call it, of students in my class, four or five of us who seemed to get the notice.

Occasionally, from time to time, everybody's work was put out, spread out around the room, you know, and there would be a kind of public comment that he would make. He would sort of go through the work and comment on it for everyone's benefit. And usually, there was a sense that there were a few stars, and then everybody else was struggling to keep up.

I think also in a social sense, he tended to favor the students who were somewhat more advanced, more sophisticated, and perhaps, perhaps appeared to be more dedicated. And I don't think he made a great effort to conceal his enthusiasm for those students.

MR. BROWN: Was he quite a sociable person to those people that he --

MR. KAY: Well, he was in a European sense, yes. I mean, he ran -- there was an annual picnic, as he called it, at his home in the last, closing days of the school every year. And he would invite the advanced painters to come.

Here's an example. I mean, he always had the third- and fourth-year students to those parties. When we were in our second year, Berger and I and Kramer and Aronson were invited to those parties, you know, sort of not with the rest of our class. So there was that kind of preference given for one -- and he made no excuses for it.

As far as other sociability, no. I would see him at those parties. There were occasions where we would have supper together at the Howard Johnson's, which was around the corner from the school at the time -- no. It was -- I don't know. It was a Brigham or a Sinco's or some one of those chains. And there would -- I don't know why he stayed in in the evenings.

I know we stayed in in the evening because we were doing -- Tuesdays and Thursdays we were invited to participate in the printmaking class by Tura Banks [phonetic]. That too was supposed to be open. We were making those prints before we were really eligible for the course, by the school schedule. But we went in anyway, and we stayed -- you finished painting at five -- or whatever the afternoon course was, at five, and then worked from six to nine or something like that, or seven to nine in the print shop.

And we would go to a local place to eat. I seem to remember that Zerbe would join us for those. I don't know why he was in those evenings. But we did see him on rare -- I saw him on very rare occasions outside of the school. But then, you know, my life was sort of totally centered in the school. I think more than in college, in an art school, you start early in the morning and you leave really quite late in the evening. And many of us -- and none of us -- there was no residence at the school at that time; I don't think there is now. So you usually found yourself with the same people all of your waking hours.
We didn't really -- it was later, when I was teaching, that I was invited to his home to participate in various music sessions. I mean, he had gotten interested in playing -- first playing recorder and then flute. When I got back from Europe, we had had some recorder sessions in the late '40s. And he and his --

MR. BROWN: You had picked it up, too?

MR. KAY: Yeah. I had, and David Aronson had. David and I would practice together in Boston, and then occasionally go out to Belmont to Karl's place and play with him there. None of us really were really very well-schooled. I had great trouble reading fluently, and David had the same difficulty. Karl was hardly any better.

His wife Marian, I think, played keyboard instruments, piano and so on, and I think was much better at that. My wife Frieda had studied piano for a while. So actually, we were really the case of the blind leading the blind with this stuff.

But he got -- Karl Zerbe got very interested. I mean, he used to play with neighborhood groups and so on, and eventually got a flute from Hanes Company and encouraged us to do the same. So when I got back in 1951, I bought a Hanes flute. I began to take some instruction in flute, which improved my playing considerably. And we used to go out to Belmont occasionally, not very frequently, to play.

MR. BROWN: He was a European? There was always a certain [inaudible]?

MR. KAY: Well, there was a certain -- I always felt -- and this is just my personal response -- I always felt that certain -- not a withdrawn or quiet personality, but rather a kind of -- how would I put it? -- a kind of transparent barrier. He had a kind of wit and occasionally sarcasm that passed for a kind of sophisticated comment, but really aspired to a kind of wittiness and brilliance, I think, that was rather foreign to me and to my background. And I really never felt that he was a man who would expose his own vulnerabilities or his own anxieties to anyone else.

I think he kept a kind of distance by means of a certain urbane cleverness, really, conversationally, I'm talking about. And I don't really feel that there was the kind of mentor relationship that I have observed sometime in the university when I later left the Museum School, and which I've heard about from other painters in their relationship to their former teachers, you know. I don't think he -- I think there was more brilliance than warmth in the personal relationship.

There was also very, very little advice in general to the class about professional advancement. That was almost regarded as in bad taste, you know, that if you were concerned about, well, when you leave school, how are you going to survive as a person in a field which everybody knew was a non-utilitarian field and which was really quite competitive -- I never heard any advice from him about how to go about approaching a gallery to have your work shown there, or even what happens when you do show in a gallery, that there is such a thing as a commission, and what the obligations of the dealer might be.

Now, he was really very well placed. He was showing in the Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery, which was a prime gallery in New York. He may have talked about all of this to David Aronson, for example, or to Jason Berger. I don't know. But he never spoke to the class as a whole about these problems, and --

MR. BROWN: When you were a teacher?

MR. KAY: No. And he never spoke to me personally about these problems. So I don't know that that's a great deficiency, but it's a difference. I mean, today I think there is a lot more discussion in university departments or even in art schools between the teacher and the students and the younger colleagues about problems of survival in the field, you know.

At that time, it is fair to say there were far fewer galleries. There were practically no granting institutions. There was, of course, a Guggenheim, a Ward, and perhaps a Tiffany by the time I left the school. But there was nothing like the amount of state, you know, art councils and things like that. So there was no discussion of those opportunities.

MR. BROWN: How was it when you began in September '51 and you came to teach? Was it a change or was it fairly smooth from being a student to being a teacher?

MR. KAY: Well, you see, I had already been teaching before. One of the reasons that I left so late for Europe in 1950 was that I had been retained for a year before that, and I was teaching -- in 1949 I had, I think, as I remember it, responsibility for the entire first-year painting class. So I had been already -- and I had taught the summer sessions in Pittsfield with Mitchell Sipora and Kokoschka, although I did very little teaching when Kokoschka was there. But actually, I had to keep classes and students with Mitchell.

MR. BROWN: There was really no --

MR. KAY: It wasn't a change. And I had taught at the museum with Harold Rotenberg. So, no, I was precociously experienced in working with students by that time. I'm not sure it was a very good thing for either me or the students. But on the surface it looked very good. Everybody was very pleased with my work, I understand. No problem about renewal or anything like that.

So, no, there was no difficulty in fitting in to the teaching program. The only difficulty was, you know, we had agonized in Europe about whether we ought to come back for this offer that was made to me. I still had a year to run on my fellowship when I got -- when I was asked if I wanted to come back to teach. They said, you know, "We'll give you the money. You can go summers," or something like that.

We really didn't know what the right thing was to do. And there, too, you see, somebody -- if a student of mine had asked me in similar circumstances what to do, I would have been very happy to either sit down or write long letters back and forth and tell him what I thought about the gains and the losses in taking on such a situation. I didn't get any advice from Zerbe in this regard.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Well, it was he who wanted you back at the --

MR. KAY: Clearly. He and Russell Smith.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Who was the director of the school at the time. But I got a very brief telegram from Russell asking me to come back. I had a rather long letter from David Aronson, telling me that this was in the works and that, you know, I'd better start thinking about whether I wanted to do it or not. Frieda and I talked about it and so on, and eventually came down on the side of prudent choice.

I think it was a mistake. I think I should have stayed the second year, because we had spent the first year primarily traveling and looking at collections, with the idea that we would then rent a place and settle down and I could work for a year. Well, that year never occurred. I came back. I had been too involved in questions of whether this was the right thing to do to ever -- and to inexperienced to ever even ask what the salary might be when I got back there.

I was absolutely stunned when Russell Smith handed me my program and a statement that my first year's salary would be $1670 for the year for teaching four days a week or something like that. Now, you know, that's 1951, and I think even major salaries were -- I think I had heard from either Karl or from David that Karl's salary at the time was something like $5000 a year. So that gives you an idea. But still.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: I remember we bought an automobile, I think that year or -- no, the next year. And we spent exactly the amount of money that I was making for the year on that car. So that gives you an idea. Today if you -- we bought a Plymouth, stripped-down sedan. I suppose a car like that today would cost in the neighborhood of $15,000 a year. So in a sense, I imagine that, you know, you wouldn't hire an assistant professor today in any college department for $15,000 a year, let alone somebody that you had taken away from a fellowship because

you thought he'd be good.

Any case, the financial thing was a very troublesome one when I got back, and I was obliged to take on evening classes at the local YMHA in Roxbury to supplement my income, and to do anything else -- work in a frame shop -- to sort of make ends meet. And I was, you know, very lucky that I could get the opportunities to pick up a little extra income.

MR. BROWN: But it was fairly fragmented or the stresses at that time.

MR. KAY: Yeah. Oh, yeah. It was -- that year I think, for me, was probably the worst year I've ever experienced professionally and personally. I mean, it was just a time of very great worry and stress. However, it's my impression that this is the case for just about everyone when he leaves an art school. The first year or two when one leaves the institution and -- well, for example, when I got back from Europe, I came around the school and saw various people, and I said, "Well, I'm back." And they said, "Oh, were you away?" [Laughs.]

I mean, suddenly you realize that you might have been the brilliant student in the classes and getting the attention of whoever was grading the class, you know, earning the scholarships and getting the fellowships. Suddenly, then, nobody knows you or cares about you, you know. You realize that you are very much alone in the world, and you've got to face the rest of your life this way. It's a very shocking -- to me it was a very shocking realization that sort of crept up on you, you know. It seemed to get worse and worse as the year went by. You realize, where is all of this going to end?

Gradually, you realize, though, that people are paying attention. You can show a few pictures here or there. Sometimes you get a line in the newspaper about it. Perhaps somebody even buys a picture after a while. And all of these little, very little, insignificant things -- they'd be very insignificant, I think, to a chemist or an historian or something like that, but they add up to a great deal for somebody who is in the arts.

You know, you eventually either get out of it or you stay with it long enough to make a place, a little place, for yourself and to go on from there.

MR. BROWN: You were beginning to be shown in exhibitions at about this time?

MR. KAY: The opportunities were definitely there. Mirski -- Boris Mirski Gallery was showing young Boston painters. My name was on his roster, and I did show there. I didn't have -- the problem, really, for me at the time was that I had practically no time to paint. And so the possibility was there, but I didn't really have the work to do the job that I wanted to do.

Gradually, I began -- you know, and it wasn't even a question of just turning work out. This was a time where a person begins to think about what sort of picture he wants to paint. You've got all of this equipment. I feel that we were well educated at the Museum School at the time and were most of us -- even the worst of us was a pretty competent draftsman, thanks to the system and thanks to the curriculum. And we sort of knew where the ballpark was as far as application of paint and technical things were concerned.

What we hadn't really thought about very much was, what kind of picture -- what do we want our pictures to look like? Do we want to make landscapes? Do we want to make abstractions? Do we want to make still lifes? Do we want to be portrait painters? These are things that you only find out when you try them, fail at one, and try another one. One door opens, another door closes, and so on. It takes time.

MR. BROWN: You had not really had this time to reflect before.

MR. KAY: Correct. Oh, no, because in the school you're really solving the problems that are put in front of you as well as you can and learning as much as you can from them.

MR. BROWN: And in your first year back, you continued to be robbed of time to --
MR. KAY: Well, I wouldn't say robbed. I mean, I gave up the time willingly. Nobody had a gun to my head. And in fact, it was regarded as a great privilege. This was something -- this was a position that many other people wanted. You know, you have a school which graduates -- I don't know how many dozen painters every year. And one position opens up on the faculty there. Probably easily one could have listed 25-30-50-100 people that would have been very happy to step into it.

So, you know, I'd never thought I was robbed in any sense. I just thought, perhaps I made a choice that I -- well, I've since as a teacher myself, advised my best students not to go into teaching, at least right away. Wait awhile. Suffer as best you can. Drive a taxi, make frames, work as a carpenter, anything, paint at night. But stay out of teaching, at least until you have a group of -- you've sort of started a group of paintings that you believe are your own, are not just problem pictures.

Then if you're good and if you can get shown, there's a very good chance that perhaps some place will ask you to teach on the strength of the kind of painting that you do and that you then have your own reputation and can, to some extent, negotiate with the institution on a footing that is somehow dignified. And, you know, very few people have taken my advice in this regard. And I've written a great many recommendations for students of mine to get positions, and I can say that a lot of art departments in the country, from all over the country, are staffed by people who have gone through my classes and for whom I have written letters of recommendation that evidently have had some use.

But I didn't think in my situation -- I think I stepped into it rather too quickly. And I was probably teaching very -- I had a retentive attitude, and I probably was communicating pretty much what Karl Zerbe had communicated to me. So I was sort of secondhand Zerbe that I was teaching.

MR. BROWN: Whereas if you had had that extra year in Europe, you could have begun this, on your own development of your own painting.

MR. KAY: Exactly. Which is what the purpose -- right. The purpose of that fellowship, I think, is very much to provide that kind of interval between the protection of a school program and the jungle that real life is, really, for a painter.

By not taking that second year, I think I made a mistake. I hope it didn't turn out to be an irretrievable one. But it reflected a general feeling. I have colleagues today who still feel this way, who advise younger painters, take a job teaching. It has many advantages. For the amount of time that you put in, you get more compensation than you would if you took a job in a factory or something like that. Generally speaking, it's ostensibly part-time, usually something on the order of 18 hours a week, three days a week. And the rest of the time, presumably, is yours to work in the studio.
This may work for somebody teaching English literature that way. But it doesn't really work out that way in the places that I've taught. You find that those three periods a week that you teach are your time with the students. But then there is a good deal of time required, if you do your job conscientiously, in faculty meetings, making reports, paperwork, and the rest of it. And you can very easily put in five days a week on a teaching job if you're on a tenure track position in a university.

Especially if you're any good at all at communicating with other people, you wind up on all-university committees, Senate councils, things like that, formulating constitutions for the governance of the university, stuff like that. It's very easy to drift into it. And so --

MR. BROWN: It has a certain beguiling quality in itself, doesn't it?

MR. KAY: It does indeed. It certainly has. For some people that I know, the respectability of an academic position and an academic career is very much there. I think in the American culture, the respect that's given an imminent professor is perhaps greater than the respect that might be given or withheld to an aspiring artist of one sort or another. I think the general middleclass public is a lot more comfortable with an academic person than with a Bohemian, or an artist, whom they regard as potentially being Bohemian.

And if the artist himself begins to accept some of those standards, he can find himself very attracted to what seemed to be honorific situations such as being elected by his colleagues to represent them in a faculty council of some sort, you know. This goes on all the time. I think the really strong people in the department resist those things.

There's also, you know, a great problem in the fact that starting in the '50s, in America, the education of the studio artist began to move from the art schools to the universities. I think that's a movement that nobody has written about, but I think it's tremendously important. Even though, to bring my own little story up to date, I stayed at the Museum School until 1956. Karl Zerbe had moved on, upset, I think, with the lack of warmth at the Boston Museum and the feeling that he was underappreciated here in Boston.

MR. BROWN: He'd never been really collected to any degree.

MR. KAY: Neither collected as an artist nor cultivated socially by these people. And he said that to me. I have a letter from him I can show you, where he congratulates me on my going off to BU and saying that he thinks that this will have a beneficial effect on my work because he speaks -- and he says something about, "and I speak from personal experience in this regard." He had told me on a couple of occasions, you know, that he had never ever been invited to the house of any of these people on the board of trustees at the museum, you know, and that he felt that their social circle excluded him.

So he was, I think, glad to hear of an offer elsewhere. He left for Tallahassee saying he was going only for one year to fill in a sabbatical -- for somebody else's sabbatical. But he never came back. And I think there were people here who knew he wasn't going to come back.

I left, you know, only a year or two after that, in '56. And I found -- and David had left the year before, in '55. He'd been asked to go into Boston University and start an art department. They had a couple of art courses, commercial art, mostly. He was invited to come in and set up a department there, which, to be very brief about it, I think he did by trying to set up a replica of the Museum School program there as he had experienced it, both as a student as an important faculty member at the end.

So what we tried -- then the very next year he asked me and Conger Metcalf to join him in that department, along with Karl Fortess. So there were four of us there in 1956.

The problem of trying to find the same number of hours in the studio for the students, of keeping their schedule clear of distractions as we saw them, distractions in the general studies area, was immense, and eventually turned out to be impossible. What we found we could do was to include in the university program the equivalent of about three years of the art school program, in terms of hours, in terms of experience in the studio.

This could be accomplished only by sort of struggling every year to pour five quarts of cream into a gallon jug. You know, you just -- the hours that we put onto the students were very, very heavy.

MR. BROWN: You mean that you required of them?

MR. KAY: That we required of them. We gave them very few options, actually. It was a very directive program in regard to studio hours.

Whether it was successful or not, I don't know. History will have to judge. A similar situation would be encountered in practically every university art department that I've ever visited. And it varied only in whether or not the faculty was willing to go along with the university system, or was willing to try in some way to modify it. By and large, I think the change in the education of the artist was absolutely immense from 1950 on. There was no more a place in the country, or there were very few places in the country, where you could get the kind of studio education that one got routinely from 1900 to 1950 in this country or in Europe.

MR. BROWN: Even as they say the MFA after you left? Because that did continue.

MR. KAY: Well, it changed a very great deal. And I don't really want to comment on it.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: The standards changed. The program changed a great deal. It became -- well, I will comment on it. It became very permissive, in my view. It embraced a great many attitudes and areas that had not been part of the school program before -- construction and so on. It became cutting-edge or au current, you could say. Another way -- another attitude towards the same thing would be that it became trendy. I mean, it just depends on where you stand on these things.

At the same time, there was in my view, anyhow, a general neglect of certain disciplines which had obtained before in the program. I never saw drawing come out of a program that was anything like the drawing that had been there before.

It looked a lot more exciting. It looked a lot more modern. It looked a lot more professional.

[END CASSETTE 4 SIDE A.]

MR. BROWN: -- MFA School's teacher in 1956 -- there was a small faculty, I guess?

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: You talked a good deal about Zerbe, who leaves for Florida State University in the early '50s.

MR. KAY: Right. Well, the other people who were teaching painting -- actually, when Zerbe was there, it was David Aronson, who was his first assistant, who I think had begun to teach back in the probably '40s, right during the war or after the war.

MR. BROWN: But well before you?

MR. KAY: Well before I did.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: He was teaching second-year painting at the time.

MR. BROWN: Was his own painting developing pretty well?

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah. He had had -- well, David was extraordinary. He began with great fluency in the high school classes, came to the Museum School, and right away in the first year established himself as an extraordinary student, and by the middle of the second year, was working as much, I think, at home in his own studio as he was in school. And Zerbe was quite liberal in this regard. If he saw somebody had something going, some idea going, working outside the school, he made no problem about that.

David came in with a couple of paintings that all of us were astounded by. He had a little panel out -- must have been about 6 inches high by 15 inches or 20 inches wide of some people standing on the sidewalk waiting for a bus or something like that -- very beautifully handled, technically, and also rather extraordinary in the characterization, rather satirical, perhaps influenced strongly by Jack Levine.

MR. BROWN: Whose work was well known, too?

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah. We all knew Levine's work and Bloom's work.

MR. BROWN: It was exhibited from time to time?

MR. KAY: It was, in Boston, yeah. But these things were very beautifully glazed and brilliant execution, for anybody, let alone a second-year student.

MR. BROWN: You said they were on panels. What medium?

MR. KAY: This was oil painting on panel. He also -- I think at the end of the summer of the first year, he brought in a portrait that he had done when he was a counselor at some summer camp, which looked, you know, highly professional. This was after a year of first-year painting when we had all just done three technical problems, one abstract painting and a pure-form painting and a form in space still life. And then he came back with this finished portrait head that looked as if it could have gone into the museum.

I think it was at that time that he first attracted the attention of Boris Mirski. I think Boris was acquainted with his work. And this was at the beginning of David's second year in art school.

He worked out a little panel which later on he called, I think, *The Paradox* [1942]. This was in his second year. It was a small panel, perhaps 12 inches by 15 inches high, of some people sitting in an interior with this amazing assemblage of small objects, watch parts, little watches, watch springs, and so on, all around the people, and again, done like a little Flemish painting, in a way, tremendously like jewel-like quality in the execution of the picture. And the heads were sort of almost caricature. It was sort of related in a way to Hieronymus Bosch, you might say, although I don't know if David was interested in or influenced by Bosch at the time.

The whole thing was very beautifully executed. I don't know where that painting is, probably in some museum or in somebody's private collection.

MR. BROWN: Now, was he in your year or --

MR. KAY: He was in my -- he entered the school at the same time I did. We were in the high school classes together, and we entered as freshmen together, and we went through our first two years together. Then I went off. And I think in the interim, when I was away during those three years, I don't know just which year, David was represented in a show, I think, called *Nine American Painters* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. So he really -- and he was showing, I believe, with Nuevo Gallery in New York at that time.

So he made his -- and he would have been at that time 19 years old, or maybe 20. He's a year or maybe even two years older than I. And he during the war, I think, made a strong reputation for himself in Boston and in New York, and had begun, I think, to teach at the Museum School.

MR. BROWN: Did you become something of a friend of his during those years?

MR. KAY: Well, we were close friends in high school. Not as -- I didn't see as much of him as I saw of Jason Berger and Jack Kramer because David lived in Dorchester and the other two in Roxbury, where I lived. But we still saw each other, you know, a great deal in high school, and we were part of the little group that functioned in the Museum School in our first two years. So, yeah, we saw -- and he had made a sort of break with his family, I think in his second year at the Museum School, and had moved into a studio at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street.

MR. BROWN: In Boston?

MR. KAY: In Boston. And had sort of set himself up to work there. I think it was in his second year. I could be

wrong about that, the exact timing. But he was the first one of us who had a studio away from home. He was certainly the first one of us to really score any kind of professional success in the galleries. He was the first one of us to begin to teach in the Museum School.

So when I got back in '46, he was already faculty and I think at the same time, had finished up his fifth year, and had been, I think, awarded a fellowship to travel in Europe, but postponed taking it for a while.

There was only David and Karl and myself in the painting department for those few years. Dick Boyce was -- well, there was a whole group of new students in '46 that I encountered when I got back out of the army, among them Arthur Polonsky, Mike Toloushevski [phonetic], Barbara Swan, Dick Boyce, Jack Wolf. These were all third-year students, or fourth-year students, I think -- fourth-year students -- when I got back to begin the middle of my third year at the Museum School.

MR. BROWN: So these people you got fairly close to?

MR. KAY: Yes, because they too -- they were on the top of their class. They were highly recommended. Their work recommended them. They were obviously very, very able and very strong painters. And so we saw them socially, to varying degrees. I saw a good deal of Dick Boyce. Dick and Jason became very friendly. Dick was older than I and was married and was living in the West End -- yeah, I guess the back of Beacon Hill on Grove Street, I think it was.

MR. BROWN: What was his work like?

MR. KAY: Well, Dick sort of took on very quickly certain aspects of the Boston School, rather floridly decorated expressionism, I would say. He loved paisley shawls. And it had some of that color sonority and the intricacy of shape and a certain calligraphic quality that he was very good at. He wasn't yet doing sculpture. He was mostly interested in painting. I believe he functioned as an assistant in some of the classes. I'm not quite sure about that.

But as we got through the '40s and into the '50s, that was about the size of the painting faculty. When Zerbe left, Gardner Cox came onboard and filled in for a year or two years as departmental chairman of the painting courses.

MR. BROWN: How did that work out?

MR. KAY: Gardner was a very intelligent gentleman, and really exemplified a kind of New England painter that I had not met before. And I respected him a great deal. He was always a cordial man. He refused to get drawn into the hostilities and the politics of the Museum School. There had been, of course, before this, as I think I told you, you know, a longstanding sort of competition, to put it gently, between Zerbe and many of the other faculty members, principally headed up by Tura Banks, who was the drawing teacher and taught anatomy, drawing, and printmaking.

MR. BROWN: He and Zerbe did not get along very well?

MR. KAY: I think you could say that in a certain regard. I think they each competed very strongly for resources, for scholarships, and prizes for their own favorite students. And eventually, I think that got to be a very distracting thing and was perhaps a -- not perhaps; I'm sure -- a contributive factor to Zerbe's leaving the school.

He had gotten his -- Zerbe was fast enough and intelligent enough to pretty much get his own way through most of the meetings. I mean, if you put a student up for a prize, the student usually -- he usually had spoken to enough people and lobbied for it enough so that he got the votes to get the prizes. And it was brought up the way he arranged it.

Eventually, though, enough people in the other departments sort of lined up against him. There was Joe Sharak in jewelry and silversmithing; Norman Arsenault in ceramics; and Tura Banks in printmaking; and Allen in sculpture.

MR. BROWN: Fred Allen?

MR. KAY: Fred Allen. And the competition was really between -- usually between sculpture students and painting students for the big prizes to travel to Europe. Tura was sort of backing often anybody who was against Zerbe's choice. The ceramics and jewelry people sort of stayed out of it for a long time. But eventually, the last year that I participated in one of these meetings -- and I don't think I'm really talking out of turn here, though they were just faculty meetings and supposedly not for public -- but I think towards the end, more and more votes were going with Banks, and Zerbe was actually turned down for his top choices in some of the painting prizes, traveling fellowships.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Banks was drawing?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And he would have had students -- was the curriculum by then four years or still five years?

MR. KAY: Well, it was always four years with an optional fifth year. And the fifth-year students were allowed to compete for the traveling scholarships.

MR. BROWN: Banks would have had certain students through four to five years?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: In drawing?

MR. KAY: In drawing or printmaking. There were some students who majored in printmaking, though everybody had had the basic first year. Then you went off and majored in painting or sculpture.

MR. BROWN: What was Banks like? You weren't quite in his immediate department. But what was he like as a colleague, as you recall?

MR. KAY: Well, I didn't know him really as a colleague. I knew him as a teacher. He was a very, very fluent draftsman who was probably one of Yakovlevs best students. He did demonstrations --

MR. BROWN: That was his predecessor, right?

MR. KAY: Yes. And he did demonstrations like Yakovlev, big conte drawings that were rubbed and erased out. He was a dazzling, dazzling draftsman in terms of being able to make an anatomy drawing or a big figure in space that really seemed extremely finished in a very short time.

He was a critic who always came through the drawing classes, as Zerbe came through the painting classes, emphasizing volume and space and perspective and working the stroke with the form so that it would emphasize these spatial notions.

And his own work was strangely less impressive than the work he did in his crits. You know, he would make a little drawing on your own drawing. You'd have a page where you were drawing from the model. Then he would just take a corner of that page and make quickly a diagram of what he thought you were missing or what he thought you might emphasize. And the damn thing was always spectacular. It was amazing. It was sort of single-mindedly driven into the space.

One, it didn't matter what he worked with. He could work with your pencil or a conte crayon, whatever you were working with. He would just take it from you and make a little drawing on the side, and it was a gem all the time. I think he could have made you a drawing -- take off his shoe and make a drawing with a dirty shoe on a piece of paper and it would look terrific.

He was just a great improviser and critic when he was, you know, making a point for you. However, when he made his own lithographs or etchings, they seemed rather labored to me. And he never had the exhibition exposure that Zerbe had, or -- in fact, I never saw his work anywhere in galleries. I don't really think he had a public career in that sense.

And he also was a very good technician, as far as showing people how -- graphic -- printmaking techniques. He could etch a plate; he could work up, ink up a stone. He knew how to etch the stone. He really was in command of all of the printmaking techniques that he taught. You know, it wasn't just a question of teaching printmaking as either just making a drawing on a stone and letting somebody else print it -- you printed your own stuff -- nor was it the kind of exotic cookery that became so popular later on in the decade out of Yale, where, you know, a lot of razzle-dazzle textures and everything else out of Hater and Pettadee became very widely disseminated through the printmaking community.

It was really in line with the printmaking of the '30s, you know, the kind of prints that Benton or Curry or Wood would have made, technically speaking, not so much expressively speaking, but technically like that -- sort of straightforward lithograph etchings and so on. And he had a real appreciation, I think, of all kinds of drawings. I mean, he -- I remember his showing van Gogh drawings to people, Degas drawings to people, as examples of good draftsmanship.

His crits were, you know, as I say, very much backed up by his own fluency as a draftsman. So he was on the spot. I never saw Allen's sculpture anywhere.

MR. BROWN: But he really wasn't competitive at the school?

MR. KAY: No.

MR. BROWN: What was he like as a person?

MR. KAY: He looked like something like James Montgomery Flagg's *Uncle Sam Wants You* poster. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: Oh, really?

MR. KAY: He was rather handsome, older, graying man, rather slim. And I think I did see one little torso in the Boston Museum that he had made. I don't know if it was a carving or a cast, female nude, truncated torso. I never knew what his sculpture was like, and I never really was enthusiastic about any of the sculpture that I saw in the sculpture department. The other sculptors there were Peter Abodi and I think Betty Smith, if I have the name right. There was a woman there, Elizabeth Smith, I think. And they -- I don't know how you would describe the work. It's sort of like Mistrovik or very stylish kind of things.

MR. BROWN: Figurative things?

MR. KAY: Oh, yes, all figurative things. But not of great interest to most of us who were painting students. We were required to take one course in sculpture. We took it and got out of it as soon as we could. The odd thing is, though, that everybody -- not everybody, but quite -- Jack Kramer really showed a great potential for sculpture. He did a few wood carvings that looked awfully good. David's were very elegant, as all of his work was. Jason later studied with Zadkine in Europe and did some sculpture.

David turned almost away from painting for a while completely and did an awful lot of sculpture and is still doing a great deal of sculpture, though he now paints considerably again as well. But I would say he's better known as a sculpture than as a painter. But he didn't really learn that at the school. He sort of went through one or two courses, but his development as a sculptor, I think, didn't take place until quite a bit later when he was out of school. And I've never been interested in sculpture.

MR. BROWN: Now, when you were on staff on the junior faculty and you had meetings, I guess, now and then.

MR. KAY: Yeah. Very rarely, very rarely.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: That was one of the great shocks to me when I got to the university, how frequent the meetings were and how incessant they were. And you know, there was none -- practically none of that at the Museum School. It was pretty much run in the department by Zerbe, without very much consultation, a little bit of briefing from time to time about what he had in mind for a vote in the awarding of scholarships or something like that. But really, programmatically very few changes.

We'd see each other at lunch hour. We generally had a brown-bag lunch in Zerbe's office. And that was about it.

I imagine there were meetings between Russell Smith and the various department heads, Zerbe, Banks, Arsenault, and Sharak. I'd have to guess because I was never present at them. And then towards the end, Smith called some faculty meetings, when around in 1950, I think, 1953 and 1954, there was a real threat to the school with the possibility that the school would be -- well, my understanding was that we were running a deficit of, I don't know, $15,000 or $50,000, some ridiculous figure. We were told that if we didn't, you know, get on top of that and clean it up, the school was going to be in great trouble and that we had to do something.

It was around that time that Smith brought in the proposal to start a program in collaboration with Tufts for a degree to be awarded jointly by Museum School and Tufts to students who had taken the equivalent of about three years of the Museum School program and about a year of general studies courses in art history and art education in Tufts.

MR. BROWN: The idea was to produce people who would be ready to teach?

MR. KAY: Presumably, I guess, a bachelor of science in education was what was awarded.

MR. BROWN: What did you have to do with that?

MR. KAY: I didn't. I didn't think it was a very good idea. I wasn't in favor of it. Nobody asked me whether I was or not. And I didn't participate in the program, though some friends of mine did. Frank Rogers did; Bernard Chaet did, and took their degrees there. Bernard had been in the Museum School, I think, as of the time that I left from the school to go to the army. That would have been in '43. He must have come in in '44. And he finished up and took the Tufts program, winding up with a degree, and I think that was a very good and useful thing for him because Yale asked Zerbe -- I believe Josef Albers at Yale asked Zerbe for a recommendation for someone who could teach painting technical courses, technique. Zerbe sent Chaet up there. He had the degree, and that made him more attractive to Yale, I think possibly.

MR. BROWN: Being a university degree.

MR. KAY: Yeah. I think they might not have taken anybody -- taken him if he hadn't the degree.

MR. BROWN: But you don't think -- what about Russell Smith? He's simply an administrator?

MR. KAY: Russell was Harvard trained, I think as an architect. Came out of -- I think came out of the School of Design at Harvard. I'm not sure. I know he went to Harvard and I know he was trained as an architect, and he was quite a young man when I came into the school as a freshman student. He had, I think, made some archeological drawings in Central America, either Mexico or somewhere down there, Mayan excavations. He taught art history in the schools. There was an obligatory art history course, which we took in our first and second years. It was a weekly lecture, survey of art history in the first year. And in the second year you had three research papers to do. You picked three topics.

MR. BROWN: Were these fairly minor aspects of your schooling?

MR. KAY: They took relatively little time. It was only, I think, one or two hours a week in the freshman year, and those three papers in the sophomore year. I wouldn't call it minor. I find, first of all, that it -- you know, without that course, there would have been lots of areas of Western European painting that I wouldn't have known anything about. I didn't enjoy the course. It was rather dull. It was taught with black and white slides from the university print series.

Nevertheless, I think it was a very important contribution to my education. I'd hate to have left without it. And I found when I went out of the school that I was surprisingly more knowledgeable about traditional painters in Europe. For example, when we got to Skowhegan -- I taught at Skowhegan summers. And they would play a kind of game. The faculty would put slides up on the screen and ask students, you know, if they could identify who the painter was. And I was amazed, you know, that there were students who didn't know a Bronzino when they saw it or a Pontormo when they saw it or, you know, de la Tour when they saw it. They had never heard of some of those painters.

So, no, I wouldn't call it -- I would call it a highly important course. I think it could have been made more interesting. But that's always a problem for art students. In the university we used to require students to take an art history course given by the art history department.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And there were always complaints from the students that they were bored, that they didn't like the comments that their lecturer made, and so on. That they really didn't see the importance of such a course. We continued to demand that they take it, however, because to send people out illiterate, really not knowledgeable about their antecedents is, I think, a terrible sin. However, I think there are very few art schools in the country that require it anymore -- art departments, I should say, in the university departments.

There are some university departments which are essentially run by the art historians. In some places, the art department had begun as an art history department and only added the studio component later on in the '50s. And the studio instructors were always regarded as inferior beings. They frequently were ineligible for tenure by the department politics. It was sort of a plantation rule, you know. There were the tenured faculty who were art historians, and there were the studio slaves.

That's changed, I think, even in places like Wellesley, which maintained this tradition for decades and decades and decades in the most shameful manner around here. There were more good painters in the Boston area who taught studio courses in Wellesley. You could go, and practically anybody of any consequence in the Boston area, in terms of their --

MR. BROWN: Taught there at one time or another.

MR. KAY: Taught there at one time or another, and never got permanent appointments.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And were dumped after three or four years and then replaced by somebody else, while the art historians stood there forever. I mean, it was plain, ordinary disgraceful. They finally changed that maybe 10-15 years ago. Dick Boyce taught there, I think, Jason Berger taught there, Joe Ablo taught there, Sid Hurwitz taught there. I mean all kinds of very good people, and none of them were kept.

MR. BROWN: Right. It went back even into the 1920s.

MR. KAY: Probably. Probably.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Well, now, Russell Smith -- I know we wound up there -- as an administrator, as a person, I mean, the courses that [inaudible], you said. Was he a fairly low-keyed person to work with?

MR. KAY: He was. I think he accepted the fact that Zerbe was a far more influential name in the art scene in Boston and elsewhere. And I think in a certain sense Karl really influenced the direction of the school for many, many years. I don't mean to say that Russell was just a clerk or anything like that. But he certainly did not, in any way that I know of, interfere with the operation of the painting department.

He had to be the intermediary -- he was like a dean -- the intermediary between the museum trustees and the school faculty. And I think he did about as well in that capacity as could be done in those days, given the budget he was allowed. He didn't really expand the influence of the school, nor did he demand that the school sort of show itself in the public press and so on. He didn't do very much about public relations or anything like that. I think that was a decent thing.

But clearly, when new administration came in and he -- and other people ran the school, the size of the administration enlarged enormously. I mean, they had dean of students, they had development people, they had all kinds of administrative help. In the days that I was associated with the school, there was Russell Smith as the director. Amy Gibson was the executive manager -- I forgot what she was called; I think manager. She kept the books and the grades and everything else, with one secretary in her office. Russell had one secretary, Ginny Hickey, for many years. And that was the school administration, period. Four people, two of them being secretaries.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And of course, that changed completely with the school as it turned out after '56.

MR. BROWN: Continuing the interviews. This is March 14, 1996. You wanted to say a little bit more about Tura Banks, one of your older colleagues at the Museum School, and particularly his teaching of anatomy, which I think you said was rather important and impressive.

MR. KAY: It certainly was. Tura was the principal drawing teacher during the time that I was at the school, both as a student and as a faculty member. And I remember very well his drawing criticisms, where he'd go from student to student, easel to easel, and take whatever you were working with, conte crayon, pencil, pen, it didn't matter what -- and make his point on the margin of your drawing. He would never draw over your work.

But along the side of the drawing, he would begin by saying, "Well, what I'd like to see is a little bit more of the sense of the space," you know. And then he would draw that same arm that you had struggled with for perhaps two-and-a-half hours during the whole morning. In really literally less than three minutes he would have that thing on the page, and the thing would be sort of reaching back into the space here.

It was an amazing performance. Just a few lines, a little bit of modeling, a little bit of directional cross-hatching, and the things would sort of sit in space, in a model's space. Then he would tell you how he did it. He would say, "Well, you know, you see that forearm as a cone going into space." And he'd draw a cone right next to the arm that he had made. Then he'd show you, "Well, very simply, the cone -- the light would strike it in such a way, and it would model underneath in such a way." And he'd show you the direction of the strokes.

Then you realized that, with all of your fiddling around with the light and dark at the bottom of the arm, you had neglected to think about this as a cone, and that if it had been a cone, it would have directionally modeled, turned in a certain relationship to your eye. And if you express that, boom. It goes right into the picture space. He would do this, you know, with anything. There were other kinds of criticisms. He would suggest that you made greater use, perhaps, of the variety of touches that you could get from a given pencil or a conte crayon or something like that.
The kind of suggestions that he made were usually based on the sort of modeling that you could see in almost all good drawing. And he would point that out, that you would see this kind of modeling in a Seniorella. You would see it in a Piero della Francesca. You would see it in a Vincent van Gogh. You would see it in a

Rembrandt. And he would bring in examples, reproductions from the museum library of reproductions and tack them up on the drawing studio wall.

And in other words, you got the sense that you were being given information that was part of a very, very long line of Western art that gave a kind of grammar, a kind of syntax, if you want, to the graphic performance in Western art, starting, perhaps, with Giotto, somebody like that.

Tura was very, very good at connecting the illusionistic qualities, the mimetic quality of drawings of many, many different periods, sort of getting it to look past the handwriting, past the style, and at the volume and space representation.

Of course, you know, different people received this information -- different students received this information in different ways, and they applied it in different ways. Some people just imitated certain modern masters or old masters. Others sort of found a variant of their own.

MR. BROWN: And you could also, it seems to me -- something you said -- appreciate more perhaps the early studies that you would have had in the school in geometric shapes.

MR. KAY: Exactly. Well, he began us. Before we even saw the figure, he began us drawing these geometric volumes.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: The other very, very useful thing about it, of course, was that it was very much tied to the same principles that were being enunciated in the painting class, so that there was a direct connection between the stroke of the pencil that you might use to designate a dark on a leg, and the stroke of a brush that you might use to designate that same type of dark in the painting class. So that the painting development had as its basis a kind of foundation of drawing, of drawing to express volume and space. And I think the two courses connected very, very well, even if the two instructors weren't always on very good social terms with each other.

MR. BROWN: Do you suppose they had had consulted, conferred about --

MR. KAY: I don't really know. I don't really know. My assumption is that they must have. My assumption is that they must have. But when I was on faculty, I never saw anything like that kind of conscious collaboration. It might very well have taken place in earlier years.

MR. BROWN: Banks came after –

MR. KAY: No. I don't really know what the chronology is. They were both there during my first year in '41. And Zerbe had only been there a year or two at that point, I believe. I don't think that Banks had been there much. You see, Banks had been a student of Yakovlev's and probably a protégé of some sort and might very well have taken over the drawing department when Yakovlev left. And Zerbe, too, arrived after Yakovlev. So I think their arrival at the school was pretty much in the same time frame -- it might have been a year or two difference, but I don't know what that would have been.

Banks also was responsible for the instruction in anatomy. Peter Dubanowitz taught perspective, and Banks always referred to the perspectival studies, too. But in the first year you took perspective, and you took anatomy.

And Banks taught the anatomy course. That was really quite a performance. He would assemble the class; I think it was once a week. There would be a lecture demonstration and then an assignment given. And that was essentially the course. He would be up on a platform with a very large drawing board and a very -- and a roll of brown paper, really craft paper. He would tear off a piece, pin it to the drawing board, which probably -- my recollection is that it must have been about three feet wide by maybe four feet high. And he worked with lecturer's chalk, a sort of large version of ordinary pastels, usually worked with two or three colors -- a dark brown, middle tone, and white. Of course, the paper, the brown wrapping paper supplied a middle tone itself.

Generally -- well, he took us -- the course itself took us through bones, started off with the bones. And with the wearing on of the year, you finished the bones, I think, probably around Christmas. Then you went on to the musculature. And these were mostly superficial muscles; didn't get into circulation, didn't get into neurology, didn't get into organs. But you got the principal large muscle masses of the -- and the individual muscles.

MR. BROWN: Was there considerable discussion of how the things interacted, how the skeleton and --

MR. KAY: Oh, yes.

MR. BROWN: -- for each muscle?

MR. KAY: Yes. Well, each muscle was presented. I mean, there would be a lecture, let's say, on the arm. And each muscle would be worked from the top. He'd start out by drawing the bones on the large drawing board there. So you would have the humerus and the radius and the ulna, and then the bones of the wrist and the hand. He would indicate those as he was talking about the way they articulated and so on. He would make drawings off on the side showing you, "Well, that's the way it would look if it was pronated and that's the way it would look if it was supinated." Had a very heavy Finnish accent, but always very intelligent.

He then would begin with the deepest muscles and in each case give you an idea -- brachialis anticus, or biceps muscle -- what the origin of each muscle was to what bone it attached, and where, and then what the insertion at the other end of the muscle was, so that you knew where it hooked up. And you'd have to learn those points on the skeleton and in connection with each muscle and what they did in a functional way. In other words, how the muscle contracted and brought the bones of the lower arm up towards the shoulder in order to flex the elbow joint, and what muscles operated on the extension of the arm on the other side, the triceps, and when they contracted how they extended the lower arm.

Then he would make drawings of both positions. But the wonderful thing about it was, for the class, that as he drew these things, they seemed to take on an almost instant reality. He would put that biceps in or the triceps in, and suddenly it was there in living flesh. I mean, he had a total command of the necessary gradations to put those things, make those things illusionistically convincing on the paper.

At the end of the demonstration, you know, you would have a complete -- he would add muscle over muscle over muscle. And at the end, you'd have a completely believable human arm reaching out of the paper at you, you know, and sometimes for fun he would then draw a little daisy or something between the thumb and the forefinger. He said, "Well, sometimes we have a little flower at the end of that."

Or when he did the skull, I remember the facial muscles -- he drew a skull first, very rapidly, you know, just sort of laid it in as he was talking about the various masses of the cranium and the mandible. We had already gone through the skull earlier on in the course. And then he would put in, you know, the masseter muscle, the temporal muscle, and so on, until -- and then he'd draw the eyeball in without the lids, and then he said, "And there you have the albicularis oculis," and he would draw that over the lid. Lo and behold, you had a living eye staring out at you.

Then finally, at the end, he would sort of do a kind of glass-like set of strokes at the top, and he said, "Well, of course, some of us don't have so much hair, but" -- and he'd have the hair growing out of this thing, and before you knew it, you had a head that looked like a head and not like an anatomy drawing.

MR. BROWN: And you were taking notes during all of this?

MR. KAY: Yeah. One was supposed to be taking notes. My notes were rather sketchy. Some of us really made a much better job of it. We also were given a set of plates, or we were expected to buy a set of plates, the Richie plates, which were badly reproduced from older engravings by Richie, which are indeed very clear and very good. And each student generally had a set of those. You were expected to go home during that week and study that section so that, you know, when he got through with the muscles of the head, you came back the next week and you were really responsible for knowing their origins, their insertions, and even much more important, how to draw them from different views, three-quarter view, front view, side view, and so on. So presumably, you were supposed to be able to put a head into space from any position at any point on the visual field.

MR. BROWN: So the week following his lecture, you studied, and then you drew? You came to class next and you made drawings or you presented drawings?

MR. KAY: Well, no. It was just assumed you were using that stuff. There was at -- the next week there would be the muscles of the neck, you know, and you had those to take notes on.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: At the end of the term, you knew you were facing a final examination, which would --

MR. BROWN: Which was to draw?

MR. KAY: -- which would consist of a sheet of paper saying, "Draw a figure hanging by his right arm from a trapeze bar. Your horizon line is below his knees. He is three-quarters front. He's hanging with his right arm. His left arm is extended towards you," and so on. "One foot is raised, the other one lowered." And you were to make a drawing indicating all the muscles visible, and then you would make a dot in each muscle and a line going from it indicating -- and then be required to spell out the name of that muscle -- supinator longus, latissimus dorsi, whatever it was.

So you were supposed to know the names of the muscles. And it was none of this business about -- well, if you know it, who cares about the Latin names? Or something like that -- or if you can draw an arm, you don't have to know what the origin of the supinator longus or the deltoid muscle is. They wanted the technical detail, and he wanted the drawing quality, both. You were supposed to be able to do this from memory.

MR. BROWN: Now, were most of the students convinced of the purpose of this? Did he state what the reason for doing this tremendous amount of work was?

MR. KAY: I don't -- there wasn't a great deal of indoctrination along that line. It was just assumed -- everybody assumed that, you want to be a painter, you're supposed to know a name. You want to be able to paint the figure and draw the figure, naturally you should know about the structure of the figure. And there wasn't a great -- in my recollection, there wasn't a great necessity to indicate this. There were no challenges from anybody, "Why do we need any of this?" or "Why are we doing this?" I never heard it, at least not among the people that I went with.

David Aronson, I think, knew all of the material before he got out of high school, actually. And Ralph Rosenthal had suggested to us in our high school classes that we get Dunlap's little book of anatomy diagrams and learn figure anatomy from that.

I mean, it was not uncommon, you see. For example, in high school in the high school classes, there would be occasional lectures on the broader aspects of anatomy, some of the more prominent anatomical features, so that you had some sense of where the major skeletal blocks were. You didn't know, for example, how to draw the pelvis in detail.

MR. BROWN: The ability to draw, even unseen things, but to understand how things worked --

MR. KAY: Exactly.

MR. BROWN: -- was considered fundamental and important?

MR. KAY: Absolutely axiomatic. I mean, nobody challenged that necessity at that time.

MR. BROWN: Do you feel it was that --

MR. KAY: Oh, I certainly do. I think one can make a very strong case for this. This is not to say that simply learning anatomy is going to make you into a fine draftsman, any more than learning grammar is going to make you into a great poet. It's an analogous kind of thing.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: I mean, to know how the body is put together is very useful. But, you know, you can have a perfect --

[END CASSETTE 4 SIDE B.]

MR. BROWN: The anatomy lessons, then, you felt deeply the reasons for, even as students, but certainly later, to know how a form works within itself, even though you're merely going to draw or paint the outward aspect of a form, is essential. And you disagree with people who say you don't really need to know how to draw from natural form, don't you?

MR. KAY: Oh, I would contest that, certainly. I mean, the argument usually isn't with people about whether you draw from natural forms or not. But people -- there are people who work from nature who work from the figure who really don't think anatomy is really a very important -- the formal study of anatomy is not really terribly important to the draftsman. I think it is. And I think it's a very useful study, especially for beginning students.

I rather think that -- I think many draftsmen would say that one learns the anatomy formally in a class and then, through working from nature or from imagination as well, one forgets a great deal of it, in a technical sense. However, there's a sort of memory, I think, of the structural development of the body that gives a kind of bite, a kind of strength to drawing which is probably not easily obtainable in any other way.

The danger, of course -- and it's often cited -- is that when people get tremendously interested in anatomy, they sometimes as draftsmen tend to make that an end instead of a means, and they become over-detailed, over-fussy about the representation of every tendon and every little bump on the body. And the anatomy is not really put at the service of some other aesthetic or expressive necessity.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm, Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: When that happens, of course, you've got a kind of empty virtuosity that is really quite offensive, I

think, to most people. But that, of course, is not any reason not to study anatomy.

And it must be said also that at the Museum School, and then later on at Boston University, the anatomy was always regarded as an auxiliary subject, not a principal subject, a subject that supported the drawing program, that was auxiliary to it the way the study of perspective was, but not an end in itself, and certainly was not given either the time or the emphasis that the drawing course was given when working just from imagination or from models. So this was a secondary tool. And it was considered useful, necessary, even. But it was not an end in itself.

The same -- everything that I've said about the anatomy could be said even more about perspective. Peter Dubanowitz taught that course. That's a course that today I think is dropped from many, many art school curricula. And I think that's too bad also. It's true that it's rather more difficult, I think, to establish a connection between the perspective studies, done with T-square, triangle, and ruler on a mechanical basis -- to connect them directly with drawings that are done from interiors or still lives or the figure. The connection is there, all right. But one has to make a little leap away from the instruments and away from the mechanical applications of the two-point perspectable system that was established in the Renaissance. But it's harder to do. And many faculty people do not see that it is necessary.

Indeed, it can be simplified enough so the general principles are understood, without getting into every -- we used to have to draw spiral staircases and details of various architectural elements -- arches and so on. I don't think that that is absolutely essential. It doesn't hurt, but I don't think that it is the main point, even of a perspective course.

But it is true that many places have dropped the formal study of perspective, and some places reduce it to a few general principles, you know. And everybody seeks a way to communicate that information to some degree, or used to seek a way. Now I think it's dropped into disuse altogether. I do think its disappearance does affect the mimetic ability of draftsmen and students that are coming out of schools today. They simply do not have at their command the kind of authority that one saw in drawings, oh, well, up till around 1950 in this country, both drawings of rather minor artists and the major people as well.

So it's -- you know, the kind of drive that you get in a van Gogh, for example, in a landscape, where every stroke is organized along a very, very well-understood and strong perspectable system, is not something that one sees today in either painting or printmaking or drawing, not very often, anyhow, among younger people, I think.

MR. BROWN: And yet sometimes you do see meticulous attempts at verisimility.

MR. KAY: Yeah, right.

MR. BROWN: I'm sure the underlying structure is missing, right?

MR. KAY: In many cases. Not in all, of course. But I think rather hard to do this without some understanding of the general systems of the Renaissance perspective. So this was sort of under Banks' watchful eye as well, although another instructor actually taught the course.

MR. BROWN: Was Dubanowitz a graduate also? Or had --

MR. KAY: Yeah. He had been a student also of Yakovlev's and was a junior instructor at the time I showed up in '41. By '43 when I left for the army, he also, I guess during the war went elsewhere and wound up, I think, in the Midwest -- I think Cleveland or Cincinnati, I'm not sure -- teaching out there. I think that may be where he came from originally. So I lost track of Peter. I never did see him again after my first two school years.

But he was a quiet and obviously very solid, firm, reserved man who was very, very communicative to students, in a quiet way was able to give them good instruction in perspective, but also in the drawing classes he would come through to give criticisms in the first-year drawing classes, I recollect.

And I should mention also, while I'm talking about Peter, that Conger Metcalf, who is still on the scene here in Boston, was a fifth-year student, I believe, in 1941 when I arrived and was a teaching assistant in the drawing classes and actually was often very, very helpful, at least to me, in particular, as he came through, and was himself doing some very elegant painting at that time, which we could see in the painting classes. I mean, we would sometimes go up into the fifth-year studios and were amazed at the quality of the work, which looked to me at the time -- and still does -- like something that could very well be hanging in a museum.

You know, you come to an art school. You're familiar. You've been in art classes many years, and you're familiar with what art students do. But suddenly, you know, you come in and you see some work that is on a

completely different level. It's a whole quantum leap to go in there and see a figure painting by -- he had a painting called *Queenie* of a sort of burlesque queen. And it was -- it just was a dazzling piece of work from a technical point of view and from a painterly point of view.

John Wilson also, who was at that time, I think, a third-year student or a second-year student had some work up in the life class -- I mean, was working on paintings in the life class. We would sort of sneak through and look at the work. And again, you know, you suddenly saw that -- boy, you were -- one thought, "I'm very close to being in a place where people go through and they come out painting like honest-to-god painters, you know, not like students anymore."

MR. BROWN: So it wasn't daunting to you, but it was --

MR. KAY: No, no. It was tremendously encouraging and stimulating, and you thought, well, you're just going to work very hard and learn all the stuff that these people learned, and you'd come out working on that level, you know. It was, I think, a very realistic appraisal.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: You know, you thought that if they could do it, you should be able to do it. And you'd get at least somewhere near that level in quality. So that was the way the scene was.

I have some slides here, actually, of some of the --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] some of your student work and other later work?

MR. KAY: I think they might give you an idea of what the sequence was.

MR. BROWN: Very good.

MR. KAY: I'll just start this up. The first slide --

MR. BROWN: The first one we're looking at is a drawing.

MR. KAY: -- is a drawing, a pencil drawing done with instruments for a perspective class. What it represents is the projection of a ground plane, which you see down below the picture margin here, projected back perspectively. And this was typical of the kind of exercise that we were expected to do every week as a weekly assignment in the perspective class.

Of great importance is this little section in here where a circle is projected on the ground, on a block that sits on the ground plane. Actually, that progression of the curves in the ellipse really becomes the basis for a great deal of drawing later. If I had to teach only two things in a perspective course, it would be, of course, the reduction in size as equal dimensions go back, like the side of this house and the way you have this convergence of these two lines towards a horizon line, towards a vanishing point on the horizon line.

The other thing that would be probably not something that a person would learn by himself would be the way a circle is projected. It fits into a square, of course, tangent at four points at the center of each side of the square. And then the diagonals indicate where the relationships are between the four sections of the square. In other words, the section nearest you is larger than the one that goes further back. Consequently, the semicircle nearest you is larger than the semicircle that is further from your eye. That's a point that is so often missed by the beginning draftsman. He thinks simply an oval will do the job for the top of a cylinder or a circle going into space, where it actually does not.

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. KAY: This is another such diagram, where you're given requirements such as three walls six feet high, a flight of six steps three feet wide, begins twelve feet back, and the base is three by five feet, the height of the steps six feet --

MR. BROWN: All of these specifications?

MR. KAY: All of these specifications. So presumably, you know, each part of this could be checked out dimensionally.

MR. BROWN: By the instructor?

MR. KAY: By the instructor.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And you could actually know that the doorway is seven feet high or six feet high. On the right wall, there's a door three feet wide, five-foot-nine-inches high, and four feet behind the beginning of the ground plate.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: So each one of these things are measurable quantities projected up from a ground plan, and you learn to do that. Now, I would say that most people who learn to do that in their first year at the Museum School, probably by the middle of the second year had forgotten how to do it. You know, except the ones who perhaps were going into stage design or into certain kinds of illustration, where you have a commercial job and you're told that a hotel lobby has to be -- a rendering has to be made of a hotel lobby that isn't yet built, but these are the architectural plans, and you're obliged to put up a projection that will correspond to the final space.

Now, you know, commercial artists still use these systems. Most painters who paint interiors and so on do not. But I think there's a kind of residuum of a sense of the way the floor diminishes, of the way the side of a building goes back, that stays in your brush or in your pencil long after you have forgotten just how to place those vanishing points and just how to work it out with a T-square.

MR. BROWN: So even though it's not so precisely measurable as this is --

MR. KAY: Correct.

MR. BROWN: -- in your paintings and so forth, it's there.

MR. KAY: Oh, it's very much there.

MR. BROWN: Was that a one-day drawing, too?

MR. KAY: That would have been -- yeah. That would have been a drawing that you did as an assignment on an evening.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: You might take -- one might take more than a day. Some students turned it in with lots of light and dark modeling and so on. It depended how far you wanted to go.

MR. BROWN: Now we're --

MR. KAY: No. This is a pastel that was done in the design class. The design class also involved itself in some of these issues of volume and space. As one of the exercises , we were asked to put together some kind of an assemblage of pure volume, cylinder, cone, sphere, block, and so on. And put these together in some sort of readable form that would hold together as an intact unit and have a certain expressive and aesthetic strength.

MR. BROWN: Who did the design course? Was that taught by [inaudible] teacher?

MR. KAY: Yes. E. Blanchard Brown was a man who taught at Rhode Island School of Design. He came up twice a week to Boston. Or perhaps it was only once a week -- to conduct a design class. His assistant -- he brought an assistant up with him, a woman. But I don't remember her name. And Eleanor Barry, who was in Boston, was also the assistant or the secondary instructor in that course. And she may have been there to conduct the class for the second class session. I can't remember whether it was once a week or twice a week.

MR. BROWN: Well, what was the purpose, Reed, of a separate design course?

MR. KAY: Well, simply to emphasize those aspects of painting that -- or of sculpture for that matter of fact, that didn't deal simply with the illusionistic properties of the medium that had more to do with the aesthetic organizational structure of a picture.

Now, these things were mentioned in the painting class. But at the beginning, there were so many problems for the beginning painting student, just in learning to manage the paint, to learning to draw, to be able to develop the modeling from light and dark, that very frequently the organization of the total was alluded to, but not really explored in much detail.

There were also possibilities for the discussion of color theory, the effect of one color next to another, the way a green makes a red look even redder when you surround the red with the green, and so on. Various purely visual problems, formal problems of the way line or points conduct the eye through the pictorial space. This was the essential job -- really, the essential job of the course was to acquaint students with the fact that there is a kind

of hidden structure in any picture. The way that the eye is guided through the picture is determined by the arrangement of shapes, lines, and colors, independent in a certain sense of the way those shapes and lines and colors represent a face or a landscape or a room.

And so these nonrepresentational formal features, factors in a painting, were big news to many students, who perhaps had not in their high school years been made aware of them. So this course sort of made it clear to everyone, or should have made it clear to everyone, that there were aspects of painting that went well beyond the purely imitative re-creation of natural objects.

MR. BROWN: Of course, you had design, some design instruction in --

MR. KAY: In the high school classes, right. I would say this was probably our least -- the least popular course among the students that I had as friends. Whether it was an antipathy to the instructor or whether the material seemed to be less connected to what they wanted to do at the moment, I don't really know. I thought -- at the time, I thought that the material was worthwhile. Actually, people like Dave Aronson, Jack Kramer, Jason Berger, George Sheridan, Oney Sari was another -- who did very, very good, did the best work in the class. So I mean, they may have criticized the class somewhat when they were out of the studio. But nevertheless, everybody did his work and hung up an interesting group of exercises.

But they were sort of exercises. In fact, most of the first year, totally, was a year of exercises of one sort or another. And nobody seemed to resent this very much. I mean, the rationale for that was explained time and again in the various courses, that you're not making pictures. You're developing the equipment that will allow you later to make pictures, although you should be thinking at all times about applying the knowledge.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm, Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: For example, those studies of pure forms in the drawing class were applied to the figure model. We had a model posing, and we were asked to break down the parts of the model. You see here a woman standing. Well, each forearm is a cone. The upper arm is a cylinder. The end of the nose is a ball. The calf is a cylinder, and so on. We were asked to indicate cross sectionally how those parts would look.

Those lines give you a sense of the direction of the form. And then later, the indication with light and dark would reinforce those directions and make that form far more believable than if it were just traced as a contour and a little dark and light.

MR. BROWN: At the stage where there's perspective and the suggestion of direction of form?

MR. KAY: Absolutely.

MR. BROWN: By the outline, but also by the --

MR. KAY: By the cross section.

MR. BROWN: The cross section.

MR. KAY: Absolutely. Absolutely. And that's where the courses sort of came together. Of course, the anatomy course, as I said before, started with the bones here, is an example of such an exercise, where you were given a pose and you were supposed to construct the way the figure, the skeleton, would look in that pose. You were asked to indicate what each section was, the acetabulum or the great trocantur of the femur, and so on.

MR. BROWN: How long would you, say, work on a drawing?

MR. KAY: Oh, about a couple or three hours, perhaps, sometimes two sessions of three hours. If you were doing it at home and you didn't want to do it all at once, you might do it several times. There would be some rough sketches first to get some idea.

MR. BROWN: And there's insets there, so to speak, of musculature. Is that --

MR. KAY: Yeah. That was just to indicate where these particular bones would be visible in the living models.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: And then perhaps how muscles would hook onto them. That would be just for your own edification. The assignment was just to do the skeleton.

MR. BROWN: You don't mean of a chalk drawing?

MR. KAY: This is a chalk drawing of an anatomy section of the back, which would have been done as part of the series of -- just, in a certain sense, just to drive it into your head. I mean, it's all very well to look at it in a book and see the trapezius and see the latissimus dorsi and the way these things attach to various bones. But you recognize it, but you don't really know it when you read it or when you look at it. When you actively draw it, then you have to challenge yourself, and you have to ask yourself, "Well, how far down on the spine of the scapula does the trapezius go when it inserts? Or which vertebrae is it that it ends with?" You see?

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: So only by questioning yourself that way do you really learn the material. Eventually, it may be nothing more, in a figure drawing, than a slight indication of a dark that one sees in the middle of the back. But if that is placed with knowledge, it has a certain kind of authority and it sits on the form. If it as done, as many beginners do, just as a sudden discovery that there's a dark there -- and they don't know why the dark is there, where it's coming from, what form is making it -- it just becomes a patch of dirt, so to speak, on the figure.

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.] Yeah.

MR. KAY: This slide is a pencil drawing, typical pencil drawing done from the living model. And it may be that it was -- usually, the model would be posed for probably a week or two weeks in the same pose. And you might do one drawing, or you might do five drawings during that time. Not everybody used the model the same way.

This is -- on the side here you see one of those criticisms that Banks indicated how -- I guess he was correcting the way I was drawing the supinator longus in that relaxed arm, telling me that there's a greater continuum between its origin and the way it fills out down here, and it doesn't just sort of slither off that way, but there's a division between that and the biceps form in here.

MR. BROWN: Okay.

MR. KAY: And this would have been done, you know, in a couple of seconds while he was passing by. He would have said, you know, "You probably want a better separation between the forearm and the upper arm."

MR. BROWN: Or definition.

MR. KAY: "Definition" is the word I want, right.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: He might also have been indicating to me the directional move of that section of the cross section in here, would have been going down. Since the arm is well below my eye level in that situation, whereas --

MR. BROWN: Yeah. The [inaudible] arm.

MR. KAY: -- whereas you notice here, the strokes are going the other way as that leg recedes back into the --

MR. BROWN: The right leg, yeah. You're looking down onto that.

MR. KAY: So that gives you an idea. We were also encouraged -- you know, you did all of these exercises. You did them so to speak in a way in slow motion, taking a lot of time to study the parts, probably to overwork the parts. The drawings don't have much spontaneity and they don't have a great deal of graphic quality. But they serve the purpose of letting you examine very closely what was in your field of vision and try to understand it.

At the same time, we were encouraged to go out and connect with what was around and do sketches of -- this actually -- this drawing, pencil drawing on a little notepad was done down in South Station, while people were waiting. I found that was a place where people sat for a long time waiting for trains and so on. So I did a number of drawings.

MR. BROWN: And they're reading papers.

MR. KAY: Yeah, reading a paper, smoking a cigarette, sitting in a topcoat and a hat. There was a good chance to study a model with a hat. And I did a great many of those, which I later recombined. We were also given an assignment from time to time. In the drawing class itself, you would have the model for three weeks at a time. But there would be a session where there would be no models for perhaps three weeks. And you were asked to do a drawing from imagination of any subject that you wanted -- a beach scene or a street scene or a totally imaginary thing. And I thought I would assemble some of these sketches and do a railway station. And that ended -- those slides end examples of my work through the first two years.

MR. BROWN: Before you went into the army?

MR. KAY: Before I went into the army. In the army I did practically nothing in the way of painting or drawing except what I could do on the back of an envelope, like this -- whoever was standing around. So I would send home drawings like this of -- usually done with a fountain pen, as this one is, on any scrap of paper that was around. In England, actually, I did some drawings of the towns where we were billeted in Wales. And in France, also, from time to time there would be a little bit of time. And in a lot of the letters that I sent back to Frieda, there would be little illustrations of how things looked. They were not really serious attempts to draw, but rather more illustrative or even cartoons sometimes.

MR. BROWN: This one, for example, is fairly straightforward. [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Yeah. I mean, it was just a study of one of the people in the platoon. You know, the army is a thing, they used to say -- and they still probably do -- that it's all hurry up and wait. So you're told to get everything ready and get into your full field pack and have your helmet on and everything else, and then you stand there till, you know, till you get the order to move out. And that can be, you know, anywhere from five minutes to five hours. You never really know. You get used to that. This was a case where people were standing around, so I would make a drawing or something like that, just to have an idea of what the equipment and the costume was like in case perhaps I might use it in some way later on.

Well, this is back to school.

MR. BROWN: This is the most refined drawing we've seen.

MR. KAY: Well, it's a copy. It's a copy of a Durer, which I was -- I was interested in -- I got in the third year in school more interested in technical aspects of painting and drawing, painting in particular. Durer's work was something I admired a great deal at the time. I often found that the best way to learn was to simply do some close copies of the work that I admired. So this is one of a series of drawing, using toned paper, which I toned myself, according to a recipe that is in a book on tempera painting by Thompson. And then the drawing was worked up in ink and opaque white tempera paint. The ink was black ink that was diluted with water.

The beauty of this method is that you can make the drawing tentatively by diluting the ink a great, great deal so it barely makes an impression in the drawing, it is so faint. And you can search out the form with that and gradually strengthen the ink with more ink and less water until you eventually are working with these strokes that are practically pure ink, undiluted. The same thing can be done on the other side of the form, on the light side of the form, by diluting the white paint first and then gradually intensifying it so that in the major part of the form that is illuminated, you begin to develop a very positive, active kind of motion to the form, which otherwise would be left as simply blank paper.

MR. BROWN: Now, you were working up these techniques yourself? I mean you were trying to figure out a way of making graphic [inaudible] drawing?

MR. KAY: Right, right. What I did eventually was to use the same general method, but to use it much more freely and with much less precise detail, but again working -- I worked the last two years in school on toned paper with white and black casein paint. So the paper was usually blue or gray, and it gave a middle tone. And then I would work the lights in the whites and the darks in the black paint. Working not in this meticulous detailed way, but in a much broader way. But it technically derives from these studies that I did from the Durer's.

MR. BROWN: You were beginning to do studies of technique already then?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Just going on your own, right?

MR. KAY: Well, yes and no.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: There was a course of technical painting where the chemistry of paint and aspects of manipulating paint were examined systematically. It's a relatively boring course by itself. It's like a cooking course. But I liked it. And I did well in it. It became a kind of hobby with me, a kind of interest, which I wasn't alone. David Aronson, for example, got into a study of encaustic painting through that kind of course. All of us were aware of the possibilities that various media offered us, whether it was encaustic painting or egg tempera painting or oil -- resin oil painting. So everybody experimented a little bit. I was perhaps a little more systematic than many of my friends in this.

MR. BROWN: Who taught this?

MR. KAY: Zerbe. Oh, Zerbe -- this was his particular ballpark. And he'd give these lectures once a week, most of them just sort of on-the-spot translations from the book by Max Doerner on painting methods and material. And he had a copy in German and would read us a section in English -- you know, translating at sight into English.

And Mayer's book was out at the time, and he recommended --

MR. BROWN: Mayer's book?

MR. KAY: Ralph Mayer. He recommended our paying close attention to what was in there. In fact, we all bought that book as a textbook for that class. The class only met once a week, and again it was a class that was clearly subordinate to the painting program, but was required for it.

In the second year of that course -- that's to say the lecture year was in the third year. And in the fourth year, we all went to the museum and were obliged to make three copies in three different techniques. One was in egg tempera with gold leaf, and a Sienese or a Florentine quattrocento painting. The next one was a so-called mixed technique -- usually the El Greco in the Boston Museum was copied, or something like it -- where you underpainted with white and gray and glazed -- under-painted with white and gray in emulsion paint made of egg-oil emulsion and glazed with oil paint. The last painting was a resin oil painting such as Rubens might have done or some other painter. So you were obliged to turn in three copies, which we did in the museum gallery.

There was a course for the advanced painting students called collaborative design, in which a problem was given out, such as a mural for a war memorial, which you see up here on the screen. The painters were expected to produce a modello or a sketch for a mural. Let us say the commercial artists were expected to do something like a pamphlet on the war memorial, designing the layout. Silversmiths and jewelers might be expected to design a fountain, a water fountain for the place, and so on.
You were supposed to team up. A sculptor might be expected to do a piece of sculpture to sit in the middle of this lobby. You were supposed to team up with a particular student in one of these other majors and the four of you produce a collaborative presentation. It never worked out that way. The painters went off by themselves and produced some kind of a sketch, and the sculptors did this. And we were graded -- our design grade depended on that. This is third and fourth year.

This is a sketch for a war memorial. There are some details. I had just come back out of the army, you know, and I was very interested in all of this business of the war machine, the military industrial establishment. This must have been done around 1946 or '47.

MR. BROWN: Were you aware at this time of works, say, by George Gross?

MR. KAY: Oh, yes. Well, I had been looking at George Gross's things since I was in high school. And also Rivera and Orozco. I wasn't looking much to Gross when I did this, but I would have been thinking somewhat of the murals of Orozco and Rivera and the Mexicans in general, Siquieros.

MR. BROWN: Some of the immediate postwar paintings of Jack Levine were on display.

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Well, Levine was really a very strong influence, not on this particular thing because it really had to hold the wall in a rather flat way, I felt, but certainly the content and some of the characterization relates to --

MR. BROWN: How large is this?

MR. KAY: This is a very small thing. I think it's something like 18 by 24 inches or something like that.

MR. BROWN: It was to be a design for --

MR. KAY: Yeah. To be a design for a large wall, sure. So we got some experience in applying design problems, problems of organizing shape, color, line, and so on, to a concrete situation. And I think that's a very valuable thing to do.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: We also did still lifes, as most art students do, assembled from any kind of junk that's around in the studio, just as -- again, as an exercise in organization and in rendering. This actually was a collaborative setup. Jason Berger, Jack Kramer, and I found a little room that wasn't being used. And we set up an enormous junk still life. As you can see, it's got a camera and a vase and a plastic cast, a bone from a skeleton, a leg bone

from a skeleton, packs of letters, cups, jawbone of a cow, all kinds of drapery and boxes and so on -- just a big jumble. Each one of us took it from a different viewpoint in the room, sort of like sharing the communal model.

MR. BROWN: And just what medium is this?

MR. KAY: That's oil.

MR. BROWN: Oil?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And you painted this collaboratively, or you set up --

MR. KAY: No, no. We just set it up collaboratively. And then each of us produced -- really, if you put the -- these were all rather large pictures, large for me, anyway, about 48 by 36 inches. If you put the three paintings next to each other -- actually, they were exhibited, I think, in the school show at the end of the year. If you put them next to each other, you wouldn't even know they came from the same setup because, from different sides of the room, the setup looked quite different. Each of us emphasized rather different things anyhow.

By the fifth year, this is a painting, a self-portrait done during the fifth year. That would have been 1948, I think, yes, '48. And we worked at home principally, or in our own studios. We didn't work in school. Some of us came into school to be teaching assistants at that time. But this was -- we had a -- Frieda and I had a two-room apartment in Roxbury, a living room and a bedroom and a kitchen. I took the bedroom over as a studio that -- we used the living room as a bedroom and living room combination.

I was interested in sort of exotic techniques at the time. This is painted in what's called gum tempera. It's an emulsion of gum Arabic and linseed oil and varnish and water. It dries very quickly, and it -- Mayer described its recipe and its process and said that it -- with it one could reconstruct many of the effects of Flemish painting, which interested me at the time.

Indeed, it does work very well in under-painting and glazing, as you see in the background there, all of that bric-a-brac and the bottles and the egg beater and the chain and the scale for weighing pigments and a copy of the *Boston Globe* with a photograph in the front of it and some keys and so on. All of that is -- they are really quite small details, but rather sharply explained in the painting. And the chessmen down below. I had this all set up in the studio in a mirror. I had a lot more hair at that time. The medium itself seemed to work very well.

MR. BROWN: And you were -- was this an assignment that was done in your fifth year?

MR. KAY: No. By the time of your fifth year, you were simply expected to produce a group of paintings for consideration at the end of the year, possibly for consideration for the award of a traveling scholarship. So this was -- just went ahead and painted what you thought you would like to paint. This was one of several paintings that I did that year on my own.

Zerbe would come and visit the studio. He did come to Roxbury to where we were living and looked at what I was doing and was very interested in the paint. The gum tempera paint, of course, you made the medium up and then you had to grind dry pigments in that medium and make your own paint, keep it in jars, and so on. And he was very interested in its brushing and handling qualities.

Actually, when he came up to the studio, he made a little painting on a scrap panel that I had there, using the stuff. He spent the better part of an hour sort of fiddling around with the painting of three heads, which he said were me and David Aronson and Jason. And he finished it off. He said, "You can have it." I was so overcome I couldn't believe it, you know, a real Zerbe. I knew they were selling for hundreds, thousands maybe, dollars, and he was giving it to me. The first thing that blurted out of my mouth was, "Oh, I couldn't take that. You have to keep that," which he did and worked on it and showed later in an -- I saw the painting later in an exhibition. I always kicked myself for not taking that thing. What an idiot I was.

MR. BROWN: But he was -- when he came to visit you at home, by then you were an advanced student. Was he quite warm? You said he had that [inaudible] formality.

MR. KAY: He was very friendly in an urbane way. He was, as I say, always a man who was capable of a witty, if not sarcastic, repartee or repost. And I always felt I was in the presence of a mind that was really working much faster than my own. He was very supportive and very -- he really -- very benign. He really didn't have very much at that point to say about the work except, you know, "Continue" and "Do more" and so on.

He wasn't directing any -- and it wasn't his way to direct radical revision. He didn't say to me, for example, "You ought to throw away all of this illusionistic junk and look at look at Picasso's synthetic cubisms, for heaven sakes. We're in the twentieth century," or anything like that, which I have heard some painting faculty in other

schools do that with students when I've visited and been on panels.

Karl was very much inclined, I think, to let students go in the direction that interested them and just see what would come out. So long as the thing was well drawn, so long as it was soundly produced from a technical point of view of the paint, I think he felt that the best thing he could do was keep out of the way. If the student had some originality, it would show eventually, and the student would find his own voice with time. I don't think he was in any way directive in terms of saying, "You should paint more like Kokoschka or more like Beckmann or more like Picasso, or try something in surrealism."

If he saw a student who was interested in some aspect of surrealism, as for a brief point it seemed to me Jason's work took on some of that, Karl would sense it, encourage it, and even direct him -- you know, tell him to take a look at Max Ernst or somebody like that. But I don't think he ever shoved anybody into any particular aesthetic direction.

This is a portrait head done rather rapidly on the spot. It doesn't look it, but it was done outdoors, that summer of 1949 when Kokoschka came to Boston to teach at the -- or to Pittsfield, rather, to teach the summer program for the Museum School. And he engaged the model and posed him out in the courtyard, a man with a white beard. We were asked to produce a painting almost in one sitting.

He was not a teacher who recommended long studies on one canvas, but rather repeated, quick studies, whether in watercolor or -- this is in oil, of course. Whether in watercolor or in drawing or in crayon or in oil, he felt you had to try for the whole effect all at once, and if it didn't work out, you scraped it down or you got another canvas.

MR. BROWN: This is considerably different from the earlier work that you did.

MR. KAY: Well, it is, but it isn't that different. The fact is, I didn't include any examples of the work I had been doing in life class, which wasn't really that far away from this.

MR. BROWN: Quick studies and [inaudible]?

MR. KAY: Yeah, some quick studies. And this really wasn't that far away, but it was faster. Oh, I had a great time that summer. I felt very sympathetic to what Kokoschka was saying. And he'd always been a favorite painter of mine. I had bought -- or Jason and Jack had given me a book of reproductions of Kokoschka that they had picked up in --

[END CASSETTE 5 SIDE A.]

MR. KAY: No, this is a gouache. It was a sketch done in Europe. I left in '50 and got to France and Italy. I spent six months in Paris. Then in April we went down to Florence and lived in Italy for the -- doing quite a bit of traveling, but our base was in Florence. And I really didn't do a lot of painting. I think I explained earlier on that our plan was to spend a year traveling and looking at museums and pictures and then settle somewhere and paint. As it turned out, I came back at the end of the year because I was offered a teaching position.

MR. BROWN: Oh, at the school?

MR. KAY: Yeah, at the Museum School.

MR. BROWN: This is an exception? This is one you --

MR. KAY: Well, this was done in -- I did a certain amount of work. It isn't that I didn't do anything while I was there. And this is one of a number of little sketches on paper. It's about 12 by 16 inches, I think, maybe 16 by 20 inches, done in opaque watercolor. It looks rather like an oil. I had in mind an oil painting. The subject is a restaurant, or a trattoria.

I was, of course, at that time very, very interested and taken by the work of the Venetian masters Verenasi, Tintoretto, Titian and Bellini. And their color absolutely amazed me. I had known their work only through black and white slides in the art history course at the Museum School, and of course some color reproduction in books. But to see it actually really was very surprising. I also liked the kind of active turbulent dynamic of the picture.

MR. BROWN: Because this is looking down, but also the forms are set on a diagonal, to a degree.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: It's a great contrast of light and dark.

MR. KAY: Right, right. And a sense of the kind of elliptical joining of forms by their contours. As one arm lets go, you get the line from the arm continuing up the shoulder of the seated man and so on, so that by contrast of light and shade and by emphasis of edges, I was trying to set up a rather large spiral, a rather large ellipse within the picture, to carry the eye through the picture, rather than a more static balanced kind of quiet thing. It went very much in line with my previous interest in Expressionism, in painters like Kokoschka and Beckmann and so on.

But it seemed to me that those twentieth century painters, like Beckmann, Kokoschka, Rouault, who interested me principally, that their origin was really back in the high Renaissance and in the Baroque periods where turbulent motion and almost violent contrast of light and dark and direction were very much part of the aesthetic.

MR. BROWN: Whereas you're looking now at sixteenth century, slightly earlier, Venetians.

MR. KAY: Right, right.

MR. BROWN: Did you find after seeing these Venetian paintings that you really admired them more?

MR. KAY: More than?

MR. BROWN: More than the twentieth century Expressionists?

MR. KAY: Well, no. They just seemed to me to be a source. I didn't really think in historical terms. I rather thought that they were marvelous. The Kokoschkas were marvelous. And in a certain sense, Kokoschka was really part of the same -- there was a family of painters. The fact that pictures were actually separated by 400 years or something like that didn't really register to me. It seemed to me that he was as much a part of the sixteenth century or that Tintoretto was as much a part of the twentieth century as anything else. I mean, I didn't really think at that time -- I don't now think of that work as being way back then, and here we are now. So to me, these time differences are almost meaningless. Whatever interests me, it's because of a kind of innate quality of the drawing, the design, the color. It's not whether or not he's wearing a business suit or a Roman toga, you know?

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: Some of the ancient work is, in a certain sense, a lot more contemporary to me than a lot of things that are done today.

This is another sketch in gouache, but it is what I was doing when I got back from Europe. I think this is 1951 or so. It's a little watercolor sketch of a subject called the *Costumers*. And it shows a couple being prepared to go out into the world. The man is wearing a red devil's suit, and the woman is wearing a kind of white diaphanous gown with a crown. There are three costumers. One of them is a tailor who is stitching up a seam in the devil's costume. Another man is down -- in the foreground there's a table of cosmetics -- down reaching for the cosmetics. And the third man is just draping the woman with this white garment.

This was a time when there was -- this was in the early '50s, which are regarded as a bland and quiet time in America. But I didn't find it that way. There was a great deal of political upheaval at the time. Joseph McCarthy was accusing everybody of communism and holding up the great virtues of America. Many, many people got hurt at that point.

This was a sketch. The painting that eventuated from it was rather larger and done in oils. And as you can see a little more clearly, the roles of the costumers are differentiated a little more. It was done without models, with the exception of the woman. I hired a woman who was a model at the Museum School to come to the studio. I was teaching at the time -- but to come to my studio, which was at home in Cambridge. She had a costume that I thought would be useful. And she posed for a couple of drawings and a painting. She didn't pose while I was working on this. I used the drawings and the study, the painted study, as referencing for the final picture.

At that point, I was influenced very much by the Venetian paintings that I had seen in Europe. Also, a painter that I think nobody cares very much about -- Jacob Jordaens -- whose crowded -- he is sort of like a second-tier Rubens. He paints very much like Rubens technically, but he composes really quite differently. And his pictures are very crowded. They seem to be too big for the frames that they're in.

I don't know that I really like them as much as Rubens, but at that time they interested me because of a certain similarity that I thought I was seeing to certain compositional devices that one sees in Beckmann and in Jack Levine. And of course, Jack Levine was a major influence on my thinking at that time.

MR. BROWN: He still -- was he around here still?

MR. KAY: No, no. He was in New York. But exhibitions of his work were visible in Boston at the Mirski Gallery, principally. I also met him at Skowhegan, where he taught for two summers while I was teaching up there. So as you can see, in something like the head of the tailor here, stylistically it owes a lot to Levine, though its faults are mine. I don't blame Jack for that.

Technically, it's a very simple technique. It's under-painted with white and gray, as you see here in the arm. And then a few glazes, yellow for the vest, blue for the collar, and a few warmer tones in the head. It takes on a color quality with just a little bit of in-painting afterwards of direct chromatic moves that was carried out through the whole picture so that --

MR. BROWN: There's great attention, isn't there, to light and to the transformation of color through light, to a degree, isn't there?

MR. KAY: Oh, well, yes. I think that's very much part of the Venetian attitude and the chromatic changes that eventually -- from light change were very important to me at the time. You can see it in the cooler reflexes in the warmer tones of the head. The head is principally ochres and cadmiums. But around the edges of the shadow, actually I think there may be some ultramarine mixes of tone, so that you get a certain chromatic quality that really hadn't been part of my interest in earlier years at the school where I was looking more at painters like Durer and the Florentine painters, but coming into the Expressionists' work and into the Venetians, one gets very involved in color.

MR. BROWN: Now, for the most part, this is, I would say, very widely Expressionistic. It's based on what you see or what you remember or whatever.

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: But there are then, on the other hand, certain things such as the red in the ear or the tip of the nose and all or across the cheek, that light flesh color which seems almost to have a light-edged brushwork.

MR. KAY: Yeah. They may be propping out a little bit, actually.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] simply that.

MR. KAY: I do think that perhaps the -- let's see if we can get the whole thing. Yeah. Perhaps there was an intention to raise the key. In that particular thing -- you don't see it as much in the other heads. Yeah, but here and there -- and you're right. I think that the color for its own sake took over.

MR. BROWN: So there was something of that probably at work at that time in your work?

MR. KAY: Yeah, yeah, certainly. There certainly was.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Yeah, but that has always been for me, you know, a necessity to try to find things in nature that organize, that are useable components in the larger expression. I think one always has to make choices. And you can't put everything down that's out there. The nature of the choice, the quality of the choice, I think, is the whole ballgame and an indication of the intelligence and the talent of the particular painter. So we all make mistakes, and we all have sometimes fortuitous successes.

Then, you know, the problem is to recognize that and to sort it out and go on to the next picture. If something happens fortunately in this thing, you go on to the next one, and you learn from doing it this time.

MR. BROWN: Now why are you speaking of success or failure as painting, but rather it looked like there was a life of their own for certain elements.

MR. KAY: Yeah. Well, I think that I was looking for that really, I think. I continued working this way for a while. This next slide is a slide of section -- it's a sketch for a section of a picture that I was going to do about a ringmaster and a parrot and an audience. It was going to be called *Applause for the Parrot*. In fact, it is called that.

Those things that I was doing then had a very definite narrative component and a very definite Expressionist treatment. And well, you know, as I say, I was looking at Levine. I had been looking at Levine for years, you know. Something about the Boston School, Zerbe's narrative content, I suppose -- I just thought that that belonged in painting.

It wasn't that I was thinking particularly of one painter or another. But I just took it for granted that even a still life in a certain sense, the relationship or the assemblage of objects should carry some kind of larger social

comment or philosophical message or something like that. The paintings that I admired did have that in addition -- it should be stressed always, in addition to a wonderful kind of purely aesthetic painterly quality, formal quality.

So these two things -- the marriage of these two things, of the narrative content and the purely visual organization has always been a concern in painting, I think, since painting began. It certainly was for me at that time. This was a separate little study for the ringmaster. I did a lot of them. I didn't want to show you all of them. There are loads and loads of slides of that, of the man with the top hat.

This was also an experiment technically, in that it worked with a very, very limited under-painting and not too much color in the glazes.

MR. BROWN: You've got the subject here as well as in the previous one, the *Costumers*, the element of the theater, at least the display.

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: Was that a particular theme of that time, do you think?

MR. KAY: Well, I don't know. It was an interest of mine, certainly. I've always been interested, as I think I told you before, in theater. We were going to a lot of theater at the time.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: But it's also fair to say that it's a motif that lends itself to all kinds of narrative exploitation. I mean, clowns, actors, the artificiality of theatrical production -- it is in a sense a communication in itself. You can use costumes, you can use things that are rather rich coloristically and in terms of shape and in terms of visual impact. So all of those things together, plus the fact that I had a genuine interest in plays and theater at the time, plus the fact that one saw a lot of that -- oh, Picasso's Harlequin period, Beckmann's stage paintings, Kokoschka's doll paintings, all of these things were current.

But at a certain point I found I really was losing interest in that. I was sort of flogging myself to get into the studio and work. I never did finish. I had stretched a very large canvas for that *Applause for the Parrot*. And somehow I worked on it and I worked on it, and it just wouldn't go, it didn't move. I would spend sometimes -- I was teaching three days a week, and I'd come in on the non-teaching days, sit in the studio, and maybe lose the whole day just sitting there looking at the thing.

I ran into what I suppose writers call a block. The whole business of the incident and the narrative and what color dress should she be wearing and what color is the parrot and how big should the ringmaster's hat be and all that -- I was getting, not only impatient with that, but it seemed kind of hopeless to me. It did not seem to be anything that -- I could keep doing these things, and I had sold the *Costumers* and shown other things and gotten a certain amount of success that way. And I could just keep doing them. But I really didn't know where I wanted to take it.

At the end of one of those very wretched days in the studio, at about five in the afternoon, I sort of wandered out of the studio into the kitchen. Frieda was making supper. On the table there was a bowl of potatoes that she had just peeled, and the knife. The sun was coming in through the window. The window faced west. And the setting sun came through. I looked at that thing, and, gee, it looked like a glory to me. I said, "Frieda, don't touch it for a little while."

I ran back into the studio and grabbed a panel, with a picture on it -- I didn't have a clean panel -- and an easel and my stuff. And for about a half-an-hour, 20 minutes to a half-hour, I worked in an absolute transport. I don't even know what I was doing at the time. Then the light shifted to an -- I mean, it was going out anyway. Then the sun must have gone down behind the house or something. It was as if somebody had thrown a switch, and the whole thing was gone. I was sort of in a lather.

I took the stuff back to the studio room. I was using the living room of our apartment in Cambridge as a studio. And looked at this thing, didn't even quite know what I had; I could hardly see it. And sat down and washed my hands and had supper. It was as if an immense load had been taken off my back. I just suddenly realized again that painting can be a very great pleasure and a wonderful enterprise.
I don't know that I really digested all of this all at once. But I started -- I put away the *Applause for the Parrot* painting, and I started some pictures of still lifes. It was as if the whole thing -- I mean, I had begun all over again. And I sort of never looked back. Our son was born not much longer than that. This was around 1958.

MR. BROWN: This was 1958, you say?

MR. KAY: Yeah. Well, I had moved over to Boston University in '56.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. So this painting --

MR. KAY: And this painting of a fish was done actually around '54 or '55. It was done because some friends of ours wanted me to paint a silly project, to paint some decorations for their kids' nursery. They wanted animals and fishes and things like that.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: On little panels of Masonite, that they could put around. And I realized I could just do something with animals, but I didn't know anything about fish. So I went down, got a herring at a nearby store, put it on the platter, and did a little study of it, which then I stylized, and silver-leafed, actually, to give to -- this was for Sam Warner. No, excuse me, for Mike Simon, Mike Simon.

I liked the -- it was on a scrap of Masonite. As you see, it's about four inches high and maybe 15 inches long, 20 inches long, perhaps. And again, like that little bowl of potatoes with the sun shining on it, I found that, you know, it was tremendous to be able to -- it was as if somehow I had uncorked a bottle or something or opened a tap. All of this pleasure in color and in paint sort of just bubbled up. I kept it -- well, it's in the collection in Washington now, but I kept it home for many, many years as a sort of talisman.

And in '56 I was offered this job at Boston University, which is a whole other story.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Karl Zerbe had left the Museum School, I think, in '52 or '53. And David left in '55.

MR. BROWN: David Aronson?

MR. KAY: Yeah, David Aronson, who was teaching there.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And I left in '56. Then at that point, I took a -- well, this painting of two white fish and the lemons was done as a sort of time filler. Karl Fortess, New York painter, was hired at the same time I was in '56 for Boston University. He came and set up residence here, but without his wife, who was still teaching in New York City. So he was sort of bachelor at the time.

During our first year, he quite often came back to the house with me after class, have supper with us. And he came by -- one day we came home early, about one o'clock after morning classes, didn't have classes that afternoon. With the afternoon to kill, I said, "Well, why don't we go in the studio and do something?" So Karl set up a little still life with a white pitcher and a stick and a lemon, black velvet, as I remember. I got some white fish out of the refrigerator and cut up a lemon, and a glass of wine. We each did a little painting that afternoon and had supper afterwards. I was quite pleased with mine and actually worked on it a little more the next day, kind of ruined it, I think. I worked up the plate. And I don't really think it improved it. However --

MR. BROWN: So you're in a sense getting back to basics, in a way.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Freed of a load of elaborate paintings.

MR. KAY: Correct. Yeah. And I was doing much more work from nature.

MR. BROWN: This pretty much coincides with your move, then, from the Museum School to Boston University?

MR. KAY: Correct.

MR. BROWN: And that's probably a good place to pick it up.

MR. KAY: All right. Yeah. Yeah. Well, let's just go on for a minute or two --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] Sure.

MR. KAY: I moved my studio from our Cambridge apartment and took a place, a large loft in Haymarket Square in Boston. Just across the street was, and maybe still is, one of the best fish stores in Boston, Jeffries. At a loss for material, I would go over to the market and just buy some vegetables or something. This time I brought back a lot of fish, threw it on the tray, and painted the fish.

There's something about painting fish that sort of concentrates your mind, to paraphrase another thing because, you know, you can linger -- you can put a pot or an apple up and have it for quite a long time. But after the second day, the fish -- we didn't have any refrigeration in the studio. And the fish begin to impress themselves on the environment. So I guess this was all done -- it's a good-sized picture, but I guess it was all done in two sessions, or three at the most.

MR. BROWN: This all was done -- would you study? Would you work very deliberately? I mean --

MR. KAY: No.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] pretty quickly, but --

MR. KAY: This was done --

MR. BROWN: This variety of textures, colors, the effects of light on form.

MR. KAY: But no drawings, no preliminary drawings, no preliminary sketches. Just set the thing up, get a canvas, draw it on the canvas with charcoal, go over the charcoal drawing with some thinned oil paint, and then do the best you can. If you flunk, you flunk.

MR. BROWN: But, I mean, had you gotten away from doing preliminary drawings for the most part for some years?

MR. KAY: Well, we had always been taught to do both. I mean, when we were in the life class, we usually worked directly from the model without preliminary studies. When we worked rather larger things from imagination, we usually made some drawings and some preliminary assembly studies and so on. It's just a logical thing.

So, you know, one does both. This wasn't a great departure, really. The studio itself, you can see in this painting, which I still kept -- it's a picture that was done of the north side of the studio, looking out over the north end. And it was a marvelous --

MR. BROWN: Downtown Boston, yeah.

MR. KAY: Downtown Boston right on Haymarket Square. They tore the building down. I had to leave that studio after seven years. But it was the best studio I ever had. It's now a parking garage. So that's the kind of improvements we have.

MR. BROWN: It's almost a spontaneous quality as compared with some of your earlier --

MR. KAY: Well, this is certainly true. I think the intent -- this was actually done -- although the painting is about 40 by 42 inches or something like that -- it's almost square -- this was done as -- with the intention of its being a preliminary sketch for a larger picture. And I just never did the larger picture.

MR. BROWN: Generally speaking --

MR. KAY: But the intention here was just to lay in the -- map out, so to speak, the design of the painting.

MR. BROWN: Did you generally then proceed on to a more finished painting?

MR. KAY: Well, a more resolved painting. I wouldn't say more finished or more detailed, but one in which shapes and color relationships and tonal relationships would be made firmer and more emphatic, really, not necessarily with an execution that would be very different or smoother.

MR. BROWN: From here it's a sketch, but it's an enlarged sketch?

MR. KAY: Yeah, yeah.

MR. BROWN: And that's fairly common at that time, too?

MR. KAY: No, I think sketches were always small. I found I -- I think what happened with this is that I had the canvas. I had the intention of doing this rather large space. I didn't think I could -- and the intention also was that you would be led through the space by the description of the various objects, the tabletop, the model's armchair, the screen, the easel, the clock, and so on. It's actually almost a series of islands in the picture.

I didn't think that any good purpose would be served by doing a small note of these things because they, in the context of the larger cavernous space, would not be reading with the kind of emphasis that they would have to

have to tell -- the reason for doing this was simply to explore the subject and to see whether in fact there is a picture in it and whether it would work. I didn't think I would find that out on small scale.

So I made the format larger, thinking that the finished picture -- I guess I find that the attitude of a sketch is simply exploration or grasping for the major impact that the finished picture will have, trying to explore where the major impact will be and what is necessary to carry it. Everything else can be left for later development.

So it isn't a question of size necessarily, although a small format -- often, I should say -- often serves that purpose very, very well. But sometimes it doesn't. And one day when I was at a loss for what to do, I looked out the window and saw the North End and thought that that might be worth a canvas. So --

MR. BROWN: This was also, what, in the '50s?

MR. KAY: Yeah. This would be, I think, 1958 or so, I think. I'd have to look that up. But it might have been '56 -- no, it would have been '58 or so. That's out in Amherst now. And it's one of a series of paintings that I made from the window of that studio.

The only thing that really hurt me was -- that green ramp that you see in the middle distance is the expressway.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, the elevated expressway.

MR. KAY: It goes through the city like a hot knife through butter, you know, it just sort of divided the North End from this Haymarket section. And it really is very difficult to -- it is so arbitrarily placed in the context of the buildings that I never really felt good about trying to paint it. It just seemed to me an intrusion. On the other hand, I couldn't really eliminate it.

The worst part of it was that it masked the point at which the buildings hit the ground. So that joint between the vertical planes of the building and the horizontal ground plane was always hidden from me in that studio. And I can't tell you how much I resented that green expressway there.

But, you know, if you can't beat them, you join them. Eventually I did a series of paintings just of the -- you know, essentially of the ramps themselves. I don't know -- a collector in Washington has this. I don't know why they want it. But it just has the off ramp going right opposite Haymarket Square going down to North Washington Street and the structures around it of the street. I did, oh, a very large group of paintings of that landscape.

Now, the interesting thing is, to me, that this was the beginning of a long siege of landscape painting which continues right up to today, 1996. After starting it, it just seemed to me that this was where I wanted to be. I really did relatively little work from the figure after that or from heads -- occasional portrait, but not many, and not many of -- none of these narrative figure paintings, compositional things.

Yet, the landscape -- the area, the landscape subject is the one subject that I had no instruction in. Being in an urban art school, it's very, very difficult, I think, for a teacher to concentrate very much on landscape. It means taking a group of 15 to 20 people out onto the street with all their paraphernalia, easels, that you have to carry, kits and so on, setting up right on the sidewalk, or finding a place, anywhere, a park or something like that. It's a lot of bother. I mean, you know, if you have students spread all over a park and you've got to go looking for them. By the time they get out there with their equipment, and then get back into the building with all their stuff, you've used up about half of the class period.

So it's not surprising that people teach very little about outdoor painting in art schools. But in any case, I came into the '50s and '60s absolutely devoid of any serious instruction in landscape painting.

There was one three-week period at the end of the Museum School sessions where Karl would say, "Okay, anybody wants to go out and do some landscape out in the Fenway, go on out there. The rest of you can stay in and work a compositional thing." Some of us went out, but not many. I never did. But Arthur Polonsky did really a very, very handsome landscape.

MR. BROWN: What do you suppose was the reason for your going into landscape at this time, unconscious though it may have been?

MR. KAY: Well, I don't know. It's sometimes like a kid in a big family where you've got three or four brothers. One plays basketball, the other one is a terrific violinist, and the third one is in mathematics. And you get the youngest kid trying to find something that he can do that the others aren't doing. Maybe it's that. You go through the door that's open, maybe, and that hasn't been taken up by somebody else.

Maybe it's something like that, but I don't really think so. I think that I began to realize two things: one, that I work better, at that time anyhow, from nature than from imagination. That it seemed to me that variety of

color, shape, direction were out there in a way that gave me springboards that I didn't imagine inside a studio. That when I made up compositional material, you could deliberately try to vary it and so on, but you kept falling back on certain stock effects. They could be very good-looking, and there are painters who have always done this. But I found that the contact with the natural variety was very therapeutic for me, very medicinal, very -- it just made possible combinations that I would probably never investigate otherwise.

MR. BROWN: And the second?

MR. KAY: Secondly, this didn't apply just to color. It applied to shape and direction and form and structure. There's something about the basic architecture of landscape painting, whether it's pastoral or urban, that is distinctively different from figure painting. The motif consists of a stretching open space in which you have objects -- trees, buildings, roads, whatever. But there's that big stretch of distance. It can be fairly shallow. It can be as here, blocked at the end by buildings or ramps. But still, the front-to-back dimension and the arrangement between things becomes tremendously important and evident -- and evident.

Working from the portrait and the figure, your major concerns are what happens inside these volumes of arm, head, chair, whatever you have. And people talk about background. The rest of the space is relegated to a kind of field, a kind of background. Cezanne showed us that this was not a good way to look, that in fact those spaces that we used to call background have a powerful positive effect on the volumes and on the forms of the figure and play a very, very important role in the orchestration of the canvas.

But it's a very natural tendency to get hung up on the way a jaw sticks out or in the way a shoulder rounds off and just sort of dust off the background as a simple tone or something like that. You can't do that in landscape, not in -- you can't do it and be effective.

So I was sort of guided towards some of that pictorial architecture through the structure, the open structure of the landscape field. And I think that more than anything else is what pulls me to landscape, even today. It's not that I'll never go back to painting the figure or the head. I've always entertained these notions of, if I can only get the next landscape right, if I can only do it right one time, then I'll go back and try a figure composition again. But, you know, there's always this business of, it's not quite right this time. Maybe next time.

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.]

MR. KAY: So I think we can stop there.

MR. BROWN: We're continuing the interview with Reed Kay at his home in Brookline, Mass. And this is September 17, 1996. Reed, I thought we last time ended by talking about some of your work through the 1950s. To get back a bit into your teaching, which has also been a major part of your career. You had mentioned it a bit, but if we could talk a bit further about the years from about 1952 to about 1960 where you taught at the summer school near Skowhegan, Maine. How did you get into that?

MR. KAY: Well, it was a consequence of my being at the Museum School. Karl Zerbe was approached, I guess, by the administration of the Skowhegan School one summer to recommend somebody to go up and give some kind of -- some course related to materials of the painter. He was, of course, well known for his expertise and his interest in that and had given a course at the Museum School for many years related to the materials and the techniques of the artist.

This was a major contribution that he made, I think, and it set the school aside -- apart from many other art schools even at that time. It goes without saying that nowadays practically nobody emphasizes this. Even in those days, the traditional craft of painting had been, I think, considerably neglected since the turn of the century.

So this was in a sense a kind of unusual interest. I think Karl got it from German days when Max Doerner was introducing this material into the art scene in Germany and had written a text on the subject. And in fact, these lectures consisted primarily of a free translation to English of the Doerner text.

Anyway, I was a student in those courses at the Museum School, as all the painting majors were. And I had shown particular interest in the subject and perhaps had done a little extra work in that course. I was teaching at the Museum School and had been given some of the responsibilities of that course.

Karl recommended me to Skowhegan, and I went up there. I think it was that Leonard Bocour, the color manufacturer, had been giving that course at Skowhegan in prior years and for one reason or another that I never knew, had decided not to show up that summer. So they called Karl. Karl sent me up there.

Lenny had just made the course into a color grinding session. It was sort of a week or perhaps two weeks -- I don't really know -- but a series of classes in which he just brought some of his pigment up from the factory in

New York and had the kids grind colors, just mix them with oil, put them together. That was pretty much the course. There might have been more to it. I never got great detail. But my general impression from talking to other faculty there -- talking to Henry Poor and some of the others -- was that it was not a very elaborate course, but that everybody enjoyed it.

MR. BROWN: Was Lenny Bocour pretty well known in the art community at that time?

MR. KAY: Well, he was known in New York. He had a brand of colors, hand-ground colors. I think it was the only hand-ground paint on the art market. Everything else was machine ground. And his became machine ground pretty soon, too. But he had started up during the Depression, he told me. I think he had been trained as a painter. He started up in the Depression with a -- in a loft with a few friends. And they ground their own colors for themselves, and then sort of branched out and made a small business out of it. It soon became established. He kept his contacts with the art community in New York.

So when you ask, was he pretty well known, I would say yes, among people like Jack Levine or Sid Simon or any of the artists in New York. I think everybody knew Lenny because I think he gave away a lot of free paint.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: At the beginning.

MR. BROWN: And in time you got to know him, is that right?

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: He was quite friendly with Dave Aronson, and he would come up to talk in Boston to promote his paint.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Most of the art manufacturers -- color manufacturers did that. They sent somebody on a tour of art schools through the country just to tell about their product. Usually, it was a sort of public service lecture. It was ostensibly to talk about technical problems in painting, but the name of the firm was, of course, brought up many times. So it was that kind of -- it wasn't a sales pitch in any of the cases. But Windsor Newton sent people around with a film. Grumbacher had a -- they all had a sort of stock lecture that they gave from art school to art school.

I met Lenny on the occasion of one of those trips at the -- way, way at the beginning. And he -- we kept in touch. Since then when my book came out, he was very kind about giving me information about his products to put in the book, which I did.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: In 1961, yeah.

MR. KAY: Right. And anyway, he had been giving the course at Skowhegan. I came in, and I didn't really feel that I wanted to just go there and have the kids grind colors and that would be it. So I gave a kind of capsule course of the materials and techniques program at the Museum School, which involved much more than just grinding colors. It had to do with making supports, stretching canvas, making gesso panels, priming the canvas. And then a description of various other materials, like the varnishes and the oils and so on that we used.

So this was a series of sort of mini-lectures at the beginning of each class, and then a work session in the class that would be related to the lecture. If I talked about varnish, we would make the mar varnish in class that afternoon. If we were talking about gesso panels, we would sand up some Masonite and make some glue Gesso and make three or four Masonite panels per student. So it was really a very -- a much more intense course, I think, than it had been.

MR. BROWN: How do you compare the students, those summer students, with those you had at --

MR. KAY: The Museum School?

MR. BROWN: -- the Museum School?

MR. KAY: Oh, well, it was a very elite group at Skowhegan. See, they did a very intelligent thing. What they -- the way they built the school was that they sent a notice to each of the principal art schools through, I think, nationally. We had students from --

[END CASSETTE 5 SIDE B.]

MR. BROWN: How were your students at Skowhegan?

MR. KAY: Yeah. They sent a notice to each art school asking them to send one or two students, their best student in their penultimate year, the year before graduation. So if it was a four-year program, they wanted third-year students. They would not take a fourth-year student. So you didn't get seniors, you got juniors, which meant that the student would go to Skowhegan that summer and then come back to the school, the school where he had originated, and would spread the word, actually, through the student body about this being a very good school and had been a great summer experience and all of that.

So the reputation was quickly established through the country that this was a hot school for summer work. They had very good students because they didn't jury the students. They told each school to select its best student.

This avoided a very big problem that such summer schools often had in that, you know, the local school sends slides or the recommendations for, say, two students to summer school X. And then the summer school X faculty looks at the work and says, "Nah, this stuff isn't interesting to us," and they turn those people down. Well, they've turned down two students, but they've also antagonized the faculty in the other school. In some cases that feeling lasts for decades, you see. Skowhegan sidesteps all of that by saying, "You pick your students. We'll take whoever you send," you see.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MR. KAY: In that way, there was always a feeling of harmony and cooperation between Skowhegan and the nominating school. The students were generally the ones who would show that school to its best advantage. And they were also usually the most ambitious professionally and the best trained out of that school, with the result that, after a decade or so, Skowhegan could point to a mind-boggling list of young painters who had professional standing in New York and elsewhere who were all alumni of Skowhegan. The fact is they had spent something on the order of eight weeks at Skowhegan and something on the order of five years in other schools. But Skowhegan always got the credit, you know. [Laughs.]

And you know, you really have to say that when you assemble that list of alumni, it's like the Who's Who of American art. The fact is it was a very, very stimulating experience because, at the same time that they got the best students -- and by the way, these students came on scholarship. So the student didn't pay. The mother school didn't pay. Skowhegan furnished room and board and very, very good food and a faculty.

They had a base faculty of four or so in-house instructors. There was Henry Poor, Annie Poor --

MR. BROWN: His wife?

MR. KAY: No, his daughter.

MR. BROWN: His daughter.

MR. KAY: And Sydney Simon.

MR. BROWN: And Bill Willard Cummings?

MR. KAY: And Bill Cumming, Willard Cummings.

MR. BROWN: They were the three founders?

MR. KAY: The three founders were Poor, Simon, and Cumming.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: Of course, Annie Poor was with Henry. They were very good instructors. Additionally, they would hire a sculptor and a painter each summer to stay the entire -- usually to stay the entire summer, although there were some summers when a painter would come in for half the summer, and then another painter would come in for the other half. But there was a resident instructor who was not part of the original faculty, the founders.

Then additionally, there was a guest almost every week. This would be a painter from New York or, well, anywhere on -- a painter of high reputation. And he would come in generally for a lecture on Friday night about

his own work or about anything he wanted to talk about. Then on Saturday, a critique of the student work. So students would bring all of their week's work in to the barn. And each faculty member would comment on the work. The guests would be included. So there would be about five or six people talking about each student's work.

The critique ran for the entire day. They would start in the morning after breakfast, and there would be two sessions, a morning and an afternoon session. We'd finish up around five o'clock. Those benches got to be very hard. You know, they were just wooden benches that everybody sat on. And you had all kinds of people that would come through, and some of them sculptors, some of them painters.

As I say, the resident people were imminent people, too. The ones who came for the whole summer -- George Gross was there one summer.

MR. BROWN: How as he as a teacher?

MR. KAY: Well, he was to me very interesting. He was -- I didn't hear him very much on a one-to-one basis, which is, you know, really the guts of art teaching. In his general lectures and critiques, he was surprisingly gentle, it seemed to me, and touching. He was -- the lecture I heard had to do with his early formative years in Germany. To hear this great satirist of the German society between the wars, you know, talking about -- oh, things like, as a young -- as a boy coming across a lady seated on the porch of his parents' house painting a watercolor of a still life of plums. He says, "And I remember the little frosty [inaudible] on the plum," you know, and things like that, or some -- or the shine on somebody's shoes. The things that he -- the details that he seemed to remember and consider visually important to him. I hadn't really expected that those interests would be manifest there.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: He was fairly old at the time. I mean, I think he was in his 60s or something like that.

MR. BROWN: But that was a very graphic way of expressing oneself, wasn't it?

MR. KAY: Yeah. He wandered somewhat in the lecture, I mean, from one experience to another. He did have a kind of bemused or amused quality when he talked about some of the students' work. I think probably alcohol was sort of like the balm of Gilead at that point in his life. I think he was partial.

MR. BROWN: Partial?

MR. KAY: To alcohol at the time, and maybe long before. But very interesting man. Jack Levine was there as a resident, I think, for two summers.

MR. BROWN: Had you known him a bit already?

MR. KAY: I had met him before. I never was a close friend or anything like that. I'd been a real admirer ever since I've been in art school, and I had been introduced on a number of occasions. Edwin Dickinson was up for the summer. So we're talking about really eminent faculty.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Guests that were right up in the most prominent places in the art world in New York and could talk with ease about their dealers and their experiences on the New York scene. So this was all highly stimulating to a student who had been in some provincial art school. I mean by "provincial" anything but New York, you know. I mean Boston or Cleveland or what-have-you -- Indiana.

Then, of course, there was the most stimulating thing about the whole thing was to be in constant contact for eight weeks with a group of students from other schools who had sometimes radically different objectives and viewpoints about art. And each of these kids came to Skowhegan thinking that he had the gospel truth, you know, the one truth in the art world.

MR. BROWN: I wanted to ask about that. Could you maybe describe a couple of those divergent points of view that they might have come with?

MR. KAY: Well, sure. Museum School kids at that time came with a rather traditional set of values about drawing and about technical painting and art history and so on. They knew art history well. They used to play a game, as a matter of fact. Sydney Simon used to put slides up on the screen, and kids would write down identification of the slide, you know, and pass them in at the end of the session. Museum School kids always had, you know, almost always were the ones who knew most of the artists better than the others.

On the other hand, kids that had been studying with Hans Hofmann or somebody like that came in with a very different sense of the importance of abstraction, the importance of direct communication or feeling without the inhibitions of any deficits in drawing or anything like that.

So, you know, there were frequently arguments. There were frequently fairly aggressive disputes among the kids in the first few weeks. But the interesting thing is that, as the summer wore on, they became sort of fused. They accepted a great deal of what they heard from guest lecturers and from the resident faculty in a way that sort of got them to understand that the whole scene, the whole enterprise of art consisted of a very large organism with many, many, many sides and that one need not really disparage another approach in order to feel confident about one's own direction. This was, I think, one great gift that Skowhegan gave all of those students.

MR. BROWN: He was naturalized, at least at the time --

MR. KAY: No -- well, they did to some extent at the beginning. Sydney used to say that -- to go back for a second, you know, I had that one year that I went up there. Bocour came back, I think, the following year, ’53, the following summer. Then for some reason known best only to the administration of the Skowhegan School, they asked me to come back. And I did for the next five or six years.

Sydney used to say that the best thing about my course was that they timed it -- they tried it a lot of different ways, once a week all through the summer. Another summer, they had me come up for two weeks and give the course every day, so there was the same number of sessions but totally compressed.

MR. BROWN: Compressed.

MR. KAY: But he said, "The main thing is that you've got to have the color-grinding sessions after the fourth week of the summer." He says, "By that time they're all ready to cut each other's throats, and what they need is therapy."

[Laughs.]

MR. KAY: And grinding, standing there grinding the colors, washing the slides, and all of that, they get over a lot of their hostility. So there was a kind of Freudian tinge, you know, to the intellectual climate in the '50s that I think has become a little bit less chic. But at that time, you know, there was a sense that we have to examine the psyche all the time.

Anyway, I was up there many summers for just the middle part of the summer in a rather intensive -- that suited me because that left me time to paint back in Boston.

MR. BROWN: Well, did you -- you mentioned earlier you feel the most effective art school teaching is one on one. Were you able to do that in your course there? Would you go around from student to student?

MR. KAY: Yes. Well, I think the most effective teaching in an art school combines many things, or several things. The one-on-one critique is the core of the thing. But then I think a group lecture is very useful, you know, for the instructor to assemble all the students together and then either put slides on the screen or take them all to the museum together or what-have-you. A group critique is sometimes useful, where students put their work out, and there's a public criticism of the work by the instructor. That can be -- it can be very helpful. It can also be rather destructive if it's done by the wrong person.

MR. BROWN: In general, at Skowhegan that group critique was done quite well?

MR. KAY: Yes. Well, it was done by a group of faculty, not just one, as a usual thing, in those days. And it supplemented regular one-on-one criticism during the week. You know, the kids went out to do a landscape. Henry Pool would be out and he would see each student at his easel. So there was both.

I think that's useful because there is a tendency on the part of -- well, I think almost any instructor, most instructors, when they see the student one on one, the instructors tend sometimes to -- well, you don't want to hurt the student's feelings. Sometimes it's, for one reason or another, easier to simply be encouraging and supportive, we would say today, and to gloss over deficiencies that might perhaps advantageously be well dealt with at that time.

Sometimes -- I wouldn't say it's a failure on nerve on the part of the instructor, but sometimes it's easier to be comfortable and friendly than it is to be rather firm and disciplined about it.

MR. BROWN: On the other hand [inaudible].

MR. KAY: If you're in the group critique, however, and other faculty are listening and other students are

listening, it becomes a kind of dance on eggs, where you really have to show that you have standards, but at the same time you're not being destructive in applying them, which is I think what a good teacher in any field has to do.

I mean, he has to communicate the best things he knows, hold the student to highest standards, and at the same time do it in a way that builds on the student's strengths, not tear the student down for not being like some ideal that the instructor has in his head. I mean, that really accomplishes absolutely nothing except to, at the best, turn out a bunch of students who are sort of faint copies of the instructor, and at the worst turn out people whose self-esteem is totally destroyed and who will never do anything in the field at all. So, you know, that is the wrong kind of thing.

There are instructors -- I've seen some -- who seem to get some kind of an ego kick out of tearing apart a student. I don't think that -- you know, I think that kind of person is to be shunned in an art faculty. They exist.

MR. BROWN: In the group critique, would most of the critique be by those who were their instructors?

MR. KAY: Well, generally, the instructors would lead off, saying, "Well" -- because the guest has never seen the student before and never seen the work before.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Seen the work.

MR. KAY: So, you know, somebody would get up and say, "Well, this is a student who came to us" -- incidentally, I should have mentioned that Skowhegan's student body was not entirely made up of people sent by the art schools. I think about two-thirds, perhaps, or less, around half were. And then there were a group of paying students. They might be anybody from hobbyists to beginners right out of high school. So there was a very mixed bag outside this nucleus of highly talented well-trained art students.

Sometimes there were surprises in those people. You know, not every great student at Skowhegan came out of an art school. But basically there were those two groups. And so the resident instructor might get up and say, "Well, this is somebody who comes to us. He's a high school student," or he was -- "He just graduated from high school. He's just beginning in the studio and we thought it would be useful if he confined himself to still life. That's why there are no landscapes and no figure pieces," or something like that.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: In other words, there would be a brief introduction to the work, and then he would say, "Well, Joseph, I think that maybe your color could be a little bit more intense here or there." So -- and then the guests would come in and say, you know, "This looks like very interesting work for somebody who hasn't been to art school yet," and so on. So that was just a logical way that it developed.

Then there was a certain amount of back-and-forth with the students in public, too. I mean, another student might raise his hand and say, "Well, I know that he's worked very, very hard and I think you shouldn't talk about the color that way," or something like that. Sometimes there was an objection from the class, you know, that the instructor had overlooked something. Or there would be a question. They would seek qualification. "What do you mean by more intense color? You want them to just brighten it up or what?"

You know, it depended on the students. Some of them back in the '50s, there were all types, you know. Those were the great days when Jimmy Dean was a film idol. I remember one kid that was really spending a lot of time trying to look and act and sound like Jimmy Dean, you know, this sort of halting, sincere, sensitive quality.
MR. BROWN: Yeah. More of a variety than you saw later, would you say, among students?

MR. KAY: Well, I don't think it changes very much, I really don't. I think we always have the same mix of class clowns, of terribly intense people, of people who are very naive, some who are perhaps very street smart, sophisticated in other ways. So, you know, it's always a mixed bag. And I think the art studio attracts a very wide spectrum of people. I think that's lovely.

MR. BROWN: Part of the success that you've discussed of Skowhegan is owing to the talents of Poor, Cummings, and Simon?

MR. KAY: Absolutely.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] diplomats?

MR. KAY: Well, you know, it's one of these combinations that comes along very, very rarely. There were all kinds of assets -- personal. Henry was considerably older than both Bill and Sydney. He sort of provided a kind of gentle, firm stability to the group. Sydney had come up from, I guess it was Pittsburgh, as a kid, and knew the art scene well in New York. Both the art school scene and then the collectors scene -- he had married a Lewison

girl and --

MR. BROWN: Big money?

MR. KAY: Big, big -- but even more important, I think, a big collection, a wonderful collection of Cezanne.

MR. BROWN: You mean Sam Lewison?

MR. KAY: Well, that was his father-in-law. And Sydney, when he built the house -- when they lived in New City in New York, I went into the place, the first thing I saw was a Cezanne on the wall. How many times do you come into a friend's house and see, not just a Cezanne, but a damn good Cezanne?

But the main thing about Sydney was that, you know, he really knew the art scene, the art people very well. And Willard Cummings was somebody whose family had been in Skowhegan many years. They owned property and business there.

MR. BROWN: He knew all the people.

MR. KAY: Yeah, right, right. As a matter of fact, Margaret Chase Smith, the Senator, I think had worked for the family for many years before she went into politics. And Willard was well educated, I think in Europe, and had spent -- most of his painting had been directed towards doing portraits. He had many social connections that went with the family -- and the family also had connections in New York and so on -- at a totally different level from the other two people.

He also had all this property. And they were willing to let the school happen on their property. So actually, the beginning of the school probably would not -- well, I don't know if it would have. But in any case, they used the barn, they used the grounds. All of that belonged to the Cummings. So that when the school really became established, I think they became -- they had to deal with the fact that they had to incorporate and buy the property and so on, as a school, no longer simply as a guest of the Cummings family.

I don't know too much about that end of it. But I do know that each of the three founders brought a specifically different advantage to the combination and that they were very, the three of them collectively, dedicated to making this an important school.

MR. BROWN: They were all -- each of them very tolerant men, it would seem.

MR. KAY: Well, it seemed that way to me at the time. But, you know, I wasn't part of the family, really. They were based in New York. And what I saw were three people who were very hospitable, very cooperative, not without some disagreements one with the other, but able to resolve differences in favor of the collective enterprise, and really very energetic.

The big thing that nobody seems to pick up on is that I think none of them taught in the wintertime. So in contrast to most of my friends, you know, they worked like hell during the summer. They ran the school, and they were personally involved hands-on in almost every aspect of the school during the summer. And during the winter, they, I think, spent a good deal of time raising money for the school.

But they were not committed to the sort of academic ladder that many of the people my age were committed to at that time. So that when I went out there, I had finished eight months of teaching at Museum School or Boston University, and then, you know, because I had to do it -- I felt I had to do it -- I took the offer, the invitation, to work during the summer. But it really meant that I had no time off that year to develop my own work or even to relax with the family, you know.

But they didn't face that problem because they had the whole winter to themselves, you see. So this pumped a lot of energy into the place. Unlike many summer -- well, I mean, BU had summer school, Museum School had summer school. I think we talked a little bit about that, when Kokoschka and Siporin and Hyman Bloom taught various years for the summer school. But you see, each of those things was a going winter enterprise with a summer branch.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: Skowhegan was totally committed to their summer program and nothing else. So that they really could concentrate on that in a way that most -- Yale had Norfolk, for example. But it was always a problem who's going to run it, who's going to teach it, and so on.

MR. BROWN: It was usually following from their winter sessions also taught in the summer?

MR. KAY: Right. Well, initially what usually happens is that a faculty member involved in the winter session is

told off, or volunteers, to sort of direct the summer session. That usually lasts a couple of years until the thing is established. Then the search goes on to get somebody from -- and people all think in the winter school that it's going to be wonderful. "Oh, we're going to run a summer session in Florence, Italy. Great! I'll volunteer to teach drawing."

It's a summer -- after a couple of summers, pretty soon you can't get any volunteers because people realize that it's a lot of work. It's a lot more work, in a way, than teaching in the wintertime. You don't have the support services that you have in the winter. You don't -- and you have a totally new group of students. You've got to revamp the program. Tremendous amount of work, rethinking the summer program, even if you're not doing the direction of it but you're just doing one course. It's still a job.

So after awhile it becomes difficult to find people. And you have to get people from the outside to come in and staff up the summer positions. Very often, the summer school has -- after it develops, has relatively little to do with the winter school in terms of character and program and faculty. So that's a separate, whole other issue. It's not very much talked about or recognized.

Many, many arts schools now have summer programs of one sort or another. Many of them, in my view, are simple money-makers or window dressing. I mean, if you can advertise that you've got a summer session in Venice, this puts your name around and -- there was, starting, I think, in the '60s, a very great tendency on the part of American students to want to study abroad, have an experience in Europe or something like that.

Of course, artists always wanted to go abroad, but usually they went after they had gotten most of their equipment here in this country. They would go after four or five years of study in Pennsylvania or in the Art Students League or in Boston Museum School. Then they would go perhaps to Rome or to Paris or something like that.

But, you know, it became in the '60s rather fashionable for people to drop out of college for a year and go find themselves in France or in Italy or Germany or Sweden or something like that. It corresponded, I think, to the whole counterculture thing in the Vietnam years and so on.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: But anyway, the summer schools had something to do with that, too.

MR. BROWN: For your own part, you eventually realized, I would say around 1960 that it was taking too much time from your work in the summer?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And also, you told me that it became too social. [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Well, it had become more and more successful. That sort of was a result of or translated to a different kind of social atmosphere in the school. There were more parties. There were -- I don't know. It was just, for a local boy out of Boston, getting a little too rich for my blood I still felt very -- I had very warm friendly feelings towards the original faculty, especially --well, you know, Sydney and Ann Poor and Henry and Bill.

But first of all, it was tremendously strenuous. That was the principal thing. And I say that because that's also what stopped me from -- I had been asked to do summer work in Boston University, and I did several years. But I was finding it almost unbearable. It was heavy work, and I really just felt that there was no letup. That by the time I finished with the summer thing, then I had to start preparing classes for the September semester in the winter program. And I just felt drained, physically in Skowhegan, but more emotionally and intellectually in Boston and in Italy when I did the Italy thing.

I finally got to the point where we decided we could make it without my doing this, and that we could pay our bills just on my faculty salary in the winter session. So that's where it tapered off.

But to get back to Skowhegan, I think its aspect changed over the years, as any institution does. I personally liked it better when it was spare and, I should say, Spartan and almost austere in the initial years, the ones in the early '50s that I had had.

MR. BROWN: Do you mean physically?

MR. KAY: Well, it was physical, it was in every sense.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: There wasn't as much money around. The dorms were sort of like barns. The dining room was, you

know, not posh at all, but the food was marvelous. Mrs. Harville was a local woman who was also principal of the high school, I believe. And they got her to do the dining room. And she ruled over those -- she got local girls to waitress and so on. She kept an eye on everything. She was just one of those wonderful people.

It was terrific. There were very few amenities. But later on, they built more permanent studio buildings, more permanent dorms, and so on. There were more guests coming through -- Bette Davis or somebody like that. And, you know, everybody was always on the --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] interesting?

MR. KAY: Well, they were brought up to -- they were people who might help with raising funds for the school in the wintertime.

MR. BROWN: Oh.

MR. KAY: So that there were people whom I'd never heard of from the museum world and so on that would come up to see Bill Cummings in the summertime just to see how the school was operating and so on. So one was always on the [inaudible], so to speak.

MR. BROWN: Things had to be a little more elaborate and structured so that these people would not be put off?

MR. KAY: Yeah. I don't really -- I don't know if they had to be more structured and more elaborate; it just got to be that way. It was just natural that the lawns would improve in quality from year to year as they got mowed and weeded and so on. What started out as a meadow eventually became sort of Astroturf-looking.

I don't know. I also think that something had -- the art world changed. And the school seemed to be very flexible in adjusting itself to that. I don't like to get into too much of that. It gets rather personal. But what I kept seeing were guests and names that I didn't have the same regard for as the ones who were there in the early '50s. They were just -- in fact, they were as eminent as the others. They were just part of the New York scene. The school was always very strongly tuned in to that.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Perhaps the New York scene was not to your taste -- being practically every year.

MR. KAY: That's what I'm trying to say.

MR. BROWN: A new fashion each fall.

MR. KAY: Right, right. And none of the fashions appealed very much to me. So that, you know, this is my own taste. Gradually my orientation seemed to be so significantly different from the orientation of the people who were coming up that -- well, I sort of sensed that when I made the decision not to come back.

But to tell you the truth, the real -- the decision was made almost, I'd say, 95 percent on the basis of fatigue. When I told Bill Cummings one year that I would not be back the following year, that was the year that I drove out of the place with Frieda. We got about two miles down the road, and I said, "I'll never make it to Boston." I turned in to the next hotel, motel, and just went to bed and slept for a day. I was just that exhausted. I was almost shaking from exhaustion.

When I got back to Boston, I think I wrote a note to Cummings and I said, "Look, it's just too much for me. I can't do it." Also, they weren't paying me an awful lot. It was more -- in the earlier years, the compensation was really just to be in touch with all of these people. It was wonderful to be able -- for me to be able to see in the flesh George Groves, for example, who when I was in high school, I used to pour over those drawings, you know. It was like a master.

MR. BROWN: But by the late '50s the people you were likely to meet there weren't of interest to you?

MR. KAY: Well, that was less the case. It was that while I was there, I wasn't really able to deal -- no, there were still very interesting people coming through at that time. It was just that to do my class, to wash up, and then to go to a cocktail party for whoever, Jacob Lawrence or somebody like that, it was exhilarating. It was wonderful. But as I say, at the end of two weeks of that, I was practically out of it.

I didn't get the feeling that anybody realized how much work I was doing, just plain physically, a lot of lugging of heavy slabs and things like that. I had good assistants from among the students. There were always two students who were on scholarship who earned their scholarship by being my assistants in the course. Murray Reich was one, Lloyd Lillie, the sculptor, was another. Many of those students have since become well known. And they were very helpful. But still, it was a lot of strain.

Then our son was born in '58. We went up that year with him. He was, I think, 18 months old at the time or

less. And anyway, without dwelling on it too much, it was a combination of being tired. I didn't go one year, and then they wrote me again and again, and I said, "Well, all right. I'll come up again." I think there was a blank of one year and then I went back. That last time, I was absolutely sure that I shouldn't do it again. I shook hands, and we parted in, you know, good friendship.

I actually saw Bill and his mother when they came up here to Boston a couple of times. But there were never any hard feelings, but I just couldn't go back.

MR. BROWN: By the late '50s, early '60s, were some of the newer artists being brought up as guests or as instructors? Was there an arrogance among any of them?

MR. KAY: No. Well, it varied. The answer is, in some cases, yes. There was a sculptor -- and I've forgotten his name, and he's since died, and he was very popular. Oh, shoot.

MR. BROWN: But would be then very popular, but also very avant garde?

MR. KAY: Oh, well, you know, one of the kids asked him, "How can you make your sculpture" -- he was an assemblage sculptor. "How can you make it out of these rusty old car parts? They're going to fall apart. And what about posterity?" He said, "Well, what did posterity ever do for me?" You know, everybody laughed; it was very funny.

But I had just gotten through teaching a class where I said, "You know, it's very important if somebody is going to pay you several thousand dollars for a painting, they have a right to ask that it not fall apart at the end of 10 years." And so you have to know a little bit about the sequence of paint layers, as least as much as an ordinary house painter knows. So you're a craftsman as well as an artist.

And to have this guy come around and say, you know, "What did posterity ever do for me?" It was clever line, but its substance was, "To hell with craft." There were others who came up who were much more personally sympathetic than this man. But yeah. There was a lot of variation. Some were arrogant, some were not. But that was true of the more traditional people, too.

MR. BROWN: That had always been there?

MR. KAY: Sure. There are all kinds of people. All kinds of people become artists. And some get very defensive. Some are rather more tolerant in other points of view than others. There's no rule about this.

MR. BROWN: By the time you left, were the students benefiting just as much as they had, say, in 1952 when you began, would you say?

MR. KAY: I would say that the school was still functioning as effectively in the sense that it was communicating its standards as efficiently to the students; yes. The only question is, "What were those standards?"

MR. BROWN: So, Reed, teaching was -- had become a very important aspect of your life. I gather at times it was frustrating because it took you away from your time for painting.

MR. KAY: I don't know many painters my age who didn't feel some of that frustration. Most of us, most people I knew, were actually teaching. Very few exceptions -- and for most of us, this was a way to pay our bills.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: To varying degrees, people felt commitment to involve themselves in the work of the institution where they taught. Some people could -- there was a big range. Some people got very, very heavily involved, took administrative responsibilities. Others got very involved with just their contact with students and would put in tremendous amounts of time above and beyond what was required by class hours. I mean, faculty people whose class was over at 4:00 o'clock who would still be in the studio at 6:30 talking to a couple or three students and trying to work things out -- and they were often students who had severe problems.

The range was very wide. There were other people who took the job and treated it pretty much like a grant, you know. They would allow their names to be used on the roster and maybe would show up from time to time, but did the absolute minimum because of their commitments elsewhere, to their work or God knows what.

So there were the two extremes. Most of us were sort of conscientious, did what we could to help the students, did what we could to ensure the vitality of the school. We all, I think, at different times from time to time wish that we didn't have to interrupt the work in the studio to go to a class or to do go a committee meeting or something like that. Schools vary, too. Some schools ask for a lot more than others. Some just ask for you to come in and teach a class and get out. Others wanted you on committees, and make proposals for the direction of the school, and so on.

MR. BROWN: The MFA school was not too demanding, was it, in terms of --

MR. KAY: Museum School?

MR. BROWN: Yeah. In terms of administrative and --

MR. KAY: No. It basically was not. There were -- there was a certain amount of school politics, which I think was a happenstance of the individuals who were there and the fact that they had been there as long as they had been. So that there was a certain amount of time that got used up in these juries for prizes and for scholarships and for traveling grants. I remember those meetings with less than the greatest pleasure. And they didn't -- they frequently did not bring out the best in people.

That was rather different from my other experiences teaching in other places. Museum School was rather heavily saturated with this kind of rivalry, which I didn't feel at all at Skowhegan or at Boston University.

MR. BROWN: Now, Karl Zerbe had left a couple of years before you left the Museum School?

MR. KAY: Right. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did you miss him? Did you wish he had still been there?

MR. KAY: Well, yes. Yes, I think so. I think that would be a natural thing. We believed in the program that he had put in place. It had changed a little bit, but grown rather naturally in some regards from the beginnings that he instituted. But the orientation, the direction, the objective would have remained consistent with his ideas. And it sometimes is disturbing to get a change in that direction.

I think what was missed was the stability. One began to feel that any change might occur. It was a sense that there was a financial pressure. I remember Russell Smith telling the faculty that there was a deficit and it would have to be repaired. It was a very small deficit. I don't know, $15,000 or something like that -- but he had been taken on the carpet by the trustees for that. Anyhow, there was the feeling that when Karl left, there was a big question as to which way the school would go and what the direction would be.

There was also the sense that the compensation of the school was hopeless, I mean that it was the kind of position that one could take if and only if one had a private income of some sort or a very high professional income derived outside the school. And there was always the pressure of a large number of hours that you were there.

[END CASSETTE 6 SIDE A.]

MR. BROWN: Talking about the MFA School.

MR. KAY: At the MFA School. It might not be all day every day. But it could easily be four, sometimes I think it was even five days for me.

MR. BROWN: But you couldn't be doing your own painting, say, if it wasn't all day even. You wouldn't have time.

MR. KAY: Well, you were told you would have the morning to yourself. So come in at 1:00 o'clock, you know, from 1:00 to 5:00 or something like that. The only trouble is that when you're painting and you start out in the morning at, say, 8:00 o'clock in the morning and you know you have to be somewhere at 1:00 o'clock, with your hands clean and a shirt and tie on, you -- that casts something of a shadow over the work that you're doing from 8:00 to 12:00.

MR. BROWN: It affects the whole intensity.

MR. KAY: Well, yeah, exactly. Your concentration is a little different. We became aware of that. Then, on top of that, salaries were so low that I, for example, had to take on a night class at the Roxbury Y in order to make ends meet. So that all of us, I think, were very glad to be able to get positions way from the school that would be more like academic salaries on which one could live and where one could project the possibility, at least, of a certain amount of time in the studio that would allow you to develop and to get the kind of work that you knew you could do.

MR. BROWN: These academic positions were just then beginning to burgeon weren't they, overnight?

MR. KAY: That's true. When it actually began right after World War II, and then the various universities began to open studio departments -- they'd almost all had art history departments.

MR. BROWN: Okay.

MR. KAY: But then the various colleges and universities found that there was an interest in studio work and that this could somehow be put into a degree program. So they began to recruit faculty for these new departments in the '50s. And that's really when so many of the university departments really came into existence.

MR. BROWN: So I take it -- I gather from the way you've been talking about the MFA School your last years, you might have thought of getting out of teaching altogether and holding your body and soul together with some other kind of work, which might also free you to paint? But as soon as there opened up this academic --

MR. KAY: Well, this is correct. Yeah. And to be truthful about it, the prospect of trying to keep the family together without a teaching position involved thinking about either commercial art, illustration, or advertising, or stage design, or something like that.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Stage design had always interested me, as did illustration. But I hadn't trained for that, particularly. And I -- you know, this was more of a fantasy than a concrete plan. But it was becoming clear to me that staying at the Museum School in that situation was not apt to be productive, and I had already begun to send letters around asking if there were any positions.

MR. BROWN: Did you want to stay, preferably in the Boston area?

MR. KAY: Well, not really -- I didn't have a very strong feeling. As a matter of fact, I had had a correspondence going with the school -- was it Cleveland or Cincinnati? I can't remember. The correspondence is in the file. And I was all set to go out there for an interview. I had sent them some photographs. They were very interested.

Barnet, who had been a Museum School student himself, was in charge and was interested in seeing me.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.] Will Barnet?

MR. KAY: I think it was Will Barnet. No, Herbert Barnet, I'm pretty sure. I'd have to look it up.

But that didn't materialize. But no, I was willing to go out to the Midwest. In fact, I had the idea of going somewhere else might be kind of interesting. And I hadn't the remotest idea of who to go about it. I had no contacts. Nobody I knew was in these places. I didn't know how to write a letter of application. I didn't know how to organize a curriculum vitae. I had never been given any hint about that.

That's one thing -- Karl Zerbe was a fine teacher in many ways. But he was completely uninvolved in any of the mechanisms that would place students in anything, in a gallery or in another teaching job or something like that. He perhaps wasn't terribly knowledgeable himself, or really didn't feel it was his function to do that kind of thing. I think that was a real deficiency at that time, to have absolutely no concern about any kind of progression, ladder, route for the student after graduation.

It's true in Europe, perhaps, you were expected to simply go off and starve, except that wasn't quite the case either. In Europe, you left school, and then there were particular things to compete for, like Prix de Rome or something like that, in each country. So there was a sort of defined route for success.

Of course, the war broke that all up in Europe. And Karl came here just prior to the outbreak of the war. So I don't really know. He himself had been the beneficiary, I believe, of a study grant in Paris or Italy; I'm not sure. But at least as far as I know, none of the people that I knew had gotten any advice from him in that regard.

So as I say, when the time came to think about something other than continuing to work in the Museum School at very long hours for very little compensation, I really didn't know where to turn. When I got a call from Boston University to come over there, I was just dandy. I was more than happy to go.

MR. BROWN: What did you know about the program at Boston University?

MR. KAY: Only that it didn't exist, that it would be a totally new program and that I would have some hand in shaping it and that I would be in the company of people I knew -- Conger Metcalf, David Aronson.

MR. BROWN: They were already --

MR. KAY: David was already on the scene. He had been hired by the university to begin such a department. So he had left the Museum School a year before I did.

MR. BROWN: Were you aware of what he was able to do there already?

MR. KAY: Well, what I got was a telephone call from him saying, you know, "I'm doing this. Would you like to join me? And you'd have to teach some of the studio courses in drawing, painting, and so on." And he told me that he was also recruiting Conger Metcalf.

He also got -- the same year, he got Karl Fortess from New York whom I think he -- I think he might have gotten his name from Jack Levine. But at any case, Karl, Conger and I arrived that same fall, 1956, in Boston University.

MR. BROWN: And it looked promising?

MR. KAY: Well, yeah. Compared to --

MR. BROWN: It paid better?

MR. KAY: Let's put it this way. The pay was triple the very first year. I had been at the Museum School for -- well, official faculty for five years, but I had been two years before going to Europe, a total of about seven -- six-seven years.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And my first raise from the first year to the second year at Boston University was more than all of the raises that I had gotten in the six-seven years before at the Museum School.

MR. BROWN: Wow.

MR. KAY: It was still not tremendous salary. It was $4,500. But I had been working at the Museum School for $1,600 a year. Now, that is back in the '50s when money was different than it is today. But it was still very low pay at that time. I think when Karl Zerbe left the Museum School to go to Florida, he was given $5,000; he was earning $5,000 a year from the Museum School, I think. I had been told that number, anyhow, by somebody.

So yeah, you know, it just meant that suddenly it looked as if one could manage to survive with this. And the plan was that you'd work hard for three days a week, and you'd have the rest of the week to work in the studio hard. You might not go on any picnics on Sunday, but you stood a chance of developing your work.

MR. BROWN: Why did you say you wouldn't be able to go on picnics?

MR. KAY: Well, what I meant was, you would have very little recreational time because, really, you should be in the studio every day. And to chop it down to four days a week, you really have to decide that you're not going to miss any days and you're not going to take lunch hours that are too long and anything else. You try to make up somehow or another for the three days that you've lost by going into class.

You want to do the class work well, and that requires preparation. For example, I had to teach anatomy the first year I was there. Well, I had taught techniques, I had taught drawing, and I had taught painting. But I had never taught anatomy, though I had taken the course and done well in it. So that took a good deal of preparation time every week just to have the lecture in order and have the drawings ready and everything else, and then grading the work, and so on.

So it was more than just the class time that had to be -- the university worked on the basis that a chemistry or French instructor, and English instructor put in an hour into class and was assumed to put in an additional three hours of work in connection with that course -- preparation, grading, and the like. So the norm was something -- well, I don't know, around 10 or 11 hours. I think two courses of three hours a week each, for one semester, and three courses for another second semester, for junior faculty -- so this didn't really -- it would come to about 11 or 12 contact hours.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: For the studio instructor or the lab, the closest analogy that the university evidently could come up with was the chemistry lab, where it was assumed that you didn't give the lecture. You simply were there all the time as a lab instructor. And so 18 hours contact time was considered normal for a studio instructor.

Well, that is a lot more than the liberal arts course requirement. It involved people usually three or four days a week plus preparation. There was preparation time, and there was conference time with students, and all of that, if you took your work seriously. You couldn't ignore the student.

You know, I used to schedule interviews with my students every semester at least routinely at the beginning of

the semester once, just to find out where they came from, what their family circumstances might be like, did they need scholarship help, were they satisfied with their dormitory arrangements, and so on. Because if they're not, you know, you can't get them to concentrate in class.

So, you know, you wound up spending quite a bit of time. But at least, at least you got enough money to pay the rent, and so on. So that was my situation and pretty much the situation of everyone I knew.

MR. BROWN: Now, was David Aronson quite fair-minded in all this? I mean, did he lay these things out for you?

MR. KAY: Oh, sure. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: From the beginning?

MR. KAY: Well, actually --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: -- as he said, we knew each other from the Museum School days.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. KAY: We knew each other well enough. And he operated, I think, very much on the basis that the place would work by consensus. That we made our own rules as we went along. We expected all of us to abide by them, but these were not handed down from above. We had to work within university regulations.

MR. BROWN: As you just mentioned.

MR. KAY: Yeah. I mean, they would tell you how many hours and so on. But collectively, we could go to the dean and say, "Look, that's simply too many hours," or we could say, "We can't have more than" -- we had decided that we could not really teach well if we had more than 20 students in the studio class, and that when enrollment figures began to pile up and we became more popular, there was a tendency on the part of administration to say, "Well, we'll put 30 in that class." We said, "No. You have to hire another instructor. We'll take the group of 30 and make two groups or two sections of 15."

They said, "Well, you know, it's not very economical." We said, "It's the only way we can teach it." And we agreed that if the enrollment fell below 11, we'd either scrap the course or combine it with something. And they agreed that it would never run substantially over 20.

Well, there were years when I would have 22 or something like that. But I could always fall back on that and pretty much get agreement from the university. But that was the kind of thing that we worked out in the department ourselves. David, you know, brought us together to discuss these things. But these were not any one person's development.

MR. BROWN: He sounds like he was sort of a natural administrator?

MR. KAY: He was a very good administrator, very intense, very careful, and in a political sense very cautious. I mean, he didn't ever explode or, you know, create any great scenes with administration. But he saw to it that the interests of the school were kept foremost in everybody's mind. We usually had a dean who could be relied upon to see reason.

Although, very often they didn't understand our problems. They didn't know why -- "Why do you need so many easels? I mean, can't -- we just got some last semester. Why do you need more?" We have more students. Each student needed one. "Can't you rotate them or something? We have to spend the money on a piano, you know." Most of our deans were music people. There were the three divisions in the school, music, theater, and art.

MR. BROWN: You were [inaudible].

MR. KAY: All under one dean -- each division had its own chairman. So you had to sort of scramble to get budget that was given to the school for the arts, but was divided up by the dean between theater, art, and music.

The dean being a music person well understood why you had to have three more practice pianos next semester or to recondition or retune the pianos, but he could never quite understand, "Why do you need so many art books up there? They're just picture books, really." I'd say, you know, "We don't have a museum next to us. We should have. But we don't have. And if I want to refer a student to the way Rembrandt painted a hand, I have to take and show him the reproduction. So we need that Rembrandt book." "Oh. Well, I guess we won't

be able to buy the Bach score that we were going to buy." Well -- actually, that became a big bone of contention at one period.

But what I'm saying is that these were things that Dave had managed very, very well for as long as he could stand it. And then he eventually burnt out, so to speak, I think. Not burnt out, but decided it was time for somebody else to take that responsibility.

MR. BROWN: How long was he --

MR. KAY: Gee, I think he was in the chairman's office for -- I'm not sure, but I would guess about eight or nine years, seven or eight years perhaps.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] '60s perhaps?

MR. KAY: I think so, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: The consensus worked quite well, too.

MR. KAY: Well, you know, the thing got bigger and bigger. The year that I came in, there were four people on the faculty, David, Karl Fortess, Conger Metcalf, and myself.

MR. BROWN: And all of you, except for Karl Fortess, had known each other for quite a while?

MR. KAY: Yeah, the Museum School, right. Well, that quickly expanded. It had to, as we got more and more students and got better known. By the end, we had a faculty, I think, of -- I don't know, between 25 and 30, I would guess. Now, with that many individuals, not everybody is going to be equally interested in producing a five-year projection of the aims of the school for the next decade, you know. I mean, the dean sends down -- periodically, administrators want these things, you know.
We're studio faculty. But if you, you know, expect to proper in the place, you have to be willing to communicate with administration. So they want to know what -- assuming that we got $10 million for the art school, what would you do with it over the next 10 years? What do you consider important, and all of that?

So you sit around. You talk about it. And then somebody has to draft it, and then you write it, and so on. Well, obviously, among 30 people, there probably are going to be four or five who are willing to sit down and do that kind of thing. In this school, it was pretty much Joe Ablo, David Aronson, Sydney Hurwitz, and myself who got most of those chores during the time that I was teaching there.

You would touch base with other people. You would see what Jim Weeks thought. You would see what Harold Tovish thought. Well, Tovish was involved in a lot of this, too, whenever sculpture came up.

MR. BROWN: When did he come on? A little bit after you did?

MR. KAY: Yes. He was -- he came -- I met him for the first time at Skowhegan. And I think that would have been around 1954, something like that, or '55, because -- or maybe it was '56 because I was already at the U, or it was perhaps my first year at the U, but I had still many contacts with the Museum School. He came to Boston and joined the faculty at the Museum School at that time. So this would have been around 1956, give or take a year.

We had met at Skowhegan and had become very friendly. As a matter of fact, the end of that summer, our wives went back to Brookline. And Harold and I stayed on at Skowhegan. Bill Cummings let us have a place to stay and the use of a studio. I had some work I wanted to do out there, and so did he. So we sort of bachelored it for a couple of weeks out there. Then he had come back to Tappan Street here in Brookline. We were still living, I think, in Cambridge at the time.

MR. BROWN: What led him to -- not just him, but others, to BU?

MR. KAY: Well, Harold didn't come into being for quite a long while. He had gone to --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Well, other artists?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Well, we got in touch with them and asked them if they wanted to come and teach there. Hugh Townley -- we needed a -- what happened was, we needed a sculptor. We sat around, the four of us, and said, "Well, who do we know?" And so, you know, I had met Townley in Paris a couple of years back and said, "Well, I met this guy, you know. This is the kind of work he does," and so on. So we sent him a note, said, "Interested? If so, send photographs," or something. He was, and he did send photographs, and he came down and interviewed. And we said fine.
That's the way it pretty much worked in the first few appointments. After that, it got a lot more formal.

MR. BROWN: You were -- presumably, the university was increasing its backing, financial backing, wasn't it?

MR. KAY: Yes. On the premise and with the condition that there was a demand for that, you know, that we could show enrollment figures where we had people -- you know, a freshman class went from a very low number to pretty soon we were involved with something like 60 or 80 freshmen, you know. That meant you had to have -- well, the way our program was set up, the freshmen all took a standard program, and they were broken down into three sections of 20, and then later four sections of 20, which meant you needed four instructors for every subject.

This had its -- then its result in -- its implication in the number of major instructors you would need as the freshmen finish that, and the sophomore year they would select a major like painting or sculpture or art education or advertising design. And so on the premise that you had, let's say, 80 freshmen, you could assume that you would need so many sculpture people, so many painting people, and so on.

MR. BROWN: So it was expanding rather rapidly?

MR. KAY: Oh, it expanded very rapidly, as I think was the case in many university departments.

MR. BROWN: And in the Boston area, it stood out. It became the largest school.

MR. KAY: Oh, no, I wouldn't say so. I wouldn't say that it ever became numerically the largest. I think Massachusetts College of Art was always bigger because, first of all, it was low tuition.

MR. BROWN: And it was also aimed towards training teachers, wasn't it?

MR. KAY: It was originally a normal school for the preparation of teachers of art and also was known as a school which had strong departments in the applied arts, in advertising, illustration, and so on, at least more courses in these things than did the Museum School.

And then, you know, the Museum School has been there for a very long time. So I would not say that BU became the dominant school in the area. I think each school had its own personality and attracted different sorts of students. The surprising thing was the very rapid growth of the BU department as opposed, let's say, to Brandeis, which also had a studio program, but never became as large or as well known, I think, although they had good people there, like Mitchell Siporin, a well-known New York artist.

MR. BROWN: Who founded the [inaudible]?

MR. KAY: Yeah, at about the same time, roughly the early '50s, maybe a couple of years before we went over to Boston University.
Wellesley had courses. But again, for other reasons, that did not flourish as a studio program back in previous decades, I think largely because the studio program was very much directed by a -- limited by the art history faculty. They didn't become autonomous until perhaps, maybe 10 or 15 years ago. I don't know that there was any -- I think there might have been one tenured studio instructor up to that time. Now it's quite different.

But for a very long time, Wellesley had that reputation of being an art history department, which periodically hired studio people and fired them at about the time they would become permanent faculty. So just about everybody I know taught for a year or two at Wellesley. Dick Boyce taught there. Jason Berger taught there. Joe Ablo taught there. Sid Lewis taught there. But nobody stayed. I taught there. I filled in --

MR. BROWN: You were [inaudible].

MR. KAY: That's right. I filled in for somebody's sabbatical. But it was, you know --

MR. BROWN: Not a particularly stable place?

MR. KAY: Well, I think they wanted it that way. They -- it was a stabilized revolving door position. The art history faculty was very stable.

Then there was a question of geography. I think that that affected both Brandeis and Wellesley. The further you

get from the center, I think, the harder it is to develop a vibrant, vital art program. I mean, you really need the museum. Without a museum or without a collection of original works of art, you're then relegated to the business of showing reproductions, color photographs, slides, stuff like that. And, you know, that's a deficit.

There's nothing for the generally talented art student -- there's nothing that can inspire him and energize him as much as contact with the physical picture, you know? Show him a real Rembrandt. Show him a real Picasso, a real Matisse. It's almost the test. It's almost the test. You can almost see it making a difference in the kid's face. You know, he looks. "Can you really do that?" You can really look at it. It's there.

Somehow, a photograph never really has the same effect. It does for an experienced painter. I look at a floating color print of a painting that I have seen in the past. It's an aide memoir. It's not the object itself and I have to rely on my memory of my impression of the original painting. But for a kid for the first few years, there's nothing like original work.

MR. BROWN: Would you take your students down to the museum? You mentioned earlier you had a lot of books.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: But I assume you also --

MR. KAY: Yeah, I did as often as I could. The logistics were difficult from BU to the Boston Museum. It's a hitchy streetcar ride, and you often didn't have enough automobiles to go. But, yeah, we would go there and go through. I would often have a particular group of things I wanted to show them. So I didn't go as often as I would like to have gone. And I used to go much more when I was teaching at the Museum School.

The great thing about the Museum School was, in those days, that we would -- you know, lunch time, we'd just wander into the museum. It was free -- wander in and look at one picture for a while, and then go back to the painting studio and try to do your best. It was just terrific. I don't know if that's still the case for them. I don't know if they're interested. It doesn't look to me, by looking at student work that they are.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: But for us that was a tremendous stimulus.

MR. BROWN: Well, I've heard that as early as -- certainly by the 1960s, even, many of the features of the Museum -- then at the Museum School weren't really too conversant with the collections over in the museum.

MR. KAY: I think the character of the faculty changed a lot.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: I mean, most people -- there were only about two people left of the -- well, there wasn't anybody left, really. There were people I knew. Henry Schwartz, Barney Rubenstein were the people with whom I had had some contact while I was at the Museum School. But they were not teaching. They had been students or fellow students of mine. They became faculty after I left and I still would see them and talk with them. But they were the only ones. There wasn't anybody else there that was part of the faculty as I knew it at the Museum School.

There had been a complete turnover, which started really a couple of years after I left. I left when the school was still more or less intact. Russell Smith was still head of the school and so on. Then they had -- at the behest of the trustees, they had a visiting committee come through with a school evaluation. Evidently, a decision had been taken to change the character of the school very much. And they put in -- I think it was somebody by the name of Bagnal, whom I never met, as head of the school.

MR. BROWN: He was a designer.

MR. KAY: Yeah. He changed things somewhat. And I didn't -- I don't know what went on. When I left, Jan Cox was in the school, had been in the school.

MR. BROWN: He had come from Europe.

MR. KAY: Yeah. And I left, I think, the year that he arrived.

MR. BROWN: He didn't have that much of an imprint on its development.

MR. KAY: I think not.

MR. BROWN: He was from Belgium; so was Karl Fortess. Were they [inaudible]?

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah. I don't think so. Karl left Europe when he was very young and would have been very much older than Jan Cox. I'm not aware that they would have any contact.

MR. BROWN: Were you aware of what was going on in these other burgeoning university departments elsewhere in the country?

MR. KAY: Not very much.

MR. BROWN: I know you weren't the administrator. But did you get feedback very soon that the Boston University program was getting a reputation as a very solid one?

MR. KAY: Oh, yes. I would hear that from -- is this thing going now?

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: I would hear that from people -- you know, I'd go to New York, where you'd meet another artist. And people had heard of the school, were sending students to the school, and so on. So, yeah, the reputation of the place was definitely spreading without, I might say, very much conscious effort on our part. And I think that -- you know, that was sort of part of the period, too.

By contrast with many other universities and university -- even university art programs, we didn't have the remotest notion about publicity or public communication or whatever you want to call it, you know. And the result was that there was no concerted effort to bring the school to the attention of anybody, just about. We just did the best job we could with the instructional end of it and assumed, simply, that the reputation of the place would take care of itself.

Many years later when we were older and wiser, we realized that these things rarely happen by themselves and that there is all kinds of publicity, of devices of various sorts through exhibitions and networking and conferences and so on, which we had blithely ignored all the time that we were running the school.

MR. BROWN: But in the earlier years it did take care of itself.

MR. KAY: It did, yeah.

MR. BROWN: There was sort of an informal network?

MR. KAY: Well, there was. It simply happens that, you know, as students leave your place and begin to exhibit by themselves, and in many cases will say that they were students at the Boston University school, the school gets to be known. And also, because people in this situation of being painters and instructors -- and as I say, that was, I think, largely a generational thing. I think my contemporaries were often in that position. So you had people at Yale, various other people, at Indiana, and some at American University, some at other schools -- Chicago and so on --

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: -- were people that we bumped into because we saw their exhibitions or they saw ours. We got to know them, and we -- or we didn't get to know them, but we got students from them. I mean, we would get students from the D'Arista [Robert] school and classes in American University in Washington. They turned out to be knowledgeable draftsmen. I mean, you could see the difference. Well, the Niewald [Wilbur] would send us students from St. Louis. And you know, it would -- or Kansas City, excuse me. They were consistently strong in certain areas.

You would get a certain style with each school. Niewald's students always were -- Niewald has great interest in Cezanne, and his students always had a kind of Cezannesque tinge. If it was only that, it wouldn't have been impressive. But the thing is, there was substantial foundation to their work, very often.

MR. BROWN: Were these students be coming at the graduate level?

MR. KAY: Sometimes as graduate students, sometimes as transfer students. Kids would, you know, have some reason or another to come to Boston. A boyfriend is at MIT, so she transfers from Washington, D.C. Who knows what? In other cases, there were these applications for graduate programs. In other cases, they would be applicants for faculty positions and we would see the portfolio and read the CV and say, "Oh, one of Wilbur's people" or "one of the D'Arista's people" or "one of Chaet's people." You know, you get that sense of the school behind the individual.

MR. BROWN: Well, when you began or when David Aronson began the school, was it purely undergraduate? Or was it always in mind --

MR. KAY: There was always a graduate component. But our school was unique, I think, is unique, or was at least when I retired unique, in the sense that the major emphasis was on the undergraduate program, that we began -- and I don't know how much Boston University history you want. But Boston University has, I think, 11 colleges. And some of them are so-called undergraduate professional schools, which I think may be an oxymoron.

I'm not an academic myself. But my understanding was that a college was four years of undergraduate general studies to get as much as possible a notion of the humanities and the various fields of human knowledge. And then for the specialized knowledge that a profession requires, with this as a base one went to several years of graduate study in medicine or in law or in engineering or in architecture or what-have-you.
Boston University had a school of education. It had a school of -- what was it called? -- anyhow, Public Communications. It used to be called Journalism, School of Journalism.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And these were undergraduate schools. So you enrolled at Boston University School of Journalism, took four years of undergraduate work, and graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Journalism, and didn't go to graduate school, right?

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: The art school was put in on that model so that we were actually -- so then you can -- this raises problems, debates. Then you begin to talk to the administration of the university, and you say, "Well, in order to really have this student graduate with a grasp of the profession, with professional skill, we've got to have four years of drawing. And the drawing course at minimum must consist of two three-hour sessions a week. It cannot be as it is in some colleges, one semester over the four-year period, you know. This has to be a continuous responsibility."

In other words, we tried to put the Museum School program as we knew it, the art school program as we understood it into the university during the first four years. Now --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Oh, to a very great degree, completely. And we felt that this meant that one would have to give -- first of all, one would have to concede the fact that being in a university, there would be some requirements for a general studies, for liberal arts subjects, that you would not be able to get a university degree without a certain minimum of English, history, so on. The distribution requirements usually demanded that you had some courses in science, some in history, and literature.

So there would be essentially a competition for time, for the students' time. And we solved it in a rather clumsy way, I think, but the only way we could arrive at, by saying, "Well, we can give the students the equivalent of three years of what we used to teach in the art school." We used to have a four-year art school program. We will be able to deliver about three years of that content to the student --

MR. BROWN: Right. Over the four years.

MR. KAY: -- over the four-year period in the university. The student will have to have the equivalent of about at least a year of general studies work distributed. And it will mean for the student that the student will have to work something like from 8:00 in the morning till at least 5:00 at night or 6:00 at night in classes, plus outside assignment time that he'll have to find time for in the evening and on the weekend.

So it meant a very intensive program for the student, actually, sort of pouring -- it was like pouring five quarts of cream into a gallon jug. That's what it was. That was always a problem for us. But we at least tried to do it. Most colleges, most university programs, didn't even try. What they tried to do was to give the student a few introductory courses in the undergraduate years. The total amount of time that most university programs gave the student in the studio was probably equivalent to what we did in Boston University in the first year of four.

MR. BROWN: Really.

MR. KAY: Not much more -- it was that radical a difference. And the rest of the time was in the liberal arts subjects.

Now, I generalize about that, and you'd have to go to the catalogs and look. But I think that's probably right. Then, and only then, did the rest of the places say, "Now you may go to graduate school and really concentrate

on the studio." They then sent the student either to their own graduate department or to -- more usually, to another school's graduate program in painting or sculpture.

MR. BROWN: Why did they usually send them to another school for what?

MR. KAY: Yes, because inbreeding was considered unhealthy and that exposure to a different range of faculty and intellectual disciplines would be beneficial to the students. So most of the time, the student does not stay in the college and then in the graduate school of the same institution.

Now, this was usual and general through the country during the last four decades. The question that comes up is what was the graduate program supposed to be doing? Did it assume that, since the student had never had very much basic drawing or anatomy or perspective, were the graduate programs going to teach those subjects? Very rarely did they even make the attempt. They said, "We are graduate programs. We are taking advanced students only."

So they -- and this is my understanding of what happened in America from about 1960 to 1990.

MR. BROWN: Boston University was exceptional, exceptional?

MR. KAY: It was very freakish. It was very exceptional. I don't think you will find an analog anywhere in the country, not that I know about anyway. There's a lot more to be said, but I don't know that this is the time and place. But there's a lot -- this raises many, many questions about the education of the professional artist in this country over the past 30 years.

See, because I feel that the undergraduate schools didn't do very much for him. I feel that the graduate programs did even less. It was mostly do as you please, press your soul to the canvas stuff with instructors who were name artists who didn't really want to be bothered very much with the nuts-and-bolts instruction. And they would teach through seminars, you know, have the students bring their work in and critique the work. But when in the world did anybody teach a student how to draw a hand or some of the considerations that ought to enter into the construction of a head or something like that?

I'm not saying that, you know, you had to go back -- you ought to go back to the old apprentice system or even the Beaux Art system. But what developed in this country -- and I believe it's also true in Europe today -- was a very, very big change, an enormous change in the education of the studio artist.

It's largely in this country because of the university system. There are three reasons for the changes in the artist's equipment today. One is the educational system through the universities, which have just about wiped out the art schools as dominant educational institutions. They still exist, but they are, I think, increasingly marginalized. And I would guess that the population of graduates from university departments of art far outnumbers the graduates from the few remaining straight art schools like the Museum School or the Art Students League in New York.

I may be wrong about that, but my guess is that the numbers are much greater coming out of universities with -- I think there are very few painters today who don't have a degree.

My contemporaries, there are relatively few that do have a degree. And the generation before me, practically none of them have degrees. So Fortess, his age group, practically none of them went to any kind of college or university. In my age group there were already a few people who went to various college programs to get a degree that would enable them to teach, frequently in public school.

MR. BROWN: As in Mass College of Art?

MR. KAY: Mass College of Art, or Tufts. The relationship to the Museum School was established just for that purpose. That happened when I was on the faculty there.

[END CASSETTE 6 SIDE B.]

MR. BROWN: Continuing the interview. The gallery scene?

MR. KAY: Yeah. The gallery scene being, as it always has been, a commercial scene, but encouraging particular tendencies, which are intertwined with some of the interests of the museums and major collectors. So you have on three fronts a great change in the attitude towards the training of the artist and the artist's relationship to previous tradition. And each of the three contributed, I think, to the fact that today's young painters are really equipped in a very, very different -- in a markedly different way from anything that happened before 1950.

I realize that's a pretty radical statement, but I think it's very much the case. I don't think there was that much

difference in, let us say, a Seurat, the equipment that Seurat got or that Cezanne got. To take two painters, Seurat had academic training, Cezanne really had very little, but through Pissarro, through the general atmosphere in Paris, he was very competent in his early years in a certain kind of academic drawing and painting and so on, and you see that in the early work.

Picasso was a perfect example of that who had absorbed the traditional skills at a very, very early age. You can say it was his talent that enabled him to do that at the age of 14, yes. But if you had an equally talented young person today, he would not be able to do the drawings. He would not be shown. He would not be required or encouraged to do the kinds of drawings that Picasso could do when he was 14 to the time he was 19, when he had sort of virtually soaked up the whole European tradition during that time, and then went off on his own to radically alter it.

Today's younger people have a very, at best, I think, a very sketchy notion of those qualities that made up the traditional equipment of the painter in Europe or anywhere. And I think that immediately conditions everything else.

Well, you could say, "Well, if the market was such, if collectors demanded work that had this kind of quality behind it, if the collector was, for example, like Leo Stein was in relationship to Picasso and Matisse, where he recognized those elements in the work that tied that work to the strengths of the European tradition -- if we had collectors like that today, perhaps art students and art faculty would have a somewhat different attitude about what ought to be learned in an art school." But that is not the case.

MR. BROWN: What instead happened with collectors?

MR. KAY: I think collectors have been far less sophisticated, much more involved in a kind of trendy, with-it quality, and much less involved in anything that you could call aesthetic quality, which is new. I think that the people who bought pictures in the past were really somewhat different, even when they were nouveau riche, as in the nineteenth century in France.

So the kind of collector you have and now, in more recent years, the kind of museum official that you have. So you've got all kinds of people whose names I don't want to get into, actually, in directing museum departments, if not the whole museum, who also are products of this kind of attitude towards visual art, which at the moment seems to be very political. But given the span of these movements, whether it's Pop Op or whatever you have, you can expect that in another 10 years there will be another focus, another difference.

MR. BROWN: When you, for example, taught at the Museum School, the head of the museum over there, the Museum of Fine Arts, Edgell was something of an art historian.

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: And then his immediate successor Rathbone was likewise trained in art history.

MR. KAY: Absolutely.

MR. BROWN: These were --

MR. KAY: It wasn't only the training though. I mean, I don't doubt that today's curators are also trained in art history.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Or at least underwent the courses at the college they attended. But something about the attitude is really quite different. I know one person who's very, very intelligent, amiable, a functionary in a local museum, who really was very well educated and whose specialty was nineteenth century French art, but who seems to favor really work that has absolutely no connection with the tradition at all, and has hung exhibitions of contemporary work which are, you know, so far away from anything that you could connect with that tradition that one has great difficulty in telling a student that drawing is useful.

There was in this institution an exhibition of feminist work in which one of my students, a graduate of one of my classes, participated. She can draw very well. But you don't really see it in the work that was exhibited. And so I'm saying that -- what I am saying -- I'm not taking a position about what the museum ought to be doing. I'm just saying that, given what the museum and the collector and the gallery world is putting together, you couldn't expect the educational establishment to go off on a completely different tangent; and indeed, it hasn't.

So these things are all intertwined. And now and then you have some school that, for one quirky reason or another, stands aside from all of this, as BU did for a number of decades. There's a school in Portland that, for a long time, seemed to have very traditional painterly orientation.

MR. BROWN: Portland, Maine?

MR. KAY: Yeah. And that's changed, I think, with the change of director and faculty. But I mean, now and then you get what I call a sport, a freak school, where it's as if they don't realize what has happened since 1950 in the art world -- 1960, I should say.

But by and large, this is the combination that has given us, you know, what we're getting. If you open the New York Times on an art day, you'll get various reviews, or *TheNew Yorker* magazine, or something. It's really as if most of the standards that -- most of the qualities that were regarded as important up till relatively recently have been abandoned.

Now, does every old man talk the way I'm talking? Maybe. But I don't think -- I think there is a qualifying difference today from what was the case when people first looked at abstraction or first looked at Matisse, or first looked at Beckmann. There was a certain shock in the change of language. But if you read contemporary -- criticism that was contemporary with that work, you see that there were people who immediately saw the connection.

Today, to see a connection is a negative. I mean, the critic will write about an artist's work, and if it is connected, this already shows a kind of hopeless, uninventive, uncreative traditionalism. I mean, I think that I could point -- I have a boxful of clippings that I could back my statement with, you know, in terms of criticism.

So, well, with the critical establishment and the other parts of the scene, you have a big change in the art school. So what there was at BU was essentially a traditional Museum School approach. But it wasn't just the Boston Museum School. There was a kind of homogeneity of approach in many of the American art schools in the '40s and in the '50s.

They weren't identical, but they all aspired to the same. They all thought, for example, that it was useful for their students to have course in perspective. It sort of went without saying. It was boring. It was something you had to take. But it was assumed to be useful. Anatomy, the same way -- figure drawing, the same way -- these things were just dropped from the curriculum. And by now, it's rare to find an anatomy course in any school. If it happens, it's held up as a kind of novelty and a selling point in the catalog.

But -- and figure drawing, well, they still pay a little lip service to it, but with nothing of the intensity that used to be the case where students would draw from the figure five afternoons a week or five evenings a week, however they scheduled it. It was assumed that you needed about, you know, 10 to 15 hours a week for four years to even begin to learn to be a draftsman.

Now, in most art schools, you know, they might give them one semester in four years. I was on a panel that was supposed to be reviewing a local college, a Massachusetts college -- Williams, if you want to know, and which is a school that doesn't lack funding or intelligent students or good faculty. And we were reviewing their studio program, this panel that I was on, at the behest of the administration.

MR. BROWN: This was within recent years?

MR. KAY: Well, within the last decade.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: One of the questions was, "We give them a semester of basic drawing. Do you think that there should be a second semester in the required curriculum?" And, you know, I was speechless. I said, "It used to be required four years of -- and how many hours a week do you draw?" "Well, about three hours a week." [Laughs.] In that one semester -- so, you know, it's like comparing an anthill to Mount Everest, I mean, the difference in scale. It's just a quantum leap.

So, you know, this may be good. It may -- I think it's bad. But it's certainly -- nobody can quarrel with the notion that it's different. It certainly has changed.

MR. BROWN: Now, you think it's bad because the results you see are being shallow?

MR. KAY: I think it's bad because --

MR. BROWN: Rudderless?

MR. KAY: Yeah. Well, I don't think they're rudderless. I think they go very hard in a particular direction. I think that the work -- I think it's absolutely essential that a young painter have the ability to respond to everything he sees outside, to be interested in it, and to be able to recreate it in some way in his own personal language, his own personal work.

Now, the problem is that if you limit his skills too much at the beginning -- well, I'll put it to you another way. That we generally can express ideas only to the extent that our vocabulary allows it. If you limit the vocabulary too much, you also limit the content of the idea that can be expressed.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: So when you've only got -- if you try to talk to somebody in a language that you know imperfectly -- I have an imperfect knowledge of German, let's say -- and if I start to talk to somebody who is German about why I'm going to vote a certain way, let's say about welfare reform, all right? How much can I actually say with my wretched vocabulary? Very, very little. And I wind up practically grunting.

I think it's very much the same situation. If you don't give a visual vocabulary to a student -- and that's something that can be taught in the same way that language can be taught. You can get a good English teacher in high school who will teach students how to write a decent, declarative -- decent expository prose. You may never be able to teach every student to write a sonnet that's as great as Shakespeare's. You don't expect to do that.

But you expect to be able to communicate to that student how he can write clearly, precisely, sensitively, you'd hope, what he feels. If he doesn't feel very much, well, that's somebody else's problem, right? But it seems to me the school has the obligation to give that student a chance to clearly express his opinions and his feelings.

I don't think that current art school education is doing that to the same extent that schools were doing that in the first half of the century.
Now, it may be there were other deficiencies in the old schools. I think there probably were. But nothing is perfect in this world. And what we've got now, or what it seems to me that we have now is a situation where everybody is happy. Not too much of a demand is made on the student. Not too much of a demand is made on the faculty. Little by little, not too much of a demand will be made on the artist.

So you gets what you pays for, you know. Not every society necessarily has to develop a great art in every period. You know, there were times when German music was marvelous. Between 1790 and 1830, you know, there was nobody. In Italy for a couple of hundred years, they had painters coming out of their ears who were tremendous towers of strength. But that doesn't necessarily mean that in Louisiana or Massachusetts it's necessary that we have a great novelist every decade and a great composer every decade.

I think, though we have dominated -- it's interesting to me that American art has dominated the international scene over the last half century at precisely the time when I think it had the least real substance. I don't know. Somebody looking at things 50 years from now will have to look back and decide, you know, whether or not this was all an improvement or a retreat. I don't know.

MR. BROWN: Do you think perhaps rather than the art itself dominating was the sort of whole mystique of America's eminence?

MR. KAY: Well, you know, I don't really know.

MR. BROWN: Part of that?

MR. KAY: I don't really know. It certainly was the case that the art emerged as influential precisely at the time when the American economy, the American military situation -- when America really, in a political, economic sense dominated the industrial world. And it seems that as the American -- that that dominance seems to have declined over the past couple of decades. At least America isn't the only power center in the world, as it was perhaps in 1950.

To some extent, the influence of the American art has declined, too, and that you begin to get the emergence in other places of other art, which seems to me not to be any great improvement. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: I understand that, as you talk, that by the '50s when, for the first time, American -- New York art became a world fashion --

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: -- that that art which became fashionable was not quite to your liking?

MR. KAY: Well, I don't think --

MR. BROWN: It didn't pass your inspection?
MR. KAY: I would put it that I am less interested -- was then and am now less interested in the general mode of Abstract Expressionism and some of the styles that followed it than I was in what preceded it. In other words, to

me, a painter like Jackson Pollock doesn't hold a candle to a painter like Braque or Rouault or Matisse or Beckmann or Kokoschka. I mean -- and in fact, I can think of very few painters between 1950 and today that seem to me to have the kind of substance, the kind of variety, the kind of expressive force that the major figures of the first half of the century have.

Now, maybe there were people 75 years old back in 1930 who were saying that, you know, about Rouault, Matisse, and Picasso in relationship to Claude Monet and Sisley. I don't know. But that's just the way -- there are individual painters. Gorky, I think, is a genuine painter. I mean a painter whose work I'm always interested in seeing. There are others. But I'm not saying that nothing has happened since 1950 that interests me. That wouldn't be true.

MR. BROWN: What of the group that came along briefly in the late '60s, early '70s, the Super-realists?

MR. KAY: Yeah, Estes, people like that?

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. KAY: Well, to me, their work -- I'd have to say first of all that I have not seen a great deal of that work firsthand. I've seen reproductions. I've seen some, you know, single -- I have not seen a large show, for example, of Estes. And it depends just who you're talking about. Leonard Anderson is not a magic realist. But I think he's a real painter. And he's something of a cross between a naturalist and a classical painter. I think he's very -- to me a very important painter and a very good one, very solid painter.

Painters of the other stripe of the photo -- what you'd call a magic realist, a photo -- the work smells to me too much of the photograph. It seems dead. It seems unpainterly. It doesn't seem to have an inherent geometry of its own that keeps the thing alive.

It's like a photograph. I guess I have to be on the other side. I'd have to feel that photography -- maybe it's an art. I don't know. But it isn't in the same ballpark somehow as painting. The photographer doesn't have the choices to make that a painter has to make over every inch of his canvas. And to be responsible for options all the way through -- he can frame the work. He can change the contrast, and so on. But he is really very much within limitations that are, it seems to me, much more stringent than the limitations on a painter.

In any case, the painting that derives from the photograph -- look, there are very good painters who have worked with the photograph as the basis of their work. Lautrec did that, Monet did that. All kinds of painters utilized photographs. But you have the sense that when Degas used a photograph, he used it as an aide to his memory for positioning or for gesture or something. But he understood the drawing and the structure of the form.

Most of the people today who are using photographs as the basis of their work seem to me really to have no prior knowledge of the form and are just copying the superficial -- what they can make out of the photograph itself.

Half the time, it seems to me they don't really understand what they're looking at -- the curvature of a shadow edge, sometimes a very subtle thing. If you know the form, you know that it is a concave arc. If you don't know the form, you might mistake it for a convex arc. And what happens then is the form gets very flabby all the way through. The significant portions are not separated from the insignificant ones.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: So if you ask me what I think about that work in general, most of it bores me to tears.

MR. BROWN: Now, curiously, you talked about the loss of the mooring in most art education of sound fundamental training. Some of the super-realists formed a group 20 years ago, sort of a [inaudible] school to teach life study and drawing.

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: Perhaps simply that’s the point you made.

MR. KAY: Yeah. I think there is a kind of little tiny blip of a counterculture happening now because there -- well, a lot has happened. You know, I mean, if you read the criticism back in the '50s, anything that was figurative or narrative was derided. I mean, the notion that art could be involved with storytelling or something like that was a relic of the '30s and to be despised.

Today if the read the criticism, anything that doesn't have a narrative, preferably political, point is somehow -- they haven't quite gotten back to the phrase of "bourgeois aestheticism," but they're getting there,

you know. So that, yeah, these things go back and forth.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. KAY: And I think that there's no question that painters are going to be interested in representing the figure and in getting as much information as they can as to how they can lay down a foundation for themselves in doing that.

The danger, of course, is, you know, that when you get these reactions, that you go back to a kind of academic deadness that, in a sense, won't solve anybody's problems. But, you know, that's the way the pendulum goes, back and forth.

MR. BROWN: And Boston University, you were there through '89?

MR. KAY: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. BROWN: Were you able, and did you feel that your school at Boston University was able to uphold the solid foundation and training through its curriculum?

MR. KAY: Well, that's certainly what we thought.

MR. BROWN: Otherwise tumultuous.

MR. KAY: That's certainly what we thought we were doing. I don't think we felt we were carrying the cross of traditional values or something. But I think everybody -- I think the people that were -- there was a big difference in the BU faculty in one sense. We never subscribed overtly or any other way to the idea of a spectrum faculty, which was very, very popular through the country. You had one Abstract Expressionist, one Constructionist, one Realist, one Surrealist, one Impressionist, or whatever, you know, a sort of smorgasbord of people. The students could go and pick whichever one they wanted to study with in graduate-level schools.

We never really tried to do that. We -- I think the faculty committees that were responsible for appointments and recommendations for appointments generally looked for people who had the kind of competence that could fit into the existing program. The result was that you assembled a group of people who were pretty much united about final objectives.

So you'd have a sculptor like Harold Tovish, who might have a particular idiom in his work that was different from, say, Nick Edmonds, who was also teaching there. But both of them realized that -- well, both of them professed that fundamental knowledge, let's say, of the figure was very important to the sculptor, however he went from that. He might become completely abstract later on. But that this would be a very, very useful thing to teach at the beginning.

But that at the same time, it couldn't be just a copying of the superficial aspects of the figure, but that it had to be an understanding of the figure with an attempt to penetrate somehow the significant structure of it. Significant in a visual sense.

MR. BROWN: Now, in your own case, you were one of the first teachers hired there. Can you give an illustration of people you later brought in to complement what you were offering? You were mainly teaching then. We haven't talked about just what you were teaching.

MR. KAY: Well, I taught many things. But at the beginning, I sort of filled in in all kinds of courses until we got faculty. So I taught perspective. I taught anatomy. I taught even design one year. I taught basic painting, advanced painting, materials, and techniques.

Once the faculty was enlarged, I sort of was usually teaching the figure course of painting, which was second to the last year of the undergraduate program. The major -- the students had selected the course as their major subject. So they worked with me for 12 hours a week. And usually, a drawing -- often, a drawing -- advanced drawing section, which was a course required of painting majors. But there were many sections of that course. Often, I tried to get my painting students to take their drawing with someone else. Because all the majors had to take advanced drawing, so I would often be teaching sculptors or something like that in the drawing course.

The course that was a course that nobody else ever taught at the school, besides myself, was the materials and techniques course, which was a subordinate course to the -- it was required for painting majors. Other people could take it if they want, and occasionally someone did. But usually, it was a very subordinate course, but required of painting majors. And I taught that. So that was my principal function in the school after the first few years.

MR. BROWN: So for example, you taught advanced drawing?

MR. KAY: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. BROWN: Did you, or rather the department bring in -- who were some of the other people who were brought on? And were they people who believed in fundamental --

MR. KAY: Oh, yeah. Well, Bob Dorista came up from Washington.

MR. BROWN: Bob Dorista.

MR. KAY: He died some years ago, much too young. Other people, Jim Weeks, taught advanced drawing.

MR. BROWN: He was from the West Coast?

MR. KAY: That's correct, from San Francisco.

MR. BROWN: Did he teach under you?

MR. KAY: Yeah, somewhat. I mean, a different nuance, let's say. I think he was perhaps very much more interested in composing the image on the page so that the compositional structure was more a question for his students. But he expected his students to be able to draw convincingly a head or a hand or a figure in space, whatever, or a still life.

So there were differences of nuance. Arthur Polonsky taught advanced drawing; David Ratner did. Each instructor, I think, had his own particular emphasis. But I think there was a common agreement that nobody was going to teach drawing by dripping paint, gouache, on a drawing pad or, you know, drawing with your eyes closed or something like that.

It was the sense that drawing was essentially a matter of understanding visual structure and space, form and space, and expressing it in essentially monochromatic terms. I mean, the principal difference between the drawing courses and the painting course was essentially the absence of color. And everything else, the same -- other concerns were principally there.

However, the drawing courses were shorter involvement. There were two three-hour periods a week, whereas the major painting courses were four three-hour periods a week. So drawing was regarded as a handmaiden tool or a tool for the major, whether it was sculpture or painting or graphic design or what-have-you.
But necessarily, that the same elements entered into it, of compositional demands and of structural demands and of -- what would I say? -- of expressive demands, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Now, let me ask a structural thing. You said somewhat earlier, after four years as an undergraduate, you figured they had the equivalent of three years at the proper traditional, or an older art school when you came up.

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: Then they were ready, if they wished, for graduate work.

MR. KAY: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. BROWN: When people came from the outside, most of them wouldn't have had that same fundamental proper training that you gave them at Boston University.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: What did you do with them?

MR. KAY: Well, what we -- you point to a question that we faced every year.

MR. BROWN: How long were they expected to be in graduate school?

MR. KAY: Well, the expectation was two years. That's what the student expected. Ideally, that would have been the case. But as you point out, most of the students whom we took were people who manifested in their portfolio a certain spark, a certain quality, a certain personal talent, but very frequently, exhibited deficiencies of training and competence.

So we would often take such a student on the condition that the student was willing to spend one year or two years doing preparation in our undergraduate courses. I would often have somebody who was matriculated as a graduate student in painting in my materials and techniques course, because he had never heard of any of

these problems of a technical nature. So he was obliged to take the techniques course, along with most of the rest of the class being a class of juniors.

We would try to put together a program that was as compact as possible. If his drawing seemed a little shaky, we would ask him to take two semesters of advanced undergraduate drawing, maybe a semester or two semesters of technical painting. Perhaps two semesters at the same time of the senior undergraduate painting.

Then he would be considered for admission into the graduate courses in painting. We made nobody any guarantees.

MR. BROWN: Was this period when --

MR. KAY: Well, it would be one year or two years. It could be as much as two years. It could be as little as one year, and sometimes it was as little as a semester. But no guarantees were given. We could only say, well, we would expect, judging from your portfolio, that after a semester, you ought to be ready to go into the graduate painting course. And most of the time, that's what happened.

Obviously, a student had to be very anxious to come to us.

MR. BROWN: Because he could go somewhere else and be --

MR. KAY: Be in and out in two years.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: But they had -- and the students who came to us came to us because they had gone to -- had visited the other schools, seen the quality of the work, visited our place and seen what our students were doing, and felt that they wanted to do our program.

MR. BROWN: Do you think many another school by, let's say, the later '60s, kind of frightened the students coming in? They would see they were rudderless, that they were in a spectrum faculty, and so forth? And some students wanted to be included in--
MR. KAY: Well, many students were very happy with that situation.

MR. BROWN: But others weren't?

MR. KAY: And some others weren't. I mean, there are always a few unhappy people. Maybe we got them all. But the fact is -- or we got a lot of them. But the fact is we always had many more applicants than we could take. And our program was very small. We only took -- I think it was 10 new graduate students a year. So I think by and large, there was no problem with the enrollment of graduate students in other schools. What I'm saying is that I think there were always people who would arrive on the campus and look at the program, say, "Gee, that looks attractive," and go in for it.

There were some who, for one reason or another, wound up at our place. I assume it was because they -- well, they told us in some instances that they didn't like what they saw in some of the other schools, and they wanted a more -- what they regarded as a more traditional training, education.

So, you know, that's the way we handled it. But it was expensive for the student. And it was somewhat difficult at times for us because we often had to shuffle enrollment around to make a place for these people in the -- we couldn't take too many of them in the undergraduate courses because we were already -- you know, there were times when my junior class already had 20 people in it. To take three graduate students in addition, that created a real problem.

Anybody could take my course in the undergraduate level, provided that they had -- oh, I think it was B-minus grades in painting in the sophomore year. So there was a cutoff point. I could refuse a student in my course, but really not if he had passable grades. I'm not sure if it was B-minus or C-plus.

MR. BROWN: But also, say, you had three graduate students ready to go in your advanced drawing -- that you were going to make demands, it would take a lot of your time working with them?

MR. KAY: Well, that is -- you're absolutely right. That's what happened. But theoretically, that shouldn't have happened. They should have been coming under the same footing as anybody else.

MR. BROWN: They were taking less of your time than the 20 undergrads.

MR. KAY: They should have taken less. But in many cases, they didn't because there was a kind of attitudinal problem. I mean, they always had to be reassured that there was a really a good reason for them to be

studying with people who were at least two years younger than they were and two -- they were further along, theoretically, than the other people in the class.

And yet, their work didn't substantiate that. They saw that very quickly, you know. So the question comes up, you know, "These kids are doing better studies from the nude than I am. Is it really important to do these things from the model?" You know, and so we get into these discussions of why it might be important. So it takes sometimes more time with such people.

MR. BROWN: But you had pretty convincing arguments, didn't you?

MR. KAY: Well, I don't know. I just told them what I thought. I don't know how convincing that was. I mean, most of them stayed; I didn't have many people leave in my class. But anyway, you don't want to give yourself too much credit for that. I mean, they had already moved all their furniture to Boston. They had already paid their tuition. Where were they going to go?

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: I mean, they would have to be very upset to leave. They could easily transfer to another instructor within the school, to another advanced drawing section. There usually were as many as four or five such sections.

And they did. There were people who floated between one and another, sometimes because they didn't like an instructor. Sometimes, they liked the instructor, but after a semester, they thought they'd like to just see what the other guy was saying. So, you know, there would be people coming to me from Ratner's section; there would be people going from my section to Weeks's section. It worked out.

Also, you have no idea. I mean, it also often depended on simply when it was scheduled. My drawing section might run from 2:00 to 5:00 Tuesdays and Thursdays, and that's when their girlfriend had a day off from the job she had, and they didn't want to be tied up then. So they'd go to Weeks's section, which might be from 4:00 to 6:00 on Monday-Wednesday, or something. Who knows?

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: But by and large, I would say that there were not too many cases of people -- that it's a surprising thing that as many students, so many students developed, I think, friendly and healthy relationships to their instructors. That there were very few occasions, I think, where a student felt uncomfortable in anybody's class.

Truth to tell, I think, as I think back on my colleagues, they were all extraordinarily good teachers. I mean, I've seen -- I've visited other classes. I've visited other schools, I mean. And I've been appalled in some cases at what I heard and what I saw. Even the least well-known of the faculty that taught with me seemed to me to be really elegant teachers. They cared.

First of all, for some reason, our generation really cared about the students. I think they really wanted to help the students. And in many cases, they were also willing to stand almost in loco parentis, you know, to really be sure that -- they were bad times. For those decades, from the '60s to the '80s, really there was all that stuff with the drugs and the change of the culture and everything else. I often thought at that time, "Gee, I'm glad that my kids are not yet involved in this, you know, that they're too young to be going through college at this time."

It was a really tough time, I think, to be going through the universities because it was -- there was a big change. I think at any time when there is such a big change, there are people who get hurt because there aren't tracks. I think the thing is that a lot of those kids didn't really know what they were getting into, you know, with these parties and the drugs and so on.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: The strange thing was that art students, I think, were much more stable than the rest of the university. For some reason, I think partly because we scheduled them such long hours in class, that they were thoroughly exhausted when they left. [Laughs.] But I think there was perhaps -- I'm just guessing because I really didn't know about these things. I think there was probably less drinking and less drug use among the art students than was the case among the students in the other colleges at the university, and probably a little less general wildness -- certainly a lot less politics.

I found that during the years of protest, during the Vietnam War, we had student activists coming up to our floor, the fifth floor of the building. And one of them stopped me in the hall, said, "You're Professor Kay?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I've heard about you." He said, "What is the story up here in the art school? We can't get any of the students interested in our movement." I said, "Well, I don't know. They're all very busy in the studio, you

know." "Well, you know, artists are political people, too." I said, "Well, nobody is stopping you from talking to them. But don't expect me to exhort them to get involved, because I have my own priorities here."

But they were evidently in many instances very frustrated that more than -- that there was a much lower percentage of student involvement in the student protest movement of the '60s.

MR. BROWN: Well, perhaps, you said from the outset that -- well, from the outset of the remaking of the school under Aronson, consensus and teachers spending a great deal of time with the students had made the difference in relations.

MR. KAY: I don't know. I just don't know. I don't know that we spent that much time. I mean, the fact is that I think really -- I'd be more inclined to guess. It's pure guess -- that these students were extremely focused on their professional interests. And the professional interest has to be defined a little differently than the professional interest, let's say, of a business school major, that the artist has a great deal of manual work to do, but he's also -- if he's to do it well, he must really be aware that he's dealing with very large problems of human awareness.

You know, you can't just make a head like a cartoonist makes it, you know, as a sort of thimble of a head. You're really trying to remake the thing on a piece of paper. You're really trying to understand. And you have to be asking yourself, "What is that thing that I'm drawing?" And that leads you to all kinds of questions. It may not lead you to religion, necessarily, but it leads you to something that's sort of in that ballpark, eventually.

MR. BROWN: It's leading to your school and your teaching.

MR. KAY: I think any artist -- I think whether he's at one school or another school, if he's really going to be an artist, he -- when you draw a tree, you see this thing -- if you're a real draftsman, you see this thing spurting out of the ground. I mean, it's attached to the ground. And there is a movement through all of it. There's a kind of growth of each branch. If you're trying to draw it, you can't be unaware of that, or you'll get a very dead drawing, terrible.

So eventually, if you stay with it long enough, even somebody who isn't terribly intellectual is going to somehow get to those problems. You begin by just copying. And it's kind of pitiful to see how a high school student just often -- or somebody that age will just sort of copy the surfaces and be very conscientious.

But the more he does it, and the more it's asked of him to think about it, the more he is going to become aware of the notion that he must somehow find out what's essential about that form visually. What is it that you can leave out? What is it that you can put in? When you're drawing the figure, the important thing about drawing the figure is to try to find out what parts are connected to each other.

MR. BROWN: Isn't this where the instructors can step in and guide?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Because most people won't probe.

MR. KAY: You know what a good instructor does? He shortens the time a little bit. That's all he does. If the student doesn't have talent, it doesn't matter. And if the student does have talent, he would have gotten to it anyway. A good teacher can, perhaps, get the student to it a year or two earlier. May be there’s more to it than that. May be an instructor really makes a difference. I don’t know. I really don’t know. You can talk forever about that and in a way I’m contradicting what I said earlier, that when the whole system delivers bad instruction, then it seems that very few people can fight that. It’s a little bit like saying that if the whole society becomes decadent, it becomes harder and harder to be a moral person. Instruction and support can help.

[END CASSETTE 7 SIDE A.]

MR. KAY: Anxious as they were about their own understanding and their own progress in the studio, were perhaps not as quick to go running off to a political demonstration as some other students who might have been bored out of their skin and didn't know why they were -- see, the thing is about an art student is that usually he knows why he's in the school. He is in there for a few years to learn everything he can so that he can go out and become a great master.

MR. BROWN: Was this true of most --

MR. KAY: That's why they're there.

MR. BROWN: Was this true of most art schools that you knew about at that -- say, in the '50s and '60s?

MR. KAY: Yeah. Yeah. Of course, you know, of course, people are sometimes mistaken. They're not going to become great artists.

MR. BROWN: Of course.

MR. KAY: But while they're there, that's what they think, most of them. Some of them are there for frivolous reasons, perhaps. I mean, there were always kids of -- young women of good family at the Museum School who were sent there almost in lieu of finishing school, you know. They could go there, but they wouldn't have made it at another place. Who knows?

But the fact is, I would say that a very big percentage of the class -- and particularly when you're talking about painting majors. These are people who already have made the decision to commit themselves to something which clearly isn't going to pay a lot of money, clearly isn't going to give them a Cadillac every four years or two years. A lot of those people have gone off to advertising, design, or art education already, those who really felt that what they wanted was a job. So the distinction between job and profession becomes very great for a painter, you see.

MR. BROWN: They're committing or not to go to graduate level?

MR. KAY: Or in our case to go to a professional art program on the undergraduate level. So I think all of these things combine, perhaps also the faculty influence. I don't know. Typically, the faculty during those years was, I think, very sympathetic to the antiwar movement. But, not only in the art school, but in the music and theater school -- well, the music school anyhow. I don't know about theater. There was far less involvement in the political scene than was generally -- BU was a very activist university during those years. And in fact, it was a very, very small percentage of the students who got all involved in that while I was -- that I was aware of.

Mind you, I don't claim to know what was -- I kept finding out -- there were other faculty people who knew a lot more about the students' private lives than I did. And I was always amused to be told some bit of gossip about a particular student in my class, usually by somebody who was in another -- a faculty member who saw that student perhaps in an auxiliary course or something like that. But I didn't always know what was going on. I certainly didn't know a lot of the gossip, anyway.

MR. BROWN: Well, you stayed then till retirement, well, till '89 at the university.

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: You said that graduates -- toward the later years, trustees became interested in the school and trustees, I guess, in the university, some of them. Was that, for example, one wanted to create a new curriculum and devoted to -- well, I think you said graphic arts, so I guess a rather more applied --

MR. KAY: Yeah, well, or -- yeah, to devote more of the resources to some of the applied fields. There was a review of the school. Now, I could look it up, but I don't remember the date. But it was quite awhile before I retired. Perhaps it was sometime in the late '70s or early '80s. And there was a visiting committee that was appointed to look over the school and so on. There was the possibility that the character of the school might be changed at that time.

In fact, we got distinct signals from outside that this was very much on the mind of the administration, that it was felt that the school was too focused on only painting and that graphic design and architectural or furniture design were being slighted, and that in general the school was perhaps too traditional.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Or at least, we surmised that they thought. We were always somewhat defensive about that by that time. And that it needed shaking up.

And so --

MR. BROWN: In fact, for 10 years, there was a crafts school established.

MR. KAY: Yeah. That's correct. But it was not established in accord with -- we took the position that we had never been consulted about that and should have been, since it was what you could call a cognate discipline. In other words, you don't set up a school of languages or something without consulting the French department which is in place in the College of Liberal Arts. So we felt that we should have been, but we weren't consulted as they set up that institute of -- program in artisan.

MR. BROWN: Artisans, right.

MR. KAY: Right. I happen to have a personal friend in that program, Don Warnock, who had been at the Museum School with me. We had shared certain technical interests at the time. And I did go over and visit and so on. Many of the faculty didn't even set foot in that building. They were really very annoyed that the trustees had -- it had something to do with Franklin Institute money and so on that the trustees had.

MR. BROWN: Yeah [inaudible].

MR. KAY: So I don't know too much about the mechanics of it. But this was in a certain sense an overlapping program. And there was some talk about combining the two programs, which horrified us because they had set up something that in many ways we did not think was very sound. In terms of accommodating the demands of the university for the liberal arts subjects and so on.

We had arrived at our program over many years of sort of trial and error and negotiation and accommodation with the university. And suddenly to have this rather large faculty come in and vote with us on all issues was a rather upsetting prospect. We didn't fight it actively, but we sort of stayed away from the whole issue, and sure enough, it sort of died on the vine through no intervention of ours.

MR. BROWN: Oh, so you felt that they didn't -- hadn't soundly worked out the relation between the liberal arts and the --

MR. KAY: Exactly. Well, and just their general position in the university. I mean, they had sort of just gone right ahead -- they didn't try to touch base with us. And we certainly weren't about to force our opinions on them. We would have told them things if they had asked us. But it never came to that. Then I don't know why it died, what happened. They had plenty of enrollment. I don't know actually the program was cut out, but it was.

MR. BROWN: Perhaps this gets to an issue of -- began around 1970 came the famously powerful and willful president John Silver. And I think he created a board of trustees that [inaudible].

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: I think among other things he made it known that he liked things which brought money. Now, that program in artisanry did come with funds from the Franklin Institute.

MR. KAY: Right, right. And also I was told, with the personal interest and involvement of at least one of the trustees who was important. So, you know, I don't know. One heard all kinds of rumors. And we didn't really know. I don't like to get into all of that because I've seen in other cases how wrong people can be when they simply go on that kind of general information. I don't really know anything about the program.

MR. BROWN: But the university had a very active student administration beginning --

MR. KAY: Certainly true, beginning with John Silver. And it certainly was -- when he first arrived he said that there were three schools in the university that he thought were first-rate, the medical school, the law school, and the art school. For a while, we were sort of fair-haired children.

You know, the truth is, it's very hard to know with any administrator, and even harder with John Silver. There was a great deal of fear, a great deal of apprehension and looking over your shoulders and so on.

MR. BROWN: Fear of him, you mean?

MR. KAY: Yeah, of possible assaults on the school. It never happened. As far as I'm concerned, we were well treated. I never had any problem that actually occurred, but there was always a generalized apprehensiveness that some interference might occur from administration to the school. The only material case that came up was when this visiting committee was said to be about to propose some radical changes in the school and in the program.

MR. BROWN: Did that turn out to be merely a rumor?

MR. KAY: It wasn't a rumor. It was real.

MR. BROWN: Okay.

MR. KAY: And what we did was to invite the board to meet in New York with a group of faculty from other schools, peer institutions, schools that had graduate programs that were well known in the visual arts, schools like Yale, schools like American University, schools like Kansas City, and so on -- Rhode Island School of Design.

There was a college art association meeting in New York that year. We proposed that they -- at the time of the college art meeting, that they come to New York and meet with a group of eminent faculty from other art

schools.

MR. BROWN: And with some of you; is that right?

MR. KAY: That we would be there at their disposal, if they wanted us there. And let them speak to those people about our program. Ask them what the opinion was nationally.

They accepted the invitation. And we had -- I don't know, it must have been about 10 or so representatives of other schools. Gil Franklin from the sculpture department, D'Arista, Bernard Chaet from Yale. I think Bob Dorista from Washington, from American University.

MR. BROWN: Who had already been at BU?

MR. KAY: Some of them had visited BU, and some had not.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: But they had all had students from our undergraduate program in their graduate programs. And so each one spoke about the quality of the students that they got from us and the nature of the equipment that those students brought to their graduate programs -- how well they were educated, how competent they were.

They went around the table once while we were there, representatives of the BU school. There were about four of us that went up to New York at that time, or maybe three. And then they asked us to step outside while they talked more freely to the colleagues from the other schools. At the end of that meeting, they dropped the whole notion of changing the school.

MR. BROWN: This was a trustee subcommittee or something?

MR. KAY: Yeah. It was a committee that was chaired by a member of the trustees. I think his name was Vermilia [phonetic]. There was a chairperson -- it was a visiting committee constituted, as most such are -- I think the chairperson was Judy Cabot, and the trustee Vermilia just sat on the committee ex officio, but I'm sure had a great deal of influence. Then a group of other people who were on that visiting committee -- a lawyer, Kingsbury Brown; Peter Shermia, I believe. I don't know. There were a number of people that participated.

Evidently, the opinions received from the other schools were such that it sort of put an end to the discussion of the change in the program. And that was the only time that we got any real manifestation of administrative involvement in the guts of the school.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: After that, there were rumors and there were -- I mean, every time you don't get an additional budget request, you begin to see machinations behind the door. But the fact of the matter is, I think we were generally very reasonably treated.

MR. BROWN: You had a long stretch there, over 30 years. And basically, it was a pretty stable situation, wasn't it?

MR. KAY: I could say yes. But you know, I still remember my first conversations when I took the job had to do with the possibility that we would set up a school which we would work very hard to make an excellent school. And that one of the conditions, or perhaps a very important concomitant of all this would be that the faculty teaching there would never become exclusively instructional, but would each have an important professional development on his own, and that it would be recognized that you need time for this, and that I'm not going home to mow the lawn, I'm going home to work in the studio.

That the faculty on its part would be obliged to show that it was participating in exhibitions and was recognized critically and professionally and that the university in the same way would recognize that in order to achieve that status you had to have the time and the resources to do it. So you couldn't be paid like a slave, and you couldn't be worked like a sweatshop worker.

And you know, we all said, "Well, it will take probably three or four years to set this up, to get this program working, to get enough people here to teach it as well as it used to be taught at the Museum School. It should take, well, two to five years." It never got to the point where the thing sort of ran itself and that you came in on a routine basis, did your job, and then got back to your painting. That never happened.

So that was a -- I would say a constant condition of instability. If you want to call that a stable situation, okay. But there was always this yearning for more studio time, less -- you know, a great deal of the time just went into meeting university regulations or meeting administrative requests. I don't think -- I don't know that we were

very unusual in this regard. I think you'd probably hear the same song from most people who taught in most universities.

There was one big difference, I think, in our situation. I think it was different, in that the founding fathers, so to speak, the group of founding faculty for the department consisted of people who were art school graduates, not university graduates. So that in a certain sense, we were unfamiliar with, and you might way unhampered by, the traditional operating methods of the university. So we had to learn some of the ground rules the hard way, you know.

But on the other hand, we were capable of questioning them, questioning their utility, at least, in our case. And so we didn't always do what they asked us. I mean, if we had, for example, there would have been a far higher component of liberal arts studies in our curriculum than there were. We made the case -- we did it very consciously on a kind of debating basis, that in fact many of the studio enterprises were very analogous to the liberal arts.

The concerns of a painter were not that different from the concerns of a writer or a scholar in literature and that therefore it should not be considered that our students needed the liberalization of as many humanities courses as, let's say, perhaps a chemistry student needed because the concerns of the historian of the literature major, of the philosophy major were not that far distant from us.

MR. BROWN: And you were able to make that case to the administrators, by and large.

MR. KAY: Well, we did make the case. It was accepted. I don't know how much attention they were paying or how much they worried about it. We thought that -- well, they pressed very hard at the beginning. I mean, it was certainly assumed that there would be -- I forget how many credits. Out of a total of 128 credits, I think more than half were to be in the general studies area for the degree. We said, "Oh, that's absolutely impossible."

And then we did other things mechanically. What was a three-credit course in chemistry required six hours. A three-credit course in drawing or in painting might require nine hours. So we said, "Six hours plus a three-hour practice period." It's not really instructed, but we will have the model there, we will have the studio open, and we will have a graduate assistant take attendance. So those students will be there for nine hours.

So the result was that we got our hours. We did many things that perhaps were not routine in the university. They were a little different from what used to be the case in the art school. So we were rather a strange hybrid, I think, which I think was probably the case with most university departments in that they were different from the rest of the university and different from art school tradition. Each school probably found its own solution to these things.

But it was a third of a century of constant -- it was stable in that the change was constant all the way through. [Laughs.] And by the end of it -- I don't really believe for a second that we built anything in stone. I think that the faculty that's there now is probably hammering out its own program. And that's the way it should be. I think that they will make their changes and they will develop the program in light of their own education.

Most -- that's what I mentioned before, that I think that we were unusual in that many of us were products of art school training. Practically everybody now that teaches in studio programs in universities are themselves products of university departments. And that really is -- you can see the difference. You could see the difference between Fortess's generation and mine, between my generation and Sid Hurwitz's or Marty Rikes; and we're only about five years apart in each case.

But somehow the experience changed enough. And now the new bunch is just totally different. So I don't know what that's going to mean to American painting, but it certainly will be different from the 1920s.

I was reading -- it's interesting to read what the training of the artist was at the beginning of this century in America and how they found their feet. Whether they wound up as American impressionists like Metcalf or whether they wound up as modernists like Max Weber, you know. I mean, in each case, the design of their early lives, I think, made an enormous difference in the way they worked out as people and as artists.

MR. BROWN: The design? You mean in their first training?

MR. KAY: Well, yeah, their training.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Their family life. I mean, I was reading a memoir of Raphael Soyer's, for example. And the conditions are very similar to the ones I experienced, strangely enough. I mean, the apartment that he describes that he

grew up in -- he grew up in New York, of course. And the way he got into art school and his relationship to his instructors, though different, was very understandable to me. I mean, I knew people like him. I knew him, as a matter of fact, a little bit. I knew the kinds of classes that he alluded to.

It is so, so different from anything that a contemporary like a 20-year-old today who wants to be a painter would go through. It's just institutionally different. The neighborhood is different. The parents are different. The expectations of the society are totally different. So it's kind of amusing to read about a generation that precedes me. And now to look at what's coming down the road, and you wonder.

That's why now and then you see an exhibition of work that has a relationship to the work that one might have seen, you know, in school years, it's really a shock. I mean, something like the Lucian Freud show that came to New York, or the Baltist show that was there before. And you say, "Wow. here still are people who are trying to do something connected to the thing that started me off." Then there's so much stuff that's totally separate.

MR. BROWN: Well, now, Reed, we're starting our seventh session today. This is October 4th, 1996. And I'd like to ask you to talk briefly for a bit about your writings. Particularly the principal one is your book *The Painter's Companion, a Basic Guide to Studio Methods and Materials* [New York, Webb Books, Inc.], which was first published in 1961. Was this an outgrowth of your years of teaching material of this sort?

MR. KAY: No. Actually, I had been, as I told you, teaching courses related to this material at Skowhegan and at the Museum School, and then at Boston University since 1956. And some of us in Boston, having been taught by Karl Zerbe, had an intense interest, or perhaps better to say a strong respect for the importance of the technical side of painting. That is to say the chemistry of the paint and the varnishes and, in general, the materials that we use and the practices by which these materials are put together to make a picture.
For two general reasons, one being that Zerbe explained that the durability of the picture would depend upon the honesty of the materials and the craftsmanship of the artist. And that if the picture didn't survive physically, it would not really represent the artist's thinking in future years and would be a kind of altered version of his ideas, of his images.

Then the second reason, and perhaps the more attractive reason, for our interests, was the fact that by knowing as much as possible about the various materials, one could make choices in the studio between various -- oh, dear. These fellows will be painting right outside --

MR. KAY: The idea was that if you had ideas that could be best expressed in watercolor, it would be silly to try to force yourself to utilize oil paint or pastel or something like that. So some experience with a broad range of practices and materials would give a painter the best vehicle, perhaps, for his development of a visual idea.

So having been involved in the teaching of these courses over almost 10 years, I guess people in the field knew that I had this experience and this interest. And I think through the good offices of a friend of mine, Bernard Chaet, who was teaching at that time at Yale, I got a note from Dwight Webb, who was one of the partners in Noonday Press. And they evidently wanted to put out a basic book on materials and methods.

And of course, there was a certain amount of negotiation and discussion. After a little while, I developed a draft of what I thought such a book might usefully contain and how I proposed to work out the first chapter. Webb was in, I think, Connecticut, living in Connecticut. And the office, I think, was in New York.

MR. BROWN: Did he work very closely with you?

MR. KAY: During the development of the text, as it turned out, we did work very closely together. I had no experience whatever in developing manuscript. And he was very generous with this time and instruction. What started out as a business association, professional association if you like, turned out to be after a while the basis for a very strong friendship which continues to today, actually. We developed the book almost one might say, line by line. I would bring in a chapter, and he would go over it. We would sort of discuss it and discuss whether more material should be added or something should be cut out and so on.

MR. BROWN: Was it much of a leap for you really, to jump from the classroom teaching of this material --

MR. KAY: Well, I never -- the answer is yes and -- it's really no, it wasn't a leap from classroom teaching. In fact, I often used my classroom notes almost verbatim for some of the passages of the book. I've always had difficulty developing text or words, composition, in verbal terms. I don't know quite why, but I'm not really very comfortable either speaking or writing. I'm always -- it seems to me there's always a better way to put things.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.
MR. KAY: And I find it hard to be as precise as I would like to be. I always find after I've written something out or even said something that the sentence doesn't really say what I wanted it to say. So I revise it. That makes it a very drawn-out and painful process. It isn't as if I can just write the thing up. Part of it is probably my high

school education. Having received as much criticism as I did in English classes, I always feel as if it's obligatory to be clear and as free of stylistic flourish as possible.

So anyway, it isn't easy. I don't find it particularly pleasant. There are some things -- for example, I don't find painting all that easy. But there's an element of sort of solving puzzles that's attractive to me in painting or in math. I really find myself getting impatient when I have to develop any kind of -- and yet I've sort of had to do it over the past 50 years.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: So it's a practice that I find very difficult, but I've done it. And the book wasn't any harder to develop than my usual classroom lectures in anatomy or in techniques or in painting.

MR. BROWN: The aim of it was to provide sort of a manual?

MR. KAY: Yeah. Well, there is a very good book in English that was -- that came out roughly at the time when I began my art education, the book by Ralph Mayer called *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques* [New York, Viking Press: 1940]. That is a sort of encyclopedic treatment of all of this material, of paints, varnishes, grounds, supports. Not only the painter, it's the artist's handbook. And it includes material for sculptors, for printmakers, draftsman, has notes on perspective. It is really the book for any artist to own as a sort of one-volume library.

I told Bill right at the beginning that I thought this book would not be replaced by anything, and that it was a complete overview of the field. There are older books, many of them, and I was familiar with them. Max Doerner's book translated from the German was a big step forward on the continent in an interest in this material.

It should be said that, you know, what happened in the late nineteenth century, the latter part of the nineteenth century, was a general turning away from the technical practices and the concerns for craftsmanship that had characterized, let's say, the seventeenth century and out into the eighteenth century when painters didn't go so much to school, but were apprenticed to other painters. And they learned not only the style, but they learned the craft of painting from their master.

This changed as schools -- you know, the Napoleonic period, you had art academies and so on. And gradually, these practices became more and more -- how would I say? -- remote from the studio. Then by the time of the turn of the century, the beginning of the 1900s with the advent of modernism, there was a rebelliousness in general about the aesthetics of painting, which also said that as you threw away a lot of the old restraints of compositional practice and aesthetic practice and taste that went with the academy, you also threw away the technical aspects as well. You became much freer and so on because you were not burdened by the strictures of craft.
Well, what happened was that a lot of those paintings have cracked badly and discolored badly and so on. So there was, of course, the pendulum swung back. By the beginning of the century, there were already -- actually, by the end of the last century, some of the Impressionists were aware of the problems that they had with some of the newer pigments and so on. So there was a rebirth of interest in the craft of painting, and you had the texts in English by Church and the Doerner book in German. And then, of course, Mayer's book in the late '30s, I believe, came out in this country or the early '40s; I don't know.

MR. BROWN: What was it that convinced Webb that there should be such a book?

MR. KAY: Ah, I was just coming to that. It is a very big book. It tells the artist a great deal, but it tells them also a great deal of material that many artists don't feel they have to have. A painter doesn't necessarily need a chapter on stonecutting.

MR. BROWN: You're thinking of Mayer's book?

MR. KAY: Mayer's book, which, as I say, contains a lot of material, and some of it is not the concern of many painters.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: The other thing is, I felt, as I had used it as a student -- I felt that it was not what we would call today as user-friendly as it might be, that its organization was such that if you were looking for a recipe for gesso or something like that, you might find it under the indexed page, but there might be a sentence or two that was really quite important that was buried somewhere in the chapter on encaustic or something like that, where it says that encaustic ground should be more absorbent or something like that, and, you know, you should be using a glue gesso ground.

So the result was that you had to know the text pretty well and skip around in it quite a lot to find what you wanted if you were really interested in technical matters. I felt it could be -- the material could be better organized and more clearly indicated with the practicing painter in mind.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: I think I said so in my first letter to Webb, that if I could do anything at all along this line, it might be to organize the material in a way that would be easier to use for the ordinary painter who is not doing necessarily a very exotic job with materials, which is what developed.

There's a general chapter on pigments. There's a general chapter on binders, oils and varnishes, and a general chapter on solvents. These are the principal ingredients about paint, and then there's a chapter on supports and grounds -- the canvas, the wood panel, the primings, and so on that are appropriate for each one, with as much variety and detail as was consistent with what could be found on the market today. I was not interested in lengthy discussions about materials that were around in the fifteenth century or the eighteenth century, but are today practically nonexistent in the market.

So we cut back a lot on the historical background of a great deal of the material, although personally I find that very interesting. But most painters are not interested in that. And then there are follow-up chapters in each one of the major techniques -- oil, water paints, fresco, pastel, encaustic, and a couple of others. There's a chapter on gilding, I think.

MR. BROWN: Now, in light of what you said, when we were discussing your teaching, many years of teaching, by let's say the 1960s, were there an increasing or a decreasing number of students being told to have recourse to these manuals? Or once they were out of school, were they using them? Getting back again to --

MR. KAY: Well, my impression is that in America during the '60s, there was a general -- in a general sense a turning away from all of these disciplines, whether it was materials and techniques, whether it was anatomy or perspective or even figure drawing, the art school curriculum became less and less specifically communicative of the old disciplines, the old series.

MR. BROWN: But your publisher evidently thought there was a --

MR. KAY: In a situation like this, there is always a residual market for -- both a commercial market and an intellectual market. There will always be people who go to art schools at a period like this and say, "Gee. In the old days they used to teach anatomy. How is it that we aren't getting any anatomy now?"

Now, this might be one student out of 20 in a class or maybe 2 out of 20. It may not even be the best student. Then again, it might be the best student. There would always be that sort of an interest in -- especially, I think, in painting. It may be that it attracts a kind of person who may be very vulnerable to the notion that there is some secret recipe of the Old Masters that will enhance the quality of his work.

Whether it's learning Leonardo's proportional configurations or Durer's anatomical ratios or Piero's mathematical formulae or Ruben's recipe for painting medium, somehow, you know, the whole business of developing a picture is hard enough so that one lives -- many people live and hope that, if we only knew today what they all knew in the past, we could make paintings that would be as strong and as expressive as Rembrandt made or El Greco made or Soutine made.

But, you know, the truth of the matter is that that's a -- it's very good to be informed about your tradition. But that isn't what makes the painting great.

MR. BROWN: Those people weren't going to find that in your book.

MR. KAY: Well, they would pick up the book for various reasons.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Some few people probably got the book, along with other books on techniques, because they were hoping to find an answer to some arcane question. There were other people who were sent to books like this by their teachers. Their teachers might not have even been very well informed themselves, or having been taught well, weren't given room in their curricular program to teach it. Or there were other more pressing concerns. And they would say, "Well, just go get the book and get it out of the book."

MR. BROWN: So your aim was to make things clear.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And cover everything that they needed to know in practical steps.

MR. KAY: Correct. And to make it possible for almost anybody to pick the book up quickly and, well, the way you could pick up a good cookbook and, if you really want to make the biscuits yourself from scratch, you're told, you know, how much flour, how much salt, how much baking soda, and so on. You combine them, and if you know what you're doing in the kitchen at all, if you've got a decent recipe you'll get decent biscuits. I regarded the whole project, at least in one sense, as filling that need.

In another sense, I also thought this was an opportunity to let people know that these things have consequences, that making a good ground not only will cause the picture to last longer, but you'll enjoy painting on it a little more. And you may find your brush slides a little differently on a handmade oil ground or a studio compounded gesso ground that absorbs in a different way. You want a more absorbing ground? You can make it yourself by just adding a little bit more whiting to the mix.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: So there was this -- and also to point people to the best examples of traditional work so that when I discussed something like pastels, after indicating the recipe for making pastels and making the fixative, it was, I thought, useful to not just mention, but to illustrate the book with a Degas pastel or -- and also with the work of somebody who might be much less known, like a Delatour, Maurice Canton Delatour, who was a wonderful pastelist long before Degas and who was probably not very well known to most art students.

So both of those things figured in the making of the book.

MR. BROWN: But you didn't mean it to be formidable?

MR. KAY: Above everything else, not.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Above everything else, it was intended to be as direct -- and in fact, from the mail I got and from the sales we got and from the comments we got when they adopted the text, this was the principal reason that the book was popular and was very -- and what I kept hearing was that it is very very useful and I find it easier to employ than Mayer. I felt very flattered when that was said. I knew very well that it didn’t cover ground with the detail that the Mayer did, nor did it range as far away from the painter’s studio as the Mayer did. But in any case that was the purpose and it seemed to have satisfied at that time, a need.

MR. BROWN: In 1983 it was revised and enlarged.

MR. KAY: Yes, that was the Doubleday edition. They wanted additional material which I gave them, I think, in the gilding chapter and some of the synthetic resins --some of the more recent discoveries. I just want to say that this is by no means the only book that came out besides the Mayer.

[END CASSETTE 7 SIDE B.]

MR. KAY: There have always been, at least in the twentieth century, books of various sorts on painting techniques ranging from little pamphlets that were manuals for housepainters all the way to how to paint kittens and things like that, you know. So this is sort of in that ballpark of practical studio advice, some of it very superficial. I hope not mine, but some of the books are obviously just commercial ventures -- flower painting made easy or things -- how to paint clouds.

MR. BROWN: Published by manufacturers, aren't they?

MR. KAY: Sometimes published by firms who have interests in selling painting materials. And some of the best ones have been published -- Windsor Newton has published, I think, in late nineteenth century some very good little handbooks on the permanence of colors and so on, so the commercial interest hasn't always resulted in superficial quality.

I sort of collected these cases that you see here. These shelves are all various books from various periods having to do with the techniques of painting. Some of the books I find most interesting are books that were put out as manuals for housepainters back in the last century.

But there also were many, at the earlier part of this century, published in America and in Europe on various aspects of artistic painting. So it's a field that has always, you know, had diverse quality of advice and instruction.

So I added this one book, which came out at a time when there were a lot of university departments, and the

book evidently was adopted by --

MR. BROWN: They were burgeoning, weren't they?

MR. KAY: Yeah. Right.

MR. BROWN: Actually, we discussed last session.

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: You also have written from time to time various articles like in '72 for the *World Book Encyclopedia* "Painting Materials and Techniques."

MR. KAY: Yeah. That was a rather --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Yeah. That was a rather long project, where they came to me and asked me for an article, a general article. The encyclopedia is an encyclopedia for kids or teenagers; I'm not sure of the exact age range. But -- and they wanted an article under "art material" or "art techniques"; I've forgotten which it is. In any case, it became a kind of project of trying to write in a very, very compressed way about the various art methods, painting methods. Obviously, it had to be very condensed. Obviously, it had to be correct and precise. And that's often very difficult to do in matters of craft because you can't sometimes simplify what is obviously a very complicated question.

For example, fresco painting -- you can say it's painting on damp plaster and let it go at that. But that doesn't leave the reader very much further along than if you just picked up the dictionary and looked it up.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: So the question is, how much detail do you include? And I really worked -- I think I worked harder on that article than I did on the book. I sent -- I think it was the better part of a year's work, and I sent it in. When I got back the galleys, I almost fainted. I mean, they had just completely -- it was something that had never happened to me before. They had completely rewritten it in a most -- what I regard as a kind of barbaric way.

MR. BROWN: Distorting things?

MR. KAY: Well, in some cases, they did. They evidently had a style. I guess that's not unusual for magazines and for encyclopedias. And they wanted this to read consistently with the rest of the text. So they evidently had in-house writers that take the material and rewrite it. In some cases, they completely lost emphasis. In other cases, they really just changed -- they changed the actuality of the description or the accuracy of the description.

Well, we went round and round. I finally -- what finally came out was a kind of compromise between the two.

MR. BROWN: What was it you understood the aim of such entries in an encyclopedia?

MR. KAY: Well, I thought it was so that a young person who perhaps had an assignment from his history class to look up fresco painting would be able to consult that World Book Encyclopedia and find out how Michelangelo painted the Sistine ceiling and what the difference between that was and, let's say, and oil painting of the same subject. What really went into the making of a picture as a physical object, and in what way the physical fact of the picture in a sense limited or dictated the ideas that come from the picture, at basically the same premises that were in the book. Only, they were intended to inform younger people with less sophisticated interests.

So one wanted even more to be accurate, and as always, to write in such a way as to interest the person and not drive that person away. You know, I had had that experience very often in looking things up as a student. I would read a passage in an encyclopedia and find myself so bored by the way, it was written.

Just the accumulation -- as a matter of fact, one of the big encyclopedias that exist today, *History of World Art*, is one of the worst-written things I have ever seen. I mean, I had the 15 volumes on my shelf here up to -- for quite a long while. I sold them -- finally decided I would never make use of them. They are generously illustrated, and the illustrations are fine. The photographs are wonderful. Text is likely translated from European sources.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: And I found it absolutely useless. I checked with other -- with scholars. I don't consider myself a

scholar. And I got pretty much the same response from everybody. So it can be -- those things can be horrible. It can just be a compendium of dates, names, and --

MR. BROWN: But you felt that what you did for the World Book for younger people --

MR. KAY: Well, I was hoping that it would be a lot more interesting than --

MR. BROWN: This took a lot of time away from your teaching and, particularly, your work.

MR. KAY: It did indeed. It did indeed.

MR. BROWN: You were at various times submitting articles. I think the first one was in '72, and then as late as 1988.

MR. KAY: Well, they kept -- after that first article, which is a very long one -- I have a copy of it here -- because it covers most of the standard painting techniques. Then they wanted separate entries. Every year or two I would get a letter asking me if I would write something about gold leaf or something about collage, you know, so that they would have an entry in that subject in the other -- one of the other volumes of the encyclopedia. These were usually very brief. Most of the time I said yes. After a while, I let them know that I would no longer take the time to do that.

MR. BROWN: I've wanted to ask this for a bit. Lecturing -- I mean, apart from lecturing in school on the job, have you always given a certain number of outside lectures?

MR. KAY: Yeah. Actually, when I was in the school, I generally felt that it was a good thing to accept invitations if they were -- if I got asked to talk somewhere else. I generally said yes. I thought it was almost part of the job, you know. I mean, you represent the institution. You're in a certain sense connected with other people in the field. And so if I was asked to go to RISD and give a slide talk or something or another, I did so. And I continued to do that through almost right up to the retirement time. These things were never very easy for me. Usually, I over-prepared, I think.

People told me that they were very pleased to hear me, and they often asked me back a year or two later to repeat the lecture or something related to the lecture. So I can only think that it was an adequate effort. But I never felt -- I never felt very comfortable doing it. It always felt to me like declamation at art school, you know. [Laughs.]

In fact, I still remember when I was asked to give a talk at a school in Washington, D.C. I just about memorized the whole thing. It was about a one-hour lecture. And I just about had it memorized word for word before I went down there. Afterwards, people said that it was wonderful, that I could talk spontaneously, to that extent. But it wasn't really spontaneous at all.

MR. BROWN: I was curious. That lecture, I guess, at the Washington Studio School in 1986, you've listed.

MR. KAY: Yeah, that was probably one.

MR. BROWN: And you called it *The Painter's Choice*.

MR. KAY: Yeah. That was probably a talk about the possibilities of choosing different -- choosing one of several materials or methods of painting.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: There were three lectures at Columbia that --

MR. BROWN: Studio problems?

MR. KAY: One had to do with techniques. Another had to do with -- I became towards the end increasingly interested in the problems -- I'd always been to some extent interested in problems of health as the materials relate to the artist's health. The reason for this was that the -- let's see. What was it, about 1946 or '47?

After the war when I got back to the Museum School, a student at the Museum School died. She was a remarkably fine woman, Glenna Miller, came from Marblehead, and came down with leukemia and died. In those days, I think they could do less for such a case than they can do now. She had been using paint remover. She had this hobby of refinishing frames and furniture. And she was working, as I understand it, in her home in Marblehead down in the cellar without any ventilation or with inadequate ventilation.

After she died, two physicians from the Department of Occupational Health, State of Massachusetts, came and

visited the school, looked into the case, and made some recommendations. They were Dr. Elkins and Dr. Hardy. And I understand from later conversations that they were very important in the whole field of occupational health.

The result was that the school administration put out a notice to the students advising that paint removers made with benzol were very dangerous. Well, we had been told that in our techniques class, but it hadn't been absorbed sufficiently by most of us. And that in fact, the commercial products that were then on the market were lethal -- were lethal. To stay away from anything that contained benzol.

I read that notice to each one of my classes, right up to the year 1989. I mean, the notice was, I think, 1947. I have a copy of it in my file. I read it every year. It always impressed the students and should have. It was rather just a straightforward thing from the two doctors -- well, from Russell Smith, who was the head of the school at the time. But he was simply reporting on the authority of Dr. Elkins and Hardy.

As it happens, I think, much later, much later, decades later, the Federal Government has ruled that material off the market. And you don't buy paint removers now that contain benzol. What we had back then was just pure benzol with a little paraffin in it, you know.
MR. BROWN: This must have been one of your concerns underlying your desire to lecture.

MR. KAY: Right. So that I found that artists in general, and students in particular, were just totally ignorant of the most basic things concerning the health -- the effects on an artist's health of the materials that the artist was using.

So one of the Columbia lectures had to do with toxicity of artists' materials. And that became, incidentally, much more -- much better known field in the last decade or two. Along with the general concerns for the environment and pollution and all of that, people started to think a lot more about health in the workplace. Artists are usually the last ones to be informed about these things because they're not organized, they're not unionized, they're not considered as a very large population in the general community.

So it seemed to me very useful to let people know that some of the pigments, some of the paints that we use are toxic, that you don't work with flake white and then sit down and eat a sandwich while your hands have some of that on them, and so on.

So there was that.

MR. BROWN: Would you say that, by today, more artists are aware of these things?

MR. KAY: Oh, I think so.

MR. BROWN: Than they were.

MR. KAY: In fact, as happens in many situations, I think people have become -- some people have become over concerned or concerned in a way that isn't particularly constructive. I mean, if you get to the point where you think that everything is tremendously dangerous, then you lose all sense of proportion.

There are people who think that turpentine, for example, is as toxic as benzol. As a matter of fact, I saw an article in a local newspaper once -- somebody had written a question saying that he was an art painter using oil paint with turpentine, and is this a safe practice? The doctor writing the column wrote back and said, "Well, there's been a study in the Scandinavian countries indicating that housepainters using turpentine suffer from all kinds of neuropathy, very bad brain damage," and so on. "You should switch to something else, like paint thinner, petroleum distillate."

Well, I looked at that, and my heart sank. I thought, "Geez, I've been poisoning my students all these years." I called the man. He referred me to a couple of -- three papers that had been published in various medical journals. My son got them for me. He was at that time an intern. And it turns out that the good doctor had read the papers and seen the word "turpentine," but it was turpentine -- it was mineral turpentine, which is the European phrase for petroleum distillate.

So that he was -- the subject of the study was not the turpentine that we and the Europeans use. It was what the Europeans call white spirit, or mineral spirit, or mineral turpentine. And he had glanced through the paper and written his column on that basis, advising people to switch to petroleum distillates.

Now, the interesting thing is that some of the petroleum distillates, some of the things we call paint thinners that those housepainters right outside the house now are using have very high concentrations of aromatic hydrocarbons, benzol and toluol and xylol. Depending on which paint thinner you get -- there's blue label, green label, and white label -- red label -- the blue label can contain, as I understand it from the company, as much as

16 percent aromatics. The red label might have 6 percent, and the green label or the odorless thinner might have something under 1 percent.

Now, if this fellow that wrote to the doctor dropped using turpentine, stopped using turpentine and got himself a can of the blue label mineral spirit, he would be probably endangering his health a great deal more. So you see, there is this concern sometimes, which it seems to me gets panicky and really operates to the disadvantage -- it's counterproductive in a certain way. But yes. Certainly today there are many more -- especially also because many industrial products have been used in unorthodox ways in the studio.

A great deal of the radical work of the '60s and the '70s -- radical in the aesthetic sense -- also employed new materials, synthetics that were really intended for industrial use that were not packaged or tested for artistic use. And some of these things, epoxies, things like that, were being used in the studio and were causing a great deal of health problem. Robert Mallory, a sculptor at the time, wrote a very important -- excuse me.

[tape stops, re-starts]

MR. BROWN: Mallory wrote?

MR. KAY: Mallory wrote an article for *Art News*, I think, in 1968, called *The Air of Art Is Poisoned*. And I used to read sections -- I used to distribute copies of that article, portions of that article, to my class. Let me see what the date is.

MR. BROWN: This says October 1963.

MR. KAY: Yes. The article was published in *Art News* in October 1963. And it describes the medical problems that Robert Mallory ran into when he was using various industrial products for his sculpture. Things like that were really happening all over the art scene and I think he did a great service by calling people's attention in the profession to this.

As I -- you know, as I kept teaching the courses and giving the lectures, I emphasized this aspect of the technical materials problems a little more than my teacher had, although we were warned when we studied back in the '40s, you know, to beware of lead, which was a component of the white paint at the time, and to be careful about other solvents as well.

MR. BROWN: You were more at the pleasant level. You've always, of course, been interested in problems of art conservation. And I noticed that you have talked on that topic, but you also fairly recently, 1988 and '89, acted as an advisor at the MFA in its research laboratory, the Museum of Fine Arts.

MR. KAY: Yeah. I'm not an advisor. Well, I don't know what you'd call it. I'm on the Board of Visitors for that department. And we meet a couple of times a year. It's a rather large committee of, oh, about 15 people. Other conservators and technical people -- I think there's only one other painter on that committee. We function with the department in the museum to make suggestions to them in terms of their relationship to the museum and to the mission of the museum.

I'm not technically competent in conservation, but I have been involved in various -- there was a large conference that was sponsored by the Getty Foundation having to do with the education of the conservators. And there is an area where the techniques of painting overlap with the concerns of the people who have to somehow or another get the pictures back together again when they fall apart. So they deal with the inherent vice, as they call it, the flaws in a picture that are brought about by the mistakes that the painter makes. The painter should be aware, it seems to me, that this is going to be part of a life of his picture, his idea. And there ought to be a certain amount of mutual interest and a certain amount of exchange of information between the two fields.

Unfortunately, there's relatively little conversation between the painters and the conservators, not because of any ill will or disrespect, but just because both groups are so busy with their own particular concerns that they really haven't made the channels to communicate with each other that I think would be healthy for both groups.

MR. BROWN: Do you think you're exceptional in your interest, or have been for some time, in techniques and in conservation of art?
MR. KAY: Well, obviously -- obviously, I've been -- yeah. I've been somewhat more specialized in this regard than many of my friends who are painters and who have a certain amount of respect for all of this, but aren't about to spend the amount of time and concentration that I have spent. And it was more or less just happenstance that I got into it.

MR. BROWN: Which was through your teaching --

MR. KAY: Well, it was partly that I had been a good student in that course and partly that somebody -- that there was an opening to teach that course at one particular time. The job was there, and I took it. I found myself getting more and more interested in it and better and better known as someone with that interest. And one thing sort of -- the thing just sort of builds up. It wasn't as if I had this all planned at the beginning that this was going to be a major area of interest for me. It was and still is very much an auxiliary field, something that's subordinate to the major issue of painting.

I mean, it's all very well to paint a picture that will last in good condition for 300 years and to use methods that aren't going to make the painter sick. But if the picture hasn't got much expressive or aesthetic worth, who cares? [Laughs.] I mean, what's the point?

MR. BROWN: Right. Well, we're turning now to looking at slides of representative examples of your work. The first time we did, which was a couple of times ago, we talked about things that you were working on, I suppose, into the early 1960s when you began moving more and more into landscapes or some of, say, cityscapes, given that your usual subject is the city.

And this is a time when you also were having exhibitions in Boston, particularly, but also elsewhere. I think at this time that Boris Mirski, we talked about a bit already, was your principal dealer here in Boston?

MR. KAY: That is correct, yeah.

MR. BROWN: You had worked for at some point, had you?

MR. KAY: No, I have never worked for Boris. I had worked for Margaret Brown.

MR. BROWN: Margaret Brown.

MR. KAY: Charles Harris Frame Shop, which was owned by, or in partnership with Margaret Brown. But I had known Boris and come to his gallery since the early '40s.

MR. BROWN: Now, was Boris a man who would try to bribe his artists to do certain things?

MR. KAY: No. Not that I'm aware of, certainly not in my case. I had my first one-man show with Boris in 1965. But I had been associated with the gallery before then. Actually, the first exhibition of paintings that I had in Boston, first solo exhibition was with the Kanegis Gallery. I think I told you that before.

MR. BROWN: In 1956?

MR. KAY: '56, correct.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Sydney Kanegis?

MR. KAY: Right. And those pictures were mostly the pictures you've seen before, *TheCostumers*, *The Trattoria*, the pictures that were done either during my stay in Europe or just after it in the very early '50s. The show was in '56. Afterwards, I became a member of Merske's group of painters at his gallery. And I was painting from the studio in Haymarket Square. As you rightly point out, I began to experiment a little bit with landscape painting, painting through the window, looking out on the buildings of the North End, and did a rather large group of paintings of mostly the rooftops that could be visible above the Southeast Expressway as it passed through Haymarket Square.

MR. BROWN: That's the --

MR. KAY: That's that green monster.

MR. BROWN: That fairly new elevated road --

MR. KAY: That's correct.

MR. BROWN: -- that goes right through the heart of old Boston.

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: Well, this is a good example, isn't it, of what you spoke of the other time? Every portion of this canvas looks to be rather activated, doesn't it? From the way you've done the distant clouded sky to every roof, not to mention the rust of the expressway on a diagonal.

MR. KAY: Right. I think at that time my interests in landscape painting were dominated perhaps by my affection

for Kokoschka's paintings, which are dramatic, highly dynamic, I think, having always a large sweep to them, a great sense of movement. And I think I saw the city in terms of these large movements of forms, of streets, of ramps, and so on.

This particular painting, which is a view of, on the left the North End, and on the right some of the older buildings in Boston, the old granary market and above everything else or through everything else the ramps of the Southeast Expressway.

Actually, it's the first painting I did outside the studio. It's done from the roof of a building across the street from the studio, on the other side of Haymarket Square from the studio, actually on the North End side. The building is still there. It was at that time owned by a firm Castaniete, which makes -- used to make tuxedoes and things like that. There used to be a yellow sign across the skyline that said, "Castaniete."

I went up to that building with a drawing pad and asked if I could go up on the roof and make a drawing. They were very nice and allowed it. And after I had worked up a couple of drawings, I thought, "Well, maybe I'll try a painting out here." I had not worked out of doors and didn't know how it would be. But I got permission, got up there.

That sort of was the beginning of my sort of working outside on the spot and trying to finish the picture on the spot. It never occurred to me to take the picture back to the studio and rework it in any way.

MR. BROWN: Was this a fairly bold step to go out of the studio [inaudible]?

MR. KAY: Well, it was for me. Yeah. It was for me. It is a perfectly traditional thing to do. Painters have been doing it -- I didn't make any great discovery. But I had not been trained that way. I had been trained in the art school to work indoors.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: There's a whole set of little problems, of carrying the material over, setting it up outside, having the sun in your eyes, having the wind blow the canvas around. All of these things I was totally unprepared for.

But above everything else, there's a sort of shock of the way you see everything out in the outdoors. The light changes fairly rapidly. Within a half an hour, a shadow may be in a totally different spot. It's very different from working in the controlled light of the studio or the -- I shouldn't say controlled, but it's relatively immobile.

The light comes in from the north side of the building. It's simply bounced light, reflected light. The source is usually in the south. And then reflected light is put back in through the north window. It therefore doesn't cause a great deal of movement in the room. So a shadow from a still life or a model stays pretty much in the same place in a north-lit studio.

Out of doors, it's a -- first of all, everything seems -- seemed to me, still does, much more vibrant. The lights are lighter. The darks are darker. The colors seem to me to be more intense. There is such a wealth of material. Inside the studio, I generally spend a lot of time thinking, "What can I put together to make a picture?" Outside, it's always a question of, you know, "How can I deal with all of this stuff?" I've got to throw out or simplify or subordinate or in some way step down a lot of it so that there will be some sort of point, some sort of readable image at the end. Because, you know, there is just so much out there, you want to eat it all up. [Laughs.] It's like being in the middle of a pastry shop. It's marvelous.

Anyway, once I was out there, I was sort of hooked. And strangely enough, you know, it's an experience I never had while I was in art school. It did resonate, in a way, though I won't say that it came to me altogether unexpected. I remember thinking while I was still in art school, as I would come home from the Museum School through Roxbury late in the evening or late afternoon, and see the tenement buildings with lights in the inside. It always struck me, I don't know, in a sort of emotional romantic way.

I always thought, "Gee, it would be very nice to be able to show the feeling that one gets walking through a city just in terms of a sort of -- I still can't put a word to it. It's just that behind all of those windows, something is going on. These houses have all sort of grown up almost the way plants grow up, huddled next to each other.

They eventually make a form of their own in a city that begins around, let's say, a river or a bay or something like that or grows on a hill, the houses sort of mass themselves almost -- well, I suppose the way coral does on a reef or various plants -- ivy grows. And there's usually a kind of connection between them. That's the word I want, kind of an organic connection.

MR. BROWN: And in the act of painting outdoors, do you sense that?

MR. KAY: You see it. You feel it very much. I do anyhow when I used to look at the city. Now, I'd have to say

now, in 1996, that I no longer find that feeling very often when I'm walking through Boston, that it's been, as far as I'm concerned, changed to such a marked degree by these large buildings, which have --

MR. BROWN: Sort of have this junction now.

MR. KAY: -- which have no scale at all with either each other or the old city. So that, you know, I don't have the impulse anymore that I had back in the '60s when Boston was still very much -- I was told it was very much the way it had been for the previous five decades. I was told that scarcely one new building of any consequence had been put up in Boston until roughly 1957 or something like that when they tore down the Mechanics Hall on Huntington Avenue and put up the Prudential.

MR. BROWN: The Prudential.

MR. KAY: But before that, I think it was Cabot who told me that his father said there hadn't been a new building since the 1920s or something like that.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: He was a collector who came once to see some work here that I had and seemed to know the city well.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.

MR. KAY: In any case, I found myself still very much at home with most of it. As I told you before, growing up in the West End in Roxbury and all of these buildings, the particular color of the brick and the detailing all had for me a kind of sonority that I liked a great deal. And it just gave me all kinds of things to paint.

MR. BROWN: You were very happy that you -- at this time with this subject and with what you were doing?

MR. KAY: Right.

MR. BROWN: It sounds like things were coming together.

MR. KAY: Right. And the ease with which the access that one could have to it. It wasn't really that difficult to set up to work.

Let me go on to other --

MR. BROWN: About what period was that?

MR. KAY: That? I'd have to look it up, but I think -- let me see. It would have been 1959 perhaps or '60, something like that.

MR. BROWN: The exact date doesn't matter at this point. Now, are we looking here at --

MR. KAY: Now, this --

MR. BROWN: What is this one?

MR. KAY: This is just a little further on, and it's actually the Cottage Farm Bridge and Cambridge as you look at it from the Boston side, from Commonwealth Avenue. And the configuration of the river and the bridge and the houses gives a kind of shape variety and the color variety that I think -- you know, I find very dramatic, very appealing. The only problem I always have with things like this is, where do you frame them? How do you cut them off? Nature being so continuous, it sort of would be in a way more suitable to do an immense scroll, you know, stuffing it way on the left-hand side of the horizon and going as far as you could see 360 degrees.

The business of framing a particular fragment of this so that it doesn't come out looking like a little fragment taken from a larger work is always, for me, compositionally a problem. And I envy painters like my friend Jason Berger who seems to have an unerring ability to find an intact set of shapes that come together and make a unit and pick this out of a larger context somehow. I've always had great difficulty in focusing on that.

MR. BROWN: This, unlike the expressway, it seems to me to have less of a sort of harmonious sort of activity throughout and rather, I think you're stressing, aren't you, a bit -- some differences, like the bridges? There are two bridges that wade through that?

MR. KAY: Right. And it's sort of the bump that the bridge makes in the end as it settles down to the other side. And I think the shapes do that, too. The arc of the bridge kind of collides with the Memorial Drive on the other

side, that diagonal.

I was intrigued. At that time, the building behind the bridge was a kind of storage building, and there was the RCA Victor dog and megaphone you see on the top of the building. It was an advertising thing there.

MR. BROWN: You've got a lot of changes in scale there.

MR. KAY: Yeah. Well, I think that's also, to me, very interesting if you can integrate them. I think the notion of smaller shapes against larger ones always gives a kind of variety to the picture that corresponds a little bit to the variety that one feels looking at the landscape. To me, a landscape made up of simply very large planar forms would be beautiful -- could be beautifully serene, but not really corresponding to my feeling about the subject matter itself. So I do like to juxtapose a chain, if you like, of smaller forms that winds its way through the picture against some rather larger elements of sky and river bank and so on. I personally think that if a city has a river and a hill, it's almost impossible for it to be ugly. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: Because here we certainly do have contrasting shapes.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: But there is a balance between small -- different ones you mentioned and the larger form. Is this pretty much what you saw, would you say? Or did you take liberties?

MR. KAY: No. Yes, it's exactly what I saw. I make it a point, and I search very hard. I try very hard to stay exactly with what's in front of me. I may simplify. That is to say, I'll try to get the large lines of a building where they belong, where I see them retinally. What is the height of the building in relation to the other buildings, in relation to the bridge -- what's its perspectival placement? I may leave out a group of windows and simply block in the side of that building.

Because the truth is, if you focus on one thing, you really don't see everything else around it in terms of detail. So that it's possible that in some instances, smaller forms may be, not so much deliberately left out as left unstressed and they become part of a larger plane on which they sit. As I say, like buildings on a wall -- if I put them in, though, they'll be the right height, the right number, and, as much as possible as I can do it, the right tonality.

So that what's there, is really out there without any exaggeration or change. But there may be emphasis on certain things that I find particularly compelling. So that tonally speaking, I might reduce detail in the water of the river in order to maintain the contrast between the river and the small bridge passing next to it.

Now, that to me isn't distortion. That is the only way I could find to represent that immense difference in tone between the two of them. If I started fiddling around with little portions of waves or something like that, I surely would lose the major impact of that solid form against the atmospheric [inaudible].

It should be kept in mind this is a very small picture. It's owned by Professor Leo Marks. And it may be 15 inches by 20 inches, maximum, so that on that scale also one tends sometimes to simply block in a form, try as hard as possible to get its tonal weight correct -- that is to say, the degree of darkness or lightness that it has -- and chromatically to develop it in terms of whether it's warm or cool or whether it's purple or green. So you're looking for a maximum of color intensity.

But I would qualify that by saying that what I mean by the maximum intensity -- to me, most colors, practically all colors that I see in nature, are in some way deviations from pure color. It's very, very rare to see a pure green, for example, in nature. If you had a color chart in front of you, you're really not going to see a pure green in a tree. What you'll see is a green that is somewhat modified by a certain amount of red or a certain amount of orange, which will turn that green slightly off the pure green.

Now, what I mean by "maximum intensity" is that you -- it isn't that you paint that green pure brilliant green. It's that you include as much green as you can put in that would be consistent with what you see up there, and as much red or orange in that mixture as you see up there. So that you don't distort it. You are really -- if you leave out the orange, if you purify it to the point where you intensify the green, you'll be losing the orange component in that mixture.

MR. BROWN: And that would?
MR. KAY: Well, that would in my view distort the color and not give you anything like the color space that you can get when you get that mixture exactly where it should be. Now, that's a very naturalistic approach to the color.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] thereby finding consonance with all the other elements in the scene?

MR. KAY: Exactly. That if when you get every area up to its maximum intensity, that is to say, the blue area, which contains a little bit of yellow or a little bit of orange, and you get enough of that orange and yellow into that blue and enough of that -- see, the thing is, most painters, myself included, very often at the beginning, it's -- the sky is blue, okay. You paint it blue. If it's close, it's good enough. But if you leave out that little bit of yellow that's in the sky, eventually some yellow passage in the building isn't going to look right, you see? And then you're going to have to make alterations there. It's only when they all consistently hit together that you get finally a kind of registration of the total atmosphere.

Now, this is, as I say, a naturalistic point of view. Gauguin, according to Cerusia [phonetic], said exactly the opposite. He said -- well, not exactly the opposite. But his advice was to stylize completely. You see it's blue, make it the purest blue possible. You see it's red? Take your best cadmium red and put that down. And the result is what you get in a Gauguin and then later on in some of the Fauve painting, something that registers with enormous intensity all over the place, but there's no attempt made for a kind of coordinated naturalistic atmosphere. You're looking for an icon or a kind of Cloisonné enamel, tremendously --

[END CASSETTE 9 SIDE A.]

MR. BROWN: There is dissonance; it’s disjointed.

MR. KAY: Or there's a lack of that kind of wonderful resonance.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: I wouldn't say it's necessarily disjointed, but I would say that it doesn't have the kind of wonderful atmospheric resonance that one has, let's say, in a fine Corot or a Pissarro or a Monet or a Titian, you know. I mean, God knows I don't say one method is better than another. I say that for me that's what I've become interested in. But at this stage, back in the early '60s, late '50s, early '60s, I wasn't consciously aware that that was where I was going. I was sort of heading into it without -- I was discovering, for example, color possibilities that I had never tried out in the studio, where I had formalized things much more.

In other words, I found out that all shadows aren't brown or gray. I would look across the river there, and part of a hill would look positively violet or positively blue. Well, if you start putting that down, pretty soon you're looking and you find that some of the building shadows on a red building aren't particularly red. They may be greenish or something like that. And you begin -- I began to find that sometimes if on a red building you got the shadow towards the violet side, you didn't have to make the shadow as dark as you might have if you simply added umber. So the result is, the whole key of the painting could go up much higher, which opened up a much wider range of light possibilities.

I mean, these aren't particularly new discoveries in painting, but they were new for me.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Well, as a process it seems to me, now that you've gone outdoors, you're excited and it's tremendous possibilities. At the same time, you want to a degree in the end -- you've become gradually, not this very moment, probably will do some more, but you're not so consciously aware of the need that you want to -- what else can I put in the picture to make it? What you used to ask yourself in the studio. Subconsciously, this is coming up as you're outdoors, too, isn't it?

MR. KAY: Well, not so much. As I say, outdoors it became much more a question of finding things and viewpoints that could be worked out in terms of shape and in terms of pattern in terms of color in a way that would satisfy me as a -- you know, just as an aesthetic configuration on the canvas.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Based on what you were looking at?

MR. KAY: Absolutely. It had to be -- it meant finding motifs in nature that would have pictorial possibility. And Boston was a wonderful city for that. You have to keep in mind again that this was all new territory for me, and I think with more experience one begins to find one isn't quite so dependent on finding an ideal subject. One begins to find pictorial material in many more places than had previously seemed possible. But that's a rather long process. I mean, over years you find that you can use the branch of a tree or a lamppost or an automobile or something like that in a certain way.

You also find that some of these things have more significance to you than others, either because of some sort of an abstract or -- well, I don't know why one leans towards certain shapes, certain combinations. But one does.

MR. BROWN: But you were looking for certain things?

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Okay. So I accept that. And unlike the studio paintings, they're much less constructs.

MR. KAY: Absolutely right.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] you are --

MR. KAY: Absolutely right.

MR. BROWN: In one way or another, certainly in this case pointing to a piece of public sculpture?

MR. KAY: Yes. That's right at the corner. It was at that time on the corner of Boylston Street and the Fenway. It's a piece of -- or who is it? I've forgot the sculptor's name, and that's just a terrible lapse on my part. Daniel Chester French, perhaps. I'm not sure. That piece has been moved now a little further down the Fenway. It's still here in Boston, this monument.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Somehow, it was the relationship of that large tree form on the left, looking through that to the monument, out down towards the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street. The red building on the right is what is now the Institute of Contemporary Art, that fire house that was converted for the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art.

These were all pretty much small pictures because, again, working out of doors, I found that it's very difficult to keep these relationships of color and value consistent with each other when you're working on the spot from the light, which is changing. Everything is rather like the sundial. And the light side of a building at, say, 11:30 in the morning becomes the dark side of the building an hour later after the noon hour. So that one has to work rather rapidly or at least try to get these things down in consistent relationship to each other.

This is much easier to do, for me, on a small format than it would be in a larger canvas. So many of these pictures are less than 18 by 24 inches in size, largely because of the exigencies of the situation of working out of doors.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: It's also, in a lot of cases I'd have to carry these things around with my paint kit. And that weighs about 15 pounds. And then the larger the canvas, the more every little breeze acts on that surface as wind on a sail. So you try to keep things manageable.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] tremendous changes in scale.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: The [inaudible] this sort of banal nude skies highlighted your skyscrapers against the nineteenth century structures and spaces.

MR. KAY: Right. That's Kenmore Square.

MR. BROWN: Kenmore Square left over from the '60s and '70s.

MR. KAY: Yeah. That would be early -- late '60s, I believe. I should be able to give you that date.

MR. BROWN: This is --

MR. KAY: Yeah. This is 1972, and you have the Prudential Building on the right and the Citgo sign in the middle of it. And this was a little sketch.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Again, small?

MR. KAY: This one is small. But I did a large one, which is owned by Bill Webb.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: Yeah, 36 by 40 inches. This thing must be probably 12 by 15 inches or something like that, something in that ballpark. And it's owned by a local collector.

MR. BROWN: Now, this is an example, certainly, of consonance and in terms of tonality, but you do have these done in tremendous changes in scale of the subjects.

MR. KAY: Well, that's one of the problems in the new Boston, and I really felt I wanted to try it. I found it an awkward thing to work out these relationships. I think perhaps if it's saved at all it's by the diagonals of the street, as you get Beacon Street coming down there. But I became -- I did a whole series of paintings from this spot, mostly to the left of these buildings because just to the left of Fenway you have the old Liberty Mutual building. You have the whole river and Storrow Drive, and they really seem to me to be of great interest.

This is a view from across the Boston Common of Charles Street and Beacon Street, that corner. And that's pretty much the way it was back in the early '70s. I rented a studio in the little building for a brief period, something like three months. I did a series of pictures from the window there, looking across the Common.

They begin to move -- if you -- one might say that they are less expressionistic, they are less driven by a need for extremely fast diagonal motion. They are certainly not distorted for any expressive purpose, not in a deliberate way. And they attempt very much to get the tonal and color changes from the middle distance to the background. Those receding planes of the river banks and so on that you see there gave me -- were the most interesting things to me to back up the buildings in the foreground.

MR. BROWN: This is very obvious that I haven't commented on, but all of these so far have been from a higher elevation.

MR. KAY: Well, the reason for that is simply that in a city like Boston, it's really rather difficult if you want any kind of wide panorama -- very difficult to work from the ground. If you put your easel down on the Common itself, you might see a small fraction of this scene, but you certainly couldn't see it all. Also, there just is the inconvenience of working on the ground. People bother you.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. KAY: There's traffic. There are interruptions, and so on. If you can be up in a room looking down, you're always a little more private and a little more secure. Even if you're on an exposed roof where the wind can blow around, at least you don't have dogs and kids and so on.

MR. BROWN: Sure. But you also seem to like these elements, whether of color or diagonals that knit things together and then more perceptible.

MR. KAY: From an aerial point of view.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: This is absolutely right. I think that's very, very true. But compositionally --

MR. BROWN: Some of your earliest training --

MR. KAY: Well, it goes back -- no, it goes back to the earliest landscape attempts from the studio, where I was up on the fifth floor looking across Haymarket Square.

No, the other part of it, really the earlier training was, of course, figure and portrait, which were in the studio and you're on the same level as your subject.

MR. BROWN: Sure.

MR. KAY: Well, this one is done from the ground. It's a view of Beacon Hill from Cambridge, the other side of the river. And on the other side of the Longfellow Bridge, it's owned by Wellington Management Company. It's a small painting, also.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: I guess the thing there is that I just decided to -- this is pretty typical in a way of one of my problems. This was done -- this started off as a sketch. It's small. It may be 12 by 15 inches. And it was a sort of reconnaissance, you might say. I thought I would try doing the hill, and I just masked off the buildings as they tower above the hill, those big blocks of the new buildings.

MR. BROWN: They almost become the background, almost lost along there as if they were clouds.

MR. KAY: Like a screen.

MR. BROWN: Almost like the cloud.

MR. KAY: Exactly, exactly. That was all I could think to do. And I thought, well, one or two sittings, and then I'll go to a larger canvas. I had found a pretty good spot on the other side of the Charles River, not too many people, not too many cars or anything else. I could see well from there.

Well, I just on the third sitting thought, "I could just make that green a little bit more telling," or "I could redraw those houses a little bit." To make a long story short, I spent the better part of two months, you know, going out every morning and pecking at that thing for an hour-and-a-half or so. I had two or three other paintings going from the same spot.

But what started out as a sketch became a small painting that was carried about as far as I could carry anything at the time.

MR. BROWN: There is a great complexity of direction and --

MR. KAY: Well, I felt that complexity. One of the things that always -- that is always a problem for me is, as I went over these buildings -- and there isn't a spot in this picture that isn't out there. I mean, every little bump in the red or the green or the little flick of white is in the scene and it's at about that -- it's exactly in that location, and I would hope it's the right color and tone. And if the painting has any merit, it has that.

As I looked, I saw this tremendous orchestration of directions and shapes, movement in that hillside, building up right up to that golden dome. I never felt completely that I had gotten it as intensely as I feel it. I don't want to -- and I didn't want to exaggerate it. I didn't want to over-emphasize it. I felt that if I could see it and feel it, it must be out there. So what I have to do is get it.

And, you know, time after -- I tried several pictures. I don't know if I included the other slide. No, I didn't. But I did a larger version of this, where I went -- I changed my mind and included the tops of the big buildings. This one is owned by Steve Payne, Wellington man.

MR. BROWN: Wellington man?

MR. KAY: Yeah. And the other one is owned by Steve Grossman, *The Mass Envelope*.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hm [Affirmative].

MR. KAY: And it's a rather different treatment of the same material. But in both cases, the real emphasis is on that interplay of diagonals in the houses on Beacon Hill. But I was obliged to include the rest of it. The problem is, what do you do with those things if they don't present to you -- if they don't present to you material that you really are fascinated by?

MR. BROWN: You mean what do you do with the larger forms? With the river or the --

MR. KAY: Oh, the river was fine. I mean --

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: The big buildings, those big new buildings, which I would have loved to have gotten to that scene knowing what I knew at that time, having the experience in painting that I had at that time. I would have loved to have gotten to that scene 25 years earlier.

MR. BROWN: Before they went up?

MR. KAY: Yeah, before those other buildings went up.

MR. BROWN: But nevertheless, in this version, by cutting them off, they do recede.

MR. KAY: Yeah, but they're sort of -- they're there. I suppose one of the things is that, 40 years from now, the relationship between those buildings -- well, it has a certain kind of narrative. It has a certain kind of narrative worth in that, you know, it shows Boston as it was developing. Even now, if you go back to the same spot in Cambridge, those larger buildings are not so isolated any longer. They have thickened in a great deal with other large buildings. And some of those large buildings now present some of the complexity of interweaving shapes that you had with the smaller ones.

MR. BROWN: I see. [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: At that time, however, these were very isolated. They were very lacking in integration, with each

other or with the old city. And I regarded them as a kind of intrusion in the old landscape. Maybe the picture, in a certain indirect way, reflects that.

MR. BROWN: Now, this one here looks much more flowing, more integrated, almost -- I mean, by the nature of the scene, practically.

MR. KAY: Well --

MR. BROWN: What was the -- was it down Storrow Drive?

MR. KAY: This is, yeah, down Storrow Drive.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: Yeah. I'd forgotten the title of the picture. But it is Storrow Drive seen from Commonwealth Avenue, from a high building on Commonwealth Avenue. Again, it's a rather, in a certain sense, a kind of awkward thing compositionally because you have this diagonal running right down to the bottom of the picture with nothing to stop your eye. Conventionally, one would like to retain that inside the picture a little bit more firmly, frame it.

MR. BROWN: The drive in the middle?

MR. KAY: The drive in the middle, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Street on the right?

MR. KAY: No, the street on the right, I think, works out. The drive in the middle -- that channel right through the middle of the picture becomes a problem in painting.

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: And you resolve it, I think, to the extent that you can make those parts integrate well with each other through the placement of the paint, through the drawing. Again, it's -- I don't know how to tell you these things. But it's a question of the way the thing is painted. In other words, you could trace the outline of that avenue, that drive, and the trees and houses onto the left and to the right of it. Four different painters could fill it in four different ways, and it might in two cases work out beautifully and in two cases look like a wretched mess.

Not because they're not skillful, but rather because there isn't the kind of feeling for a compositional integrity that the thing has. So it's always a question of working it out as you paint it. In my case, it isn't that I come to the picture with already an idea of how I'm going to solve the problem. Painting the picture generally is the process through which you make the thing hang together.

MR. BROWN: That's important, then.

MR. KAY: It's very important.

MR. BROWN: It's true in all of your work, isn't it?

MR. KAY: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: It's in the process?

MR. KAY: The process itself --

MR. BROWN: It either emerges or it doesn't?

MR. KAY: Right. Exactly. And that's the hope you can't find in nature. I mean, I knew that right at the beginning just by looking around, that nature does not contain pre-painted pictures. It isn't as if you can point yourself at some aspect of nature, copy it down faithfully, and you'll have a picture. I think it's very important to say that.

My position has always been that, yes, I'll be faithful to nature. But there has to -- something has to happen in the process of painting that will pull everything together and give it a point and give it some kind of pictorial integrity, pictorial interest, if you want. This isn't a process of adding anything to the picture. This isn't a process of deliberately leaving anything out. It's a process of somehow or another finding vital connections in the pictorial material.

It exists out there, but it's up to the painter to find them. And each painter, I think, finds different ones, you see. The material is there. It's not something that I bring to the picture and I impose on the natural material. I

think there are painters who deliberately do that and produce great pictures. But that isn't the way I go at it. I do not deliberately impose some kind of organizational material on top of a natural motif. It's that I hope to dig it out of -- it's in the motif if you dig hard enough, it seems to me.

MR. BROWN: Excuse me. Do you lay out drawings or anything like that?

MR. KAY: Well, I don't. Now, that's again something -- I used to do a lot of that, a great deal of preparational drawings, color sketches, and so on, which is a natural outgrowth of the way I was taught in the studio. Landscape works for me a little differently. I have a notebook, which I take with me almost anyplace I go. And I make brief notes, more to remind me to come back to that particular spot. If I see something that looks at all possible, I've learned a long time ago that what looks possible at 11:00 o'clock on Monday morning on a bright sunny day may look absolutely uninteresting and dull Thursday afternoon at 4:00 o'clock on a cloudy day. Just, you'll look at it and say, "What did I ever see in this?" you know?

So I've learned to grab it before it melts. And I sort of scribble it down in a notebook. I usually note the time, the date, because seasons change things a lot, too. I have piles of notebooks, you know, with these sketches in them. Some of them are rather finished drawings; some of them are just the briefest scribbles.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] you used to do? Is that right?

MR. KAY: No, I do a lot of those drawings. But they are not necessarily connected. I mean, let us put it this way. I can do 15 drawings, and maybe one of them -- I come back to the place where I did one of them and do a painting. But there will be 14 that never get painted, not necessarily because they are uninteresting or bad drawing or anything. It's just that I never got back to that spot. I couldn't live long enough to get back to all of these spots.

Some of these drawings are done in 15 minutes. Some of them are done in two hours. But they all have -- the one connecting thing is that they -- they are potentially -- the drawing is undertaken with the notion that this might be a place I can come back to. Don't forget it. It's just very easy to forget things, you know.

I mean, you see something at an intersection while you're waiting for a streetcar. And then a week later you're thinking, "Geez, I'd like to start a picture. Where can I go? I can't think of any place to go." I thumb through the drawing notebooks, and I say, "Oh yeah. Corner of Washington and Beacon Street. I'll set up there." So that's what the drawings are for, really. They are sort of memos to myself that say, "Go back. There's something going on there."

This is a return to the same place where I did the previous Storrow Drive picture, but it's five years later.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. This would be --

MR. KAY: Yeah, I think something like 1979 or something like that.

MR. BROWN: And by now it's --

MR. KAY: It's a little more built up, as you can see.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I see. Marvelous continuity within the tonality.

MR. KAY: Well, I threw out, as you'll notice, a lot of the -- Storrow Drive in the foreground. And I cut off my foreground much closer to the mass of buildings in the middle distance. So I wouldn't have to deal with that long channel and that big diagonal coming right down to the base of the picture.

MR. BROWN: If you look back to your earlier cityscapes and now these that are 15 years ago, roughly speaking, were you striving for greater harmoniousness, would you say?

MR. KAY: Well, that's a nice way to -- it's nice you put it that way. The answer is no, I wasn't really consciously thinking of that. But they do seem to me now, looking back at them, to have lost, if you want to put it that way, a certain dynamic violence that the early ones had -- tended towards. They seem a little more serene and I'd hope a little more harmonious.

But all of that is just a result of getting more and more involved with trying to put it down as it actually is out there. That was not a primary consideration at the beginning. But as I looked more and more, I just wanted more and more to -- I just sort of fell in love more and more with what I was seeing and I wanted to get it down. I mean, accurate -- I've become, I think, at this period anyhow, sort of obsessive about getting everything proportional. It's a pretty good topographical record of that particular strip of Boston. I think if you compared it with any kind of a mechanical record, you'd find that it coincides very, very nearly with what is out there, I would hope with a little more presence than a photograph would have.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I'm with that. Botanically topographical record -- you couldn't characterize these as that. You wouldn't want to, would you?

MR. KAY: Well, I wouldn't want to.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. KAY: I think people who are hostile to this kind of painting would characterize it that way. But my intention is not that.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: But I do respect what's there. I have enough affection for what's there. Well, I don't know if "affection" is the right word. It's just, you see a group of colors and shapes together, and you say, "Gee, that's gorgeous. Let's try to get it."

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KAY: And if that means simplifying another passage so that will stand out a little more strongly, that's fine. The light usually does that anyway. In other words, the natural effects get to me to be more and more attractive. I think I impose less and less of a stylistic manner on these things. So I suppose they're becoming more naturalistic, I would hope more harmonious. But it isn't as if I would say to myself, "Gee, that red stands out too much. I'd better tone it down" and tone down what is out there. If it's out there and I like it, it shouldn't be necessary to change it.

Do I like everything that's out there? Well, not necessarily. But generally, if I don't like it, I don't paint it. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: You go to where you like it.

MR. KAY: Yeah. Right. This is a pretty good example of the same kind of thing. This is a view of -- I'm just trying to think what the date was. I think it's '89? Yeah. This is Beacon Hill from Chestnut Street, not very far from where your office is.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And it's just a series of the rooftops and the chimneys that are up there.

MR. BROWN: This is certainly an example of something of the kind of light, even with many of the forms, the several series of forms there in series.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: I must say a good spot, repetition.

MR. KAY: Absolutely, absolutely. That was one of the things that intrigued me about it. And there is a kind of -- actually, this painting is closer to some of the very early paintings from Haymarket Square than it might seem to be as you first look at it. The rather large delineations and the obvious brush marks are not there. But what still is there is that kind of perspectival plunge of the roofs as they go down towards the river and I think a somewhat stronger better marked-out color differentiation.

There was the case from Haymarket Square where all the color was brighter, but it didn't separate as much into middle distance, far distance, and foreground as this does. So I regard this as one of the most successful pictures that I made during this period. And I did several of them. They were done from the rooftop of a friend of ours who has a house on Chestnut Street.

MR. BROWN: And this -- you feel that this seems -- whereas the early work was still more agitated, wasn't it?

MR. KAY: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Lightheaded.

MR. KAY: I think so. I think the underlying drive is the same in this. I mean, the large dynamic, the large sweep of the things is here. But it isn't made so obvious, it isn't underlying. And you have to live with the picture a little bit before you feel it. But it's there, I think, very much in that band of houses and chimneys on the right as that goes down towards the river.

The interesting thing is that the owner of the house, who is a very good photographer in his own right, after I had done the picture, tried to make some photographs from the same spot, complained afterwards that somehow or another the picture sorted out the distances -- far distance, middle distance, and foreground -- in a way that he said he seemed not to be able to do with the photograph. But eventually, he produced a photograph that really did a great deal of what the painting does. It's kind of interesting to put the painting or a reproduction of the painting and that photograph side by side. They look very much alike, and yet they do look quite different, one from the other.

MR. BROWN: What do you suppose that was? Was it a larger panoramic format he had done?

MR. KAY: No. I think that his problem was essentially the -- it was black -- he works in black and white.

MR. BROWN: Oh.

MR. KAY: And I think the panchromatic limitations of the film, the chemical limitation of the film to respond really sensitively to color nuance is the thing that makes the difference.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: In other words, you can have two tones in this picture that are the same value, the same degree of darkness. But because they are chromatically differentiated -- one would be a middle blue and the other one might be a middle violet -- the blue tone drops away into the distance very firmly.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KAY: If you have them reduced by the film chemistry to the same gray, that move in space is not going to happen to the same extent.

MR. BROWN: No. No. And this is [inaudible]. And this is --

MR. KAY: This is at the same time, done from the same roof. The wind came up. I really couldn't work. I couldn't trust myself to work on that set of chimneys because the painting was far enough along so that I really was afraid, and the wind was shaking the canvas very hard. So I just put it aside and took up another panel, which was considerably smaller. And just did this in a single session.

Mostly just was trying to study the tones of the sky in relationship to the landscape tones. It's always a huge problem for me. I think, again, something that I never was told in art school because we never talked about landscape very much. But really, you have to set the landscape up so that the large relationship between the sky and the ground plane, whether it's water in a river or a meadow or something like that, a road, a highway -- but those two tones have to be absolutely resonant, absolutely right.

If the sky is too light, if it's too dark in relationship to the ground plane, you can do the most elegant painting on the detail, on the building, on the tree, whatever it is, and there's going to be something dead about the picture. The picture will really come to life only when those very big planes of sky -- because the sky is a plane. I mean, it's like a big inside of a dome. And the flat of the water or the road or the land, the prairie, whatever -- when those two things are right in relationship to each other, then you can get the dark of a window or the light on a chimney or on a roof.

It's strange. It's not so easy to do that because in nature, the range is enormous between the sky and the ground. And your paint doesn't have that kind of range. So you're always messing around with those two big -- how light are you going to make a sky? If you make it light enough, it's probably going to be so white that it won't have the color intensity that the blue has. So if you get the blue right, the -- if you give it enough blue pigment so that it has that intensity, then you're forced in a certain sense to drop darks of the ground plane down to a point where it then becomes very difficult to register shadows on it.

I mean, somebody like Cezanne or Pissarro -- Pissarro in the '70s, Cezanne in the '90s -- did some things with landscape that -- I don't think people realize how extraordinarily true and strong those paintings were. But nobody has done it with that kind of absolute presence that some of those painters got. Never anything arbitrary about them. They are absolutely on the button in that regard.

MR. BROWN: Do you often begin by addressing these problems of tonality?

MR. KAY: I try to, yes.

MR. BROWN: Problems between the terrestrial and the sky?

MR. KAY: Yes. I try to. However, in any painting that's sustained for any length of time, which I find that while I

might knock those things in with as much attention and as much firmness as I can at the beginning of the picture, if I return to the motif the next day to continue, very often that relationship has changed.

So I begin to mess around with it a little bit -- darken the sky slightly, pick up the ground plane a little, whatever -- and that's when you get into -- that's when I get into trouble. And, you know, I do the best I can. Compromises are inevitable, and you just try to solve that problem as well as you can.

But, no, that remains for me the problem all through the painting. Generally speaking, when I have gotten that solved, I know I'm pretty much through with the picture. The rest of it sort of drops into place. But somehow I've done many paintings where there's been elaborate workup of smaller units in the picture, be they houses or trees or what-have-you. And then I look at it again, and I say, "Oh, for Christ's sakes. It's all wrong because it doesn't work with the sky."

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KAY: Now, here you've got an example of a painting where you catch it -- all that is suggested is that that blue of the sky at the horizon line -- the sky isn't even completed. But the statement is made that that's what we're keying the water to and the buildings to. As long as the sky has that kind of blue presence, then certain things follow in the development, let's say of the dark of that kiosk. In the foreground, that particular blue has to be that blue and another blue as long as that sky stays that way.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. So this is a view of --

MR. KAY: This is done in France, actually, in a small town in Normandy, Saint Valatie. And there's a drawbridge there, a little bassain [phonetic], they call the harbor, where it comes in off the ocean. And there's a little harbor with a drawbridge and a marina.

MR. BROWN: Is this a –when was this done?

MR. KAY: About 1990, '90 or '91 maybe.

MR. BROWN: Are we still talking fairly small a format?

MR. KAY: No. That's about 24 by 30 inches. That's a pretty good size. I was very lucky with that one because I was able to rent a room right opposite the bassain, right opposite the harbor. And it was only on the second floor. So it brings -- it cuts down a little bit on that feeling of the aerial view, which I frankly find a little bit tiresome. I mean, it isn't tiresome in the sense that in itself it's bad. It's that it does -- it gives you the advantage of a certain kind of pattern. You're looking down -- if you get up high enough, if you went up to the top of the Prudential, it's almost as if you're looking at a map, right?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: You're looking straight down, and that gives you a different kind of pattern.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible] earlier [inaudible] like you're tracing --
MR. KAY: Yeah. Well, it could be kind of interesting. But the depth will not be there because, since you're looking straight down, all of these things are pretty much on one plane, on the ground plane. At intermediate situation, then when you're on the fifth floor or the tenth floor, you get these strong diagonals.

MR. BROWN: Right from the second level then.

MR. KAY: But here you're on the second level, you get something else. The one thing, the higher up you go, the more one feels disconnected, it seems to me, from the actual scene. As one gets closer to the ground, and you're easel is on the ground, you really -- your viewpoint is such that it corresponds to the viewpoint of most people as they pass physically through the street or through the landscape.

MR. BROWN: But what about people? Are there people?

MR. KAY: Well, there are some people in there. People always ask me that.

MR. BROWN: People have been subordinate for you?

MR. KAY: Yeah. For me they are, especially if you're up in a fifth floor, your people are going to be little dots. Or they're going to be the size of dots. Somehow, you know, critics read all kinds of things into this. They say, you know, "You’re withdrawn from society" or that you're not interested in human problems.

The plain fact is that you set out to make a picture of a particular place because it has certain combinations of

forms, colors, shapes, directions. The actuality is that the people, from an optical point of view, in these scenes, very often play a very, very small role. They don't -- I don't put in every time there's somebody spilled some garbage on the sidewalk or every time there's a loose brick in a building.

Very often, blemishes like that are just as evident as a few people strolling by on the street so that they often get represented rather briefly, if at all. Often, I'm so involved with just trying to get the buildings placed and the trees placed and so on that somehow the whole thing is over before I've really gotten to -- painters used to call this "staffage." They used to say, you know, that the component of the human element was a kind of staffage that gave scale. It does give a sense of the size of the place.

Being people ourselves, you can't get past the fact that they've got a special significance in the picture. And so, you know, I feel it's been oversight more than any deliberate decision. But if you look on the bridge there, there's a guy walking there, and there are two other people on the other side of the house. In general, most of these scenes have people in a subordinate situation.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: To me, in the city scenes, the automobiles almost take the place of people. Seeing the cars represents people.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: How are we doing? We're almost at the end of the slides. This is Gloucester.

MR. BROWN: You call it *Gloucester, Massachusetts*?

MR. KAY: Gloucester, Mass. I started going there when we stopped going to Normandy around 1991 or '92. And we've been going back every summer since because I just love the configuration of buildings there. This is a rather wide view of the town as you see it from across the harbor.

MR. BROWN: But there is a lot of variety of different scales.

MR. KAY: Different scales.

MR. BROWN: Different color.

MR. KAY: Absolutely. And different geometry.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: I mean, it's just very, very interesting to me. It's the first time that I began to confront in any serious way the problem of water. I mean, the Charles River figures in many of the earlier pictures. But somehow I never got into it as much as I have in the summers at Gloucester. And I've learned a lot about what happens to the color and the shapes as they are reflected in the water, and how I can perhaps use them in the paintings.

MR. BROWN: Well, that's wonderful, then, isn't it? Because it introduces an additional, richer motif.

MR. KAY: Yeah. Right. You get different compositional possibilities. But again, as my granddaughter said here, looking at this picture, she said, "But where are all the people?" Well, from where I was, you really couldn't see any people on the boulevard there.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KAY: But you could here, and there aren't any here. I mean, this is the drawbridge in Gloucester. This painting is in Japan now. Somebody -- some tourist walked into the gallery and just put down the money and walked out with the picture. The possibility existed, certainly, to put some figures into that, foreground and on the bridge. I just never did -- I did two paintings from this spot. Both of them are -- this one is about 18/24 inches; the other one is about 24/30 inches.

MR. BROWN: These two paintings are beginning to look very economic, a little spare.

MR. KAY: Well, I'm trying to simplify. I'm trying to say more with less. For example, that rather purply band of rocks on the left, you know -- the color could have been broken up into smaller units of the rocks. They existed. But I really didn't feel that it would have served the purpose of the larger contrast to break that up. So you're right.

MR. BROWN: Very simple, particularly of the background, the distant view, I suppose, of the city of Gloucester.

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Those are reduced to really a rather limited range of cones and shapes.

MR. KAY: Well, you have to understand, again, I'd been trying to do two things at the same time. I've been trying for a kind of mood, a kind of expressiveness. And at the same time, I've been trying for optical truth. Now, optical truth can mean that, as I look hard at that pile of stones in front of the bridge, on the bank, I really don't see those houses a mile or so behind the bridge. They are a blur. It's what a camera does when you focus on something in the foreground. If you're using anything but a very stopped-down aperture, you're not going to get the background things in focus at all.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: So these are not imposed distortions on my part. What they are is a recognition of the fact that the eye can only be in one point at once in the scene. And to the extent that you jump around and focus everywhere, you're really working against what the eye sees.

Now, there can be a good reason for doing that. If you look at a fifteenth century -- if you look at a Sassetta, let's say, a fifteenth century Italian painting, everything is in sharp focus and it's wonderful. It's marvelous. But it isn't necessarily optically true.

MR. BROWN: But by that statement, you're approaching near the optical truth now --

MR. KAY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: -- perhaps than your work of 35 years ago.

MR. KAY: I think so. I've been trying to. Trying to. This is again Gloucester, a hillside and the water in front. And as you can see, the activity of paint and color in the water is probably greater than it is in large portions of the picture. This one, I think, worked out very well. Somehow it seems to me to have fewer --

[END CASSETTE 8 SIDE B.]

MR. BROWN: -- session of October 4, 1996. We're going to look now to very recent work. This hillside Gloucester in the last few years, and you made a previous -- a preliminary comment on it. I would say that the sketchiness about it, not that I'm trying to say it looks unfinished -- but is that a fair observation?

MR. KAY: Well, it's fair in the sense that perhaps the smaller forms in trees, and in various architectural elements are not developed. They're -- the statement is made or the attempt is made to make a statement about the largest relationships in the form. So that once I got the color right between the light side of the house and the dark side of the house, I let that stand without much more elaboration.

The assumption also is that these would be in the right size relationships to each other. It isn't that drawing has ceased to become a concern; it certainly is. But it is drawing of the major aspects of each form as I understand the major aspects to exist, and a willingness to not say everything about each form that I possibly could.

Sometimes, it seems to me, one can get to the point where you're telling people more about a given scene than they ever want to know or that I ever want to get involved with. So that once I've made my point about a particular geometry, a particular spatial relationship, that's it.

Now, you can call that sketchy. But I would like to find the different word because it isn't necessarily fast. In fact, a picture like this takes me quite as much time as a much more detailed picture used to take me. Nor does it have the happy accident that a sketch sometimes has. You know, sometimes you just put things down very quickly and they seem handsome, and you just leave them alone, whether or not they really articulate accurately what's out there.

So this is -- I would rather call it a rather more simplified statement that comes about as a result of a distillation process, either on the canvas or in the preliminary drawings that I might have made, or just in my looking at it. But certainly, yes, it's a little more selective in its treatment.

MR. BROWN: My using the word "sketchy" shows how that word has been debased. [Laughs.]

MR. KAY: Well, no, it's a perfectly --

MR. BROWN: And I mean, this is a case of something that in fact truly is not a sketch.

MR. KAY: Yeah. We do like -- I think there's something about our period also which has elevated the sketch,

justifiably, in my view. There used to be a time when sketches were not that highly regarded. I think today because of our interest in spontaneity and directness of statement, we tend to like sketches more than we like sometimes the finished works that derive from the sketch.

I know people, many people who like Constable's sketches more than his large pictures, people who like Corot's sketches more than the large developed pictures. I like a lot of Ruben's sketches and liked them more than the big compositions. But if you ever try to do one of those large things and you realize you can't simply take a sketch and blow up each brushstroke five times the size and pass it off as a painting, although that's been tried, too.

I mean, some of the Bay painters, Dishov [phonetic], Diebenkorn, people like that -- Parks in particular did a great deal by doing that kind of thing on a large scale with large brushes to really approach the canvas in very much the spirit of the sketch with very interesting results.

But it's still not what Constable did when he spent a whole winter taking a few sketches and trying to make out of them a five-by-four-foot picture to send out to the annual Royal Society Exhibition. That -- it's like writing a large novel. It imposes responsibilities on the artist that are very hard to meet.

I can't say that I've done it. And I haven't seriously even tried it, although it keeps coming to mind now that I would like to take some of these smaller pictures, take them into the studio, and see what I make out of them. I don't know in advance how it would come out. But it wouldn't look anything like -- it wouldn't look -- it wouldn't have the same spirit, it seems to me, as what you see here, which is finished on the spot, not touched at all in the studio, and worked out as best I can right in front of the motif.

MR. BROWN: But you're talking about in the studio, greatly enlarged, for example.

MR. KAY: Well, perhaps, although the -- yeah. Enlarge it in some instances -- this painting is, I think, 15 by 20 inches, perhaps. Yeah. While I'm at it, I might very well try that on a 30 by 40 inch or something like that, see what happens. See what happens. I mean, you might take some of the shake out of the thing. You might actually make --

MR. BROWN: By "shake," you mean the point?

MR. KAY: Well, yeah. You might be obliged to make the point in a somewhat sterner or in a somewhat more emphatic way. And one would hope not to lose -- not to lose the air and the presence that the smaller picture has. Has it been done? Sure. I think Matisse did that. I think Beckmann did that very beautifully.

MR. BROWN: The whole reason you do this -- you said the Bay Area artists --

MR. KAY: Well, the Bay Area artists were just making, in my view -- the ones I'm thinking of way making, in my view, big sketches. That's a different issue. This would be the business of converting the sketch to a larger statement. I don't know. I don't want to talk about it without having done it. And I keep thinking that something along that line might be a good way to spend a winter instead of going out and freezing out in the snow, as I've done.

Let's go on. Now, this is another Gloucester Harbor scene and I think particularly felicitous in the tone of the sky against the tone of the buildings. Somehow the darks in the buildings stays quite blonde, really, which I think is a very big gain in terms of air, in terms of atmosphere. I'm not quite so convinced about the tone of the water in the foreground. I mean, I'd like to go back, do it again, and get a better treatment of that.

MR. BROWN: But you did get to capture the effect of the water on shadow on the forms on land?
MR. KAY: Yeah. I tried. I tried. Anyhow, it's a -- you see, the damn place is just so rich in possibilities for just abstract arrangements of shapes. It's just got variety, it's got scale, and it's got color changes. It's got everything a landscape painter needs, really, I think. It's like Venice. [Laughs.] Better than Venice -- it isn't so pretty.

You asked about drawings. This is a fairly recent scribble of the kind that I do all the time. This is right here in Boston out in Summerville or Charlestown. I'm not quite sure which -- what you'd call it -- Sullivan Square. And, you know, there's nothing special about it.

In fact, the reason I pick most of the things I do, I try very hard to avoid -- well, I don't try very hard. But I don't find myself attracted to monuments or to buildings that are in themselves important architectural statements. When I -- if I were to do a lot of portraits, I would probably shy away from doing portraits of movie stars, you know. I mean, I think that's a problem. If it's already a work of art, what can you add to it, or what does it -- how can you really work with it?

So most of my motifs are very ordinary places. But in these ordinary places, like the heave of that overpass there on the left is what really attracted me to the whole thing. Just the way that thing goes up, rides up, and then comes down has, to me -- well, let's put it this way. Maybe 100 years from now when they've -- or 50 when they've torn all of that down and made a park there or something like that, you might see something like that and say, "Gee, those places had a particular mood, a particular tone, a particular period quality."

That's what I would like these paintings to have. I'd like them to have some of the richness. Not narrative richness, just the purely visual richness that one sees all around in ordinary places. Not, God knows, these horrors that are put up in Boston, you know, which are big brass glass luxury places. But rather these sort of utilitarian squares and circles where people do their business, where there has to be a traffic tie-up, you know, and all that, and then in the background, the kind of older buildings that I at least grew up with.

So I kind of like the way that three-story building on the right -- it's an old building, probably put up around 1870 or 1920, somewhere in that period. There is something about that row of windows that I somehow respond to, mostly because I probably remember things like that when I was a kid being taken around Boston hand-in-hand by my mother, you know. And so it has a certain emotional draw to me.

It has a special character. Frankly, there's nothing in England or in France or in Italy -- some of the buildings look in the North End a little like Italian buildings that I've seen in Florence and in Rome. Charles Street in many regards looks really rather like some portions of London that I've seen.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: What really sets the likeness, you know, in an urban scene is, I think, very largely the width of a street in relationship to the height of the buildings. If you made a dummy of the street, you know, and kept that proportion -- the height of the building to the width of the street -- you would have the very special character of a given place. If you get that right, it's going to look like Boston and not Rome and not Veuille or Saint Valatie or Florence, you see. So I kind of look for that character.

I guess in a way you could say that a lot of what I've done has been done in the spirit of portraiture. That when we do a portrait, we want all the -- as much as possible, the character, the essential character of the sitter, we want to keep his individual unique characteristics, and at the same time, we don't want to trivialize this by making it interesting only to the people who know him.

In other words, there has to be something more than just the fact that he's got big ears or a particular configuration of muscles around his mouth. That's why Rembrandt's portraits, Kokoschka's portraits, Beckmann's portraits are so marvelous. They give the individual, and at the same time they tell us something where that individual reminds us of qualities that other people have, too, which are called universal qualities, if you want.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: But I'd like to do that in landscape, if I could, you know. Get the individual place, and yet make people feel, as they look at the picture, that this reminds them of something that they've grown up with. I think the good landscapes do this. I think Pissarro's landscapes of 1872 to 1975 -- I think that Beckmann surprisingly did some marvelous landscapes.

MR. BROWN: And do you think you have now and then, don't you? Do you feel yourself sort of peaking? Or do you feel yourself just now --

MR. KAY: I feel myself still trying to make the good one. I don't -- if you ask me, I really feel that I'm still miles away from what I would like. It's why I keep doing -- people say -- here's a drawing of a bass player. I used to do figures a lot.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: And I should go back and do them again. Why do I keep doing these damn landscapes? I just want to do one, one really good one. [Laughs.] If I can get one that will really do what I want, I suppose that's what keeps everybody painting.

MR. BROWN: But they are doing a great deal of this. I mean, you couldn't miss that.

MR. KAY: I frame them and I sign them. So I'm not totally ashamed of them. However, I have to say that, boy, I look at some pictures and I realize, you know, how far ahead those painters were. I mean, there are times you look at a really good landscape -- a Corot, Vildavay [phonetic] landscape, or a Beckmann view of San Francisco or Kokoschka -- almost any of Kokoschka's cityscapes.

When you're face to face with a painting like that -- or Sisley, some of Sisley's paintings, I mean, just little bridges. And, Jesus, a flooded town square -- and you look at it and you say, "My god, how did a man do it?" If I live maybe -- if I'm lucky and I live another 10 years, maybe I'll get something half that good. So I haven't got time to go back to do the bass player. I figure by now it might take me too long to get back into that kind of painting. Let me just do one good landscape, and then I'll do the bass player.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: I think -- this is a landscape drawing in Brookline just around the corner. I started a little landscape of that. But as I look at it as a drawing, I say to myself, "Well, you know, that isn't so impossibly banal in its arrangement that you couldn't make the painting from it." So next time I need a motif, I'll go there.

But it's really the city stuff, you know. After all is said and done, it's pretty hard for me to imagine -- I love Gloucester. But, you know, Gloucester doesn't present either the problems or the opportunities that something like this in Boston does, for me.

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. KAY: You have to sort of pick your spots. You have to find the vista. It's getting harder and harder to find a place to stand where you can see stuff like this. But I would say, of recent work that's probably my favorite one. Sid Hurwitz has it, and I'm glad that he has it.

MR. BROWN: You're still dealing with the great, sudden changes of scale, direction?

MR. KAY: Well, that's what we live with, isn't it? I mean, we're living with forms that are clumped together and then sort of drowned out by these very large architectural affirmations. Sometimes it seems to me they're pretentious and silly. But they do have a function. The right painter will come along and show that to us. If you're not careful, they can come out looking like a wretched version of Saint Geminiano or something like that, these towers. But it's just a question of finding the connections, finding the essential quality. And, you know, it's like when you get the color right, it takes its place in space where it should.

When you find the emphasis of paint and drawing and placement, then sometimes forms that seemed absolutely tiresome suddenly come to life, and it's like really being in the clatter of the city. Boy, if I could get that, I would say, you know, it's been a worthwhile run, you know?

MR. BROWN: Right.

MR. KAY: That's it. That's the last.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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