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Oral history interview with Tony Vevers, 1998 July 9-August 25

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Tony Vevers on August 25, 1998. The interview took place in Provincetown, MA, and was conducted by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

[Reel 1, Side A.]

TONY VEVERS: —creation of the work site, so—which was a zoo in the country, one of the first open zoos where animals were kept in large sort of paddocks or enclosures like the wild. And as near to the natural habitat as possible. So I sort of grew up in the zoo. And close to nature, because I spent all my early life in the, out in the country in Bedfordshire near the Whipsnade Zoo. And uh––

ROBERT BROWN: And that was an innovation completely was it, Whipsnade?

TONY VEVERS: Well, it was—

ROBERT BROWN: What was the idea? Larger quarters for the animals a bit nearer to their habitat?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. For instance, the bison or the American buffalo, you know, were on the side of a hill in a big field. And it was just probably close as you could get to their natural state. And the wolves were in a forest full of evergreens, pine trees. And they looked very much like wolves because you'd think of them as living in Russia, for instance. Yeah. Especially in snow. And they had beavers and they had—on the stream, which they dammed. And generally, the whole feeling was pretty much as close as possible to the natural surroundings of the animals themselves. It was on about a 30- or 40-acre park that they established.

ROBERT BROWN: Would your—did your father talk a lot about his plans and do you recall many discussions at home? Or was professional life kept separate from––

TONY VEVERS: No. No. Because uh, we actually lived out in the zoo itself. Or right next to it. We had a house right next to the [00:02:00] zoo park itself, right outside the boundary of it. And my father was very, you know, very close with—of course, now, he was running the zoo in London. We used to come up weekends and spend the summer months in the country right next to the Whipsnade Zoo. So I was quite uh, well-versed with what was going on and the development of the concept, I suppose you'd say.

ROBERT BROWN: Was um, were you very interested or encouraged to do, maybe do something in the scientific line as a child?

TONY VEVERS: Well, as a child, I wanted to do what my father did, which was to be a doctor and then perhaps work for the zoo. But I changed my mind, I guess. I didn't change my mind, but I came into art as an adolescent. Yeah. In this country.

ROBERT BROWN: I see. Because that—you hadn't really done much with art in England before you—

TONY VEVERS: Well, yeah. When I was in school, you know, I was in a co-ed experimental school in London. And I remember doing a painting of a ship, a sinking ship on fire with people being rescued in lifeboats, which was very expressively done. I remember painting it and later on, my father saw it. I brought it home. I was very excited about it. But I never did anything else like it after that. I still have that painting in this—it has lots of characteristics that I find in my later work as a painter.

ROBERT BROWN: Such as?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, so, very expressive brush strokes and the poses of the figures are like the poses I used to use in the figures when I doing figurative painting.

ROBERT BROWN: You were at this school for some—several years?

TONY VEVERS: I was there from '34 to uh, [00:04:00] the outbreak of the war in 1939-40. Um, about that time, you know, Hitler was expected to come and invade England. And there were also—the Blitz was on. So uh, my father sent me and my sister over to friends over here in America for the duration. And I'd always wanted to

come to America, so I was very happy about it. But, and uh—

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. You once told me that you were interested because you'd discovered American comic books.

TONY VEVERS: That's right. Yeah. I really got turned to comic books. I was very excited about them.

ROBERT BROWN: And what did they—what did you think they told you about America?

TONY VEVERS: Well, just they were so different from anything I'd ever seen in England. You know, the use of illustration and dialogue I remember was very, very intriguing to me. Especially Prince Valiant, for instance. And I was also uh, taken by the nutty, nuttiness of Smokey Stover and nosh moz ka pop [ph]. And uh—

ROBERT BROWN: What was that last one? Malt?

TONY VEVERS: Nosh moz ka pop. It was a saying they used to put in. It was a crazy, crazy strip which was really sort of Dadaesque in a way. And I was young—I was really, really was taken a great deal by this uh, I suppose probably by the fact this was a kind of art that was different. Um, I was particularly impressed with [inaudible] Lichtenstein to do it myself, but I remember in school doing an awful lot of drawing, mostly what, you know, mostly what boys do is draw airplanes and so on, you know, bombs and boats with guns on them and stuff like that. I did a lot of that, I think. And I had a best friend who was a very good draftsman for a young boy. And I used to envy his ability to draw, his ability to use line. [00:06:00] He, he was quite talented.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it particularly drawing that you loved doing? And you didn't do much beyond that, I guess.

TONY VEVERS: Uh, no. My main interest when I was sort of a, in around, in the '30s was actually, was radio. Um, I heard, in ham, hams on the radio. And I got very intrigued by them. And I started building sets, low frequency, shortwave reception sets, and um, listening to ham radio and all that sort of exchange. And that's what, that's what—it was so foreign to me. And so it seemed so modern, I suppose, that it really intrigued me. I was always intrigued by modern, idea of the modern––

ROBERT BROWN: Not because you felt you were living in an old-fashioned––

TONY VEVERS: No, not at all.

ROBERT BROWN: ––setting. Simply, you were intrigued––

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: ––by itself.

TONY VEVERS: In fact, in London, we lived in a very, very new concrete-built international-style apartment house, built by a Russian architected named uh, Berthold Lubetkin.

ROBERT BROWN: Lubetkin.

TONY VEVERS: And my, and my parents' best friend at the time was uh, Ernő Goldfinger, who was another well-known uh, I suppose you might say avant-garde architect in England, who incidentally built himself a house on Hampstead Heath that was so hated by Ian Fleming that he called the villain of his next novel, Goldfinger.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. That's true. And a wonderful, wonderful man whose wife became I think my mother's probably best friend. And we used to go and visit them up, up until quite recently in England until they both died in the last few years.

ROBERT BROWN: [00:08:00] So your parents were—this, this very modern or advanced circle at the time was, they were a part of or at least they had friends in.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. They were definitely uh, they were—well, they were very left wing. In fact, my father was once accused of being a member of the communist party. And he was very pro-Russian. He'd been there several times and was very attracted to the Soviet people. And during the war, he raised a lot of money for the Soviet cause to purchase ambulances for the Russian Red Cross.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think a bit of this might, must have rubbed off on you and your sister?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, I think so. Perhaps. Some-somewhat. I think it was perhaps, uh, as a result of having sort of very leftish background, I tend to be somewhat of a conservative myself. But I'm not, I'm certainly not as interested in the left wing as I used to be.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you suppose? Just sort of you got tired of the rhetoric or you saw the—

TONY VEVERS: Well, I think when—

ROBERT BROWN: —the systems into which you got locked?

TONY VEVERS: You saw the systems falling apart. I remember the last time I saw my father was in '67. And he uh, I think was also somewhat disenchanted because, you know, this was after Hungary and Czechoslovakia had uprisen. And uh, it was very obvious that the Soviet Union was not very stable and that the doctrine was certainly not, not a very uh, worthwhile one or, how to say? Uh, not very vital [00:10:00] to the human race. And I think he must have been very disenchanted with it. But he didn't say, he never said much about, you know, the current affairs for that reason probably, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: But you don't suppose—was he conversant with or acquainted with some of those highly educated Cambridge grads who were graduates who went a bit further with the Soviet Union?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, uh––

ROBERT BROWN: Like [Anthony] Blunt and uh––

TONY VEVERS: Oh, no.

ROBERT BROWN: [Kim] Philby and those people?

TONY VEVERS: I don't think so. No.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

TONY VEVERS: Um––no. He uh, I think was pretty much—he would rather—I think, the way I look at it now, kind of a simplistic view of the Russian experiment or whatever you want to call it, and was willing to overlook certain aspects of the, what the Soviets were doing. But certainly, what it turned out, you know, the Stalinist movement, what it turned out to be or what we know about it now, was certainly against anything that he would have uh, wished for.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. And probably at the time, he simply didn't realize or know, or had no proof of the tremendous purges and so forth.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, no. I don't think so.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And your mother. Was she similarly uh, leftist?

TONY VEVERS: My mother came from the north of England, up in Northumberland. Her, her father was a major solicitor in the city of Carlisle and they're very upright, and sort of um––I always think of the book about the, was it the Forsytes. It was like someone's [ph] Forsyte, [00:12:00] and so, [John] Galsworthy uh, series of books about the Forsytes, *The Forsyte Saga*. And she was very take—I think she really followed my father's political instincts, but in her 30s or late 30s, she was, she had a, was diagnosed as having a faulty heart valve and she was always a semi-invalid throughout much of my childhood. I was very close to her, but she wasn't able to do things that most mothers would do with their children. She, she could get out and go shopping once in a while, but it was always a big effort for her. And I was always aware that her life was, you know, so on the edge because she, any kind of—it was very easy for her to get a heart condition and to have to be, spend, you know, a lot of time in bed actually. And uh, so it did give me a sense of mortality––

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: ––um, beyond my years, perhaps.

ROBERT BROWN: So she was actually quite, would tire, fatigue very easily then.

TONY VEVERS: Um, yeah. She, she had to get up—she'd get up and have breakfast and then she'd stay in bed and, and she was teaching herself German, and was able to learn the grammar and so on quite well, and to—she ended up speaking very good German apparently, according to German friends who talked to her. So she was very valiant in spite of all this going on.

ROBERT BROWN: Your parents were both accomplished, purposeful people then.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. [00:14:00] Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. Definitely. I'd say so.

ROBERT BROWN: The school that you and I guess perhaps your sister, as well, like you said, was an experimental school.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What would you say in the '30s that meant? I mean, can you––

TONY VEVERS: Well, most of the schools, you know, were pretty much all the boys' schools or girls' schools, they were fairly, you know, what do you call? Traditional, I guess. Actually, this school was more like an American school because it was co-ed and from sort of kindergarten on up to high school. And they also encouraged you to make things. They, they had—you had classes in carpentry. I took a class in, you know, in silversmithing and in printing, and so on. So I was sort of encouraged to work with my hands, which is something I've always been lucky—happy about because it's, I've always been fond—as a painter, being able to be manually dexterous is a very, been very useful to me. Especially later on in my life when I had to support my family as a carpenter. [Laughs.] Yeah. It was sort of a—in school I don't think I learned very much except to read and I don't know any math particularly. But I did get a great deal of uh, sort of a great reward from there, emphasis on making things, doing things, for which I'm very grateful. It was also very sort of—It was quite a, I'd say, liberal school or left-wing. I remember as a child we had a lot of refugees coming in from Europe. The first ones were the uh, Spanish children, refugees from the Loyalist Fra—uh, Fascist [00:16:00] conflict in Spain. And after that, we had a lot of Jewish children who came in. So we were always aware, of course, of the uh, foment, foment going on in Europe.

ROBERT BROWN: So political refugees. Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Well, more like—yeah. I guess so.

ROBERT BROWN: Did—was the aim, when you completed your schooling—and I don't know whether you completed your secondary schooling before you came to the United States, but—I don't think you did. I believe you came back here.

TONY VEVERS: I sort of got through by—I suppose the equivalent of 10th—eighth grade. When I came here, I went into, straight into high school.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. The school was the King Alfred School.

TONY VEVERS: King Alfred School. That's right. Yeah. In Hampstead. It's still there.

ROBERT BROWN: The name suggests tradition or sort of British nationalism, but uh––

TONY VEVERS: Yeah, it does.

ROBERT BROWN: But uh, in fact, it was a very open-ended school. Well, the most—you and your fellow students, were they thinking of going on to university? Or what was the––

TONY VEVERS: I don't know. I never thought of it much. I sort of took it for granted I'd probably go on to university, I guess. But uh, we never talked about it much. My father also had three children by an earlier marriage who uh, the—two boys and a girl. And one of the boys went, one of them went to Oxford and one went to Cambridge. And I imagine that that's what they would have wanted to do for—me to do. But I doubt if I would have made it because I don't think school was a very good preparatory school for a place like Oxford or Cambridge.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you went to New York to uh, well, through New York City in 1940 with your sister.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. We came to the States in, yeah, in July of 1940. Landed, and landed, of course, in New York.

ROBERT BROWN: And to um, [00:18:00] be met by friends of your family.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Yeah. It was––there were people we'd known in this apartment house we used to live in London. Uh, the boy and I were, were good friends. We knew each other quite well in London uh, before the war. They left a year before the war started because they could—they saw it coming and they figured it was time to get out.

ROBERT BROWN: So you went um—you told me that some of your first impressions of New York, I guess it was a very—extremely striking uh, things you saw, right?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, it was fantastic. Coming into seeing the Statue of Liberty and the uh, you know, the skyscrapers was very impressive. Um, and just in terms of size and so on. But I think I got—I may have mentioned that the thing that really impressed me in a way was the cars, because they were all different colors. You know, in England at that time, cars were all either black, or if they were sports cars, they might be red like an MG. And uh, so it was very strange to see cars that were sort of sky blue, sky blue color, or brown or whatever colors they were. And that was quite a—that was quite strange. And I remember also, once we got outside New York, the same people living in little houses, because I had the impression somehow everybody lived in a skyscraper or in some kind of fantastic, modern sort of building. And those little, uh, not little, but the American houses made of wood seemed very unlike—very, you know, contrary to what I'd experienced in––

ROBERT BROWN: Did they seem, did they seem temporary and—

TONY VEVERS: Well, there was a great sense of temporariness about America. I think it was the—there wasn't this sort of, [00:20:00] you know, cultivated and clean-cut aspect to nature that you see over here, that you see over in England, where the fields are all—look like they've been cultivated over years and years and years. And the hedgerows in between are all formed. And the trees seem to be planted, you know, to fill in a specific place. And uh, as a result, I had a feeling of America sort of seemed to be almost impromptu compared to the picturesque character of the English countryside.

ROBERT BROWN: I suppose who you had—you got here in July. I guess you went to, were put into school right away. Is that right?

TONY VEVERS: Well, no. We had the summer. We were staying in Madison, Connecticut, right on the seashore—on the Long Island Sound. And uh, so we spent a very pleasant summer going swimming and so on. And then before, we went to—you know, at the end of August, early September, we went to school and I had to take SATs before I went, and apparently got quite a high score because uh, they told the people I was living with that, that I was—I, my rating was unusually high––

ROBERT BROWN: And this was to go to, say, to a public high school?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Yeah. And it was—

ROBERT BROWN: They wanted—they did an evaluative examination then, an SAT or something.

TONY VEVERS: No. They just had an SAT. I mean, you know, a multiple-choice thing. I expected some kind of much more formal, you know, examination, but they didn't have that.

ROBERT BROWN: And how did you find the school?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, well the school was actually—I found it was very easy compared in a way to what I'd expected. I mean, not, not easy, but not as hard as I had thought it would be. Um, we had homework, but I was able to do the homework often before school started. And I think, I also found that, in English, I was way ahead of my classmates because I'd already read [00:22:00] most of Dickens. I'd already Thackeray and uh, so on.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Despite the fact that you went to this liberal school—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —you would have had—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, they had—so I started reading Dickens when I was about, I guess six or eight years old.

ROBERT BROWN: Wow.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Sure.

ROBERT BROWN: Home, home encouragement probably, too, huh?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, yeah. My mother taught me to read and I started reading, you know, voluminously as soon as I could get my hands on books. Uh, I was real bookworm.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, how long were then in Madison, Connecticut?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, um––

ROBERT BROWN: In public school.

TONY VEVERS: Well, I was in there for two—I was at public school for two years, and then the couple with whom we were staying um, they'd taken my sister and myself, they'd also taken another adolescent, a girl, who was a relative of the husband of the family. So they had uh, a son and they had like four or five adolescent children, plus two babies, two infants of their own. And the poor woman, Ella Manuel, was uh, just about exhausted. She was a wonderful woman who went on to become a sort of major figure in the feminist movement in Canada. She —

ROBERT BROWN: What was her name?

TONY VEVERS: Ella Manuel.

ROBERT BROWN: Ella Manuel.

TONY VEVERS: She came from uh, Newfoundland, and was very sympathetic to the arts and so forth. And I remember in high school, I had a very close friend who was also interested in the arts. I mean, we sort of became a little sort of group, along with another girl. Uh, they were both older than I was somewhat, by about a year I think. [00:24:00] And we all became very involved with the idea of, you know, going on into the arts or somehow possibly having a bookstore or an art gallery or something. Not necessarily being, you know, actually being artists, but being involved with the arts in some way, which was very different from everybody else at the time.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you a—get down to New York now and then?

TONY VEVERS: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: Even in those years, those two years?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Well, yes. We went down with a—we saw—they took us down to New York to show us the town. And they had some friends in New York, and we—I used to go and stay with them. And uh, once I went in and I remember somehow I was staying uptown, so I got to go to the Columbia library. And they had a show of uh—we went to the show there. And they had this exhibition of Gertrude Stein's books, handwriting, her manuscripts, which I found very, very interesting. Even though I'd never heard of Gertrude Stein. And after I went on—actually, the high school was pretty good. I was thinking about it a lot because I had a reunion this September with the people in my class of the high school, [inaudible] high school. I think, I don't know what it is. It's the 50th or 60th or something, 55th, 56th, I think reunion, something like that. It's the class of '44 anyway.

ROBERT BROWN: And, and you're planning to go.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, right. Yeah. I'd like to see them. Uh, they were very nice. The kids were very friendly, welcoming, you know, to a young stranger. And um, I really enjoyed being in the, you know, being there with them in the school.

ROBERT BROWN: Did your sister seem to also find it to be a––

TONY VEVERS: Well, she was younger and uh—

ROBERT BROWN: She was younger than you.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. And also, just before we—a year or so before we left, we'd lost our [00:26:00] mother who died. And it was terrible, traumatic for my sister because she missed her mother, you know. Although I'd been sort of prepared for it, so it wasn't as big a shock as it might have been for her. And I think my sister's always felt kind of deserted as a result. For me, for her coming to America, it didn't, you know, she didn't know what to expect. It was that sort of a kind of scary thing that happened to her at a young age. She was about nine when we came. But for me, it was sort of like fulfillment of a dream. I'd always wanted to come here and this school—we had a lot of, you know, had a lot of foreign students apart from refugees. And my—I remember we had a lot of Americans who were, I found, fantastic. Uh, they all had a great sense of being themselves and not being sort of crazy or anything, but they all sort of had this—their sense of personality was far different from the sort of quiet conformity of the English kids.

ROBERT BROWN: This is—you're speaking back again of the King Alfred School back in—

TONY VEVERS: King Alfred. Yeah. And uh, the American kids, they were very uh, I found very exciting, very interesting, not to pal around with. I didn't get to know them very well, but they all stood out as exemplars that I was attracted to. So when I was told I had to go to the United States, you know—

ROBERT BROWN: This was uh, something you eagerly—

TONY VEVERS: I was very eager to go.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas your sister, poor thing, was not—

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. And I also was interested in jazz, so I thought it wonderful. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You were interested in jazz, even at that age.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, sure. Yeah. I imagined, you know, that you could hear Benny Goodman every time we turned the radio on, you know. And so, you know, it was very exciting for me to be there. And the kids at the high school were very nice to me. They––rather than make—I expected them to make fun over out English way of talking, but they were, I think, very, very interested [00:28:00] and sort of amused to have these kids coming from the old country in a way. They were mostly uh, kids from the village, from the little town of Madison, which is a shore village, and mostly Yankees, I guess. And the other part of the school was farmers' kids from Upstate, from up—every, every town along the shore had a sort of—up, ten miles up in the country had another, you know, a sort of sub-town, like Wellfleet and South Wellfleet or something like that, which was a farm—would be farmers. And they had all the farm kids in the school who were great big, you know, almost—the guy—the boys were like men. They were, they seemed to be so big and uh, muscly. And they were impressive, too. And uh––

ROBERT BROWN: But each group were, were welcoming.

TONY VEVERS: Well, the farm kids all [inaudible] to go on to, you know, they went to vocational. They had vocational school and they had the other, which was sort of the pre-college group. And I was in the pre-college group. So I guess by, not by choice, but just by instinct or something. So that most of the kids I knew there who I was friends with went on to college. But as I said, the couple we were living with, Ella, the wife, just couldn't take handling us any more, that group any longer. So they moved to Greenwich, Connecticut to start a new time for themselves. And we were, we went to stay with another couple up in North Madison. A couple from Oklahoma who were very sort of [00:30:00] interested in education. They came literally from the frontier practically. And they were uh, not that they were hicks, but they were very, very—they'd both been to university. They were very sort of square in a way, you might say, but they also had a great deal of reverence for education. And one of the first things that they did was to make sure that I got into a good prep school.

ROBERT BROWN: And this was still in Connecticut.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. In '42.

ROBERT BROWN: Why, why were those people—had they come east to––

TONY VEVERS: Oh, well, because, because they—her husband went to Yale. The uh, the wife went to, I don't know where.

ROBERT BROWN: So they weren't, certainly weren't hicks really. They were––

TONY VEVERS: Mm-mmm [negative].

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Not at all. They were very simple people. And uh, very nice, very kindly. And they took us in and the first thing they did was to make sure we were in good schools. They put my sister in a private girls' school in New Haven, which was very good for her because she got into, interested in drama and pursued that on into college. But I went—I was sent to Hotchkiss on a full scholarship and it was probably the best thing that ever happened to me, because I found myself as a painter there. Um, a friend, one of the boys in my class wanted to paint. And they had a, they didn't have a painting program there, but they had a sort of studio. And they had paints and brushes that you could check out and paint, and bring them, you know, if you felt like it.

So this guy and I went and checked out some brushes and paints, and I went out and painted a picture of a landscape from the top of the hill where the school was, of the countryside and the lake in the middle of it. And it really uh, changed me because after that, I saw everything in terms of brush strokes. And I put the painting into a [00:32:00] school show of art. And I won the first prize.

ROBERT BROWN: And you'd not—was this a painting in oil?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. It was a painting in oil.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd had some training or some—

TONY VEVERS: No. None.

ROBERT BROWN: —familiarity with the medium? Or was this—

TONY VEVERS: None. None whatsoever.

ROBERT BROWN: So did, did somebody sort of show you—

TONY VEVERS: No. No. I just, I just picked it up.

ROBERT BROWN: Picked it up.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. But of course, at the same time I was reading, you know, Van Gogh, that book about Van Gogh by Irving Stone, *Lust for Life*. And I was also reading—by chance, I picked up a—one of the first books I got when I was in the school was *Look Homeward, Angel* by Thomas Wolfe, which I loved. Um, it was, just made, just knocked me out. It was that sort of story of the young man growing up and, you know, becoming a writer. And that's sort of the—that whole idea fascinated me. And so that was very, that was a major theme in my life. And for a while I read everything that Thomas Wolfe wrote. Um, *Of Time and the River*, and so on. And nowadays I wonder, because I try to pick up those books and can't even get past the first paragraph. [Laughs.] But uh––

ROBERT BROWN: But they are ones that really enthralled you as a youth.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, God. Yeah. Yeah. Beginning of *Look Homeward, Angel*, really fantastic. But um, so a lot of things all came together, but so I sort of—my liking for drawing and so on had a focus to it. Before that, I'd been interested in radios, I think I mentioned.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: And one of the things I liked doing about radio wasn't making radios, which I enjoyed because it was something to do with hands—like my hands, but also drawing the circuits for a radio setup. Uh, I loved drawing the symbols for the tubes and the resistors and condensers and so forth. And that was, you know, that was a major part of the activity for me. But um, anyway. So that—

ROBERT BROWN: At Hotchkiss you really were—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —really on your own.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. I got a lot of encouragement from [00:34:00] the master up there, Tom Blagden, who incidentally was an ex-Hensche student.

ROBERT BROWN: Ex-Henry Hensche student.

TONY VEVERS: Henry. Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Down here in Provincetown.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Yeah. He, he came here and––

ROBERT BROWN: Thomas Blagden.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Yeah. And he was a lovely man. He was just terribly encouraging. He lent me books and encouraged me in every possible way. And I just painted the whole—every time I got a chance I painted, you know, between classes and after classes, and so on, weekends. And every––so I had stacks of paintings in my room piling up. And I knew exactly that this is what I wanted to do with my life. And—

ROBERT BROWN: This was—but you, presumably a place like Hotchkiss in those days at least had a fairly heavy academic load as well.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, I almost got chucked out um, first year. That was—academically I was doing so badly, but the headmaster was very sympathetic to me. A very nice man, but a wonderful headmaster. But then he said, like you know, "Do you think Churchill would approve of what you're doing?" You know, why you're not doing, of your lousy, um, scholastic record?

ROBERT BROWN: Record.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. I said, "No, but I couldn't imagine that Churchill would have had time to worry about my

scholastic record." [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: That didn't really set you back.

TONY VEVERS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: But he didn't mean to uh, depress you, did he?

TONY VEVERS: No, he didn't. No. But it did bother the people we were staying with. ROBERT BROWN: It did.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. I took some tutorials in math because I was still terrible in math. And so I, you know, the first [00:36:00] half of the first year I sort of flunked out. I flunked everything. But after a while I sort of caught on to studying because you had to study so hard, which I wasn't used to at all. But I loved the uh, also the atmosphere and the idea. I made some very good friends there. One of my best friends is still from that period.

ROBERT BROWN: In mathematics. Some of—

TONY VEVERS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: Mathematics, you simply couldn't have, but you, just in general you had good friends.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah, I did. Yeah. I had this—my best friend, even now, we went to Hotchkiss together and then we got out and then we went in the Army. And we both were sent to the same boot camp. And later on we were both together at Yale. And uh, we've always been very close. And he works for *Time Magazine*.

ROBERT BROWN: You uh, before we get to your uh, to that uh, your—again, while you were still at Hotchkiss, you could go to New York now and then.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, yeah. Sure.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you given unusual freedoms or was this possible for, say, an upper-classman to––

TONY VEVERS: No, we couldn't go to New York. Um, you couldn't take trips—

ROBERT BROWN: You couldn't go on your own, but––

TONY VEVERS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: But you did see exhibitions there you told me once.

TONY VEVERS: Oh.

ROBERT BROWN: About this time.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. I was uh, when I was back at Madison, I had this friend Ruth, who was, I'm still in touch with. And she and I both somehow learned all about Stieglitz. And one time we got a bus or somehow we got into New York City and went to see Stieglitz up, you know, up in the building where he had the American place.

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

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. We went up a rickety old lift, elevator and rang the doorbell and he came out. He, he was all, his hair was all over the place. He was all so frazzled looking. And you could see—I could see behind him and he had a cot with an army cot with blankets all over the place on the floor. I imagine he'd just gotten out of bed. And he said, "I'm very sorry. I'm not well. And there's nothing to see in the gallery. We're not showing anything." And he was very nice. He was very [00:38:00] apologetic he didn't have something to show us. And we couldn't say anything to him. We only stay—uh, so we sort of said thank you and left, and that was it. But we got to see him anyway.

ROBERT BROWN: You said also—you told me once also that, that more or less at this time—and I don't know how conscious you were of it—but you could have been conscious of Modernism from your friends, parents' circle of friends in England, and that you saw very little of that in American work at this time. Modernism.

TONY VEVERS: Well, I wasn't, I wasn't—

ROBERT BROWN: Is that fair to say or is it—

TONY VEVERS: Well, I was aware of Modernism in terms of architecture pretty much, because my father and his friends who were architects, like the—

ROBERT BROWN: Lubetkin and––

TONY VEVERS: Lubetkin and Goldfinger. Yeah. We used to spend weekend—used to spend summers with the Goldfingers on the coast. And uh, so I was aware of avant-garde architecture, but I wasn't aware of anything about the painting.

ROBERT BROWN: And when you got to New York you could––

TONY VEVERS: When I got to New York, I got interested in painting and I used to send off to the Museum of Modern Art for their little catalogues or books that were [inaudible]. I used to have a series of little picture books of, you know, symbolism or something like that. And you could send off for them for about 50 cents, something like—and I used to get those. And so I became, you know, really sort of involved with and interested in what was going on, apart from what was going on in this country, which was American scene and, you know, social realism.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Not Modernism. Right.

TONY VEVERS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: These Modernists were your pins [ph], these little MOMA booklets that were—

TONY VEVERS: A lot of them were. Yeah, mostly. Yeah. And I really couldn't understand why John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood, and all those people, you know, Benton, were regarded as such wonderful painters when you could see that they weren't as good as any of the people like Monet, for instance, you know. And uh, [00:40:00] I used to look at what *Life Magazine*, which of course, flouted them all the time. And, you know, because I originally realized what these guys were doing was really very uninteresting. You know, sort of illustrational stuff about uninteresting subject matter. But I still didn't really find out—really know what was going on terms of —I didn't understand Cubism, for instance. I had no idea what Cubism was about.

ROBERT BROWN: Could Tom, Thomas Blagden at, at Hotchkiss, could he talk about it?

[Cross talk.]

TONY VEVERS: No. He was pretty much a, I'd guess you'd call him, he was sort of an American realist. He painted landscapes very beautifully, but he wasn't a Modernist by any means. But of course, he was very sympathetic and nowadays I send him, always send him stuff and he's very interested. But um––

ROBERT BROWN: So he was a pretty young teacher at that time.

TONY VEVERS: He, he was at that time. Yeah. He was the youngest teacher in the faculty.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned in um—you were, graduated Hotchkiss in what? 1944?

TONY VEVERS: Forty-four. Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: And what were you set to do at that point? Did you—that summer or did you have immediate plans?

TONY VEVERS: Well, yeah. We, at that time—before you graduated, you were supposed to apply to a college or a university. So I applied to Yale because I knew that they had an art school. And also they were in New Haven, of course, which wasn't far from Madison.

ROBERT BROWN: And you still had friends in Madison.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, sure. I had a lot of friends there. Yeah. I still do actually.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. And then your sister you said was in school in New Haven—

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —at that time.

TONY VEVERS: That's right. Yeah. Sure.

ROBERT BROWN: So you were—were you accepted in—

TONY VEVERS: I was accepted into Yale. Yeah. And—

ROBERT BROWN: And then that's—

TONY VEVERS: And then I was drafted.

ROBERT BROWN: Ah. And you said you went [00:42:00] briefly to the summer, the Yale summer art school, didn't you?

TONY VEVERS: No, I didn't.

ROBERT BROWN: Not that year.

TONY VEVERS: No. I didn't do any art school. I just went right into the Army.

ROBERT BROWN: Ah. And you were aware this might happen, of course.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: This must have been the subject of constant––

TONY VEVERS: Oh, yeah. We all knew we were going to be drafted.

ROBERT BROWN: ––speculation.

TONY VEVERS: Sure. In fact, some, some guys volunteered before they had to, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you an American citizen by then?

TONY VEVERS: No. No.

ROBERT BROWN: But they could draft a––

TONY VEVERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: ––citizen of an allied country.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Sure. They sure did. Other than that, I think you were expected to, you know, go over to England and join the British forces. You had a choice that way. I had no—I hadn't the slightest inclination to do that.

ROBERT BROWN: No?

TONY VEVERS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: With the reports you were getting from England was, and Europe was still pretty, pretty dire over there?

TONY VEVERS: Well, it wasn't that so much. I just, I figured that being in the British Army wouldn't be as pleasant as being in the American Army somehow. Uh, I didn't have any reason for believing that, but I sort of intuited that, which of course, was the case [laughs] I found out. Better clothes, better food, and everything else. But in the Army, uh, I guess I still went on drawing. I used to do a lot of drawings of the soldiers and I did landscape drawings and stuff. But for the whole time I was in the army, I didn't do any painting or anything. And I figured that I, you know, I'd be storing up ideas. And the first time I got a pass to Paris went, since I got—I went straight to the Louvre.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh. Well, this must have been after the war.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Right after the war.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. You were in the what? In the uh, Army? In the infantry?

TONY VEVERS: In the infantry. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Really? So you, so you were right in the combat infantry?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah, right.

ROBERT BROWN: Not an officer or––

TONY VEVERS: I was a PFC. Uh. That's a—yeah. I [00:44:00] went over there as a—and got, I was put into the

replacement depot. It's a thing where you know, the only way, you went up to the front, you know, right behind the frontline troops. And you were supposed to replace people as fast as they were taken out, either wounded or dead. In fact, that was the only way you could get off the line was to be either wounded or killed. It was a very tough way of handling things, but––

ROBERT BROWN: This is as they were rolling ahead after D-day, right.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Right.

ROBERT BROWN: So they were very aggressive and a steady pressure.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. They were up on the uh––they were just going, moving into Germany when I sort of got up near the front. And we crossed the line right after the main crossing. And we went through Belgium—went through France and then Belgium on the 40-and-8 trains, where they had carriages. It was the 40-and-8, the 40 horses or eight men.

ROBERT BROWN: Or the reverse, yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. But we were packed in there like, you know, the people were packed into the, who went to the concentration camps. They jammed us in, you know, higgledy-piggledy. And as soon as we got up to near the front, they started—they put us in trucks and they'd start, they trucked us the rest of the time. It was pretty hair-raising, too, because they had, no speed limits. They'd just go as fast as they could.

ROBERT BROWN: You said the aim was to be as fast, to get there as quickly as possible.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: So you made the crossing of the Rhine in combat or––

TONY VEVERS: No. No. It was after. They were, they'd taken—

[END OF TRACK.]

[Reel 1, Side B.]

ROBERT BROWN: So, and you came in in which district in Germany?

TONY VEVERS: Well, yeah. I came through the—I came across northern France. I went through Namur and Liège. And then we came, we went through Aachen, which was the first German town that I think the Americans took. The town was absolutely flat. It was like three feet high, just rubble. You could look at one side of the town across to the other side. And we went on there. We were moving fast after that because they were moving ahead very quickly.

ROBERT BROWN: There was no time for you to absorb or look around at all. I mean, you were—

TONY VEVERS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: —just moving, moving.

TONY VEVERS: Just saw things from the back of the truck. They were taking us up. But finally I got to a point early in April when I was finally assigned to the 9th infantry division. And once that happened, then I was just, you know, taken further and further up towards the uh, my intended goal, which was the 47th regiment of the 9th division, which was then pulled back from the line up in northern Germany, up near Dessau, and joined them there. And they—we were put, we were in a little farmhouse not far from the front. And this was about a day or two before D-day, about a week before D-day, I guess.

And the only thing we were expecting was we were expecting to have German paratroopers coming for a last combat strike against the Americans—against us. So I remember the first thing I did was I was stuck out on guard duty, waiting for the Germans to come out of the sky. And one day uh, one night I was out there in the ditch [00:02:00] outside, just outside the village. And all of a sudden I just, I saw these you know, tracer bullets going up in the air and sort of a bombardment going off. And the guy I was with said, "Oh, it must be the end of the war." We figured that was sort of like, it was like fireworks. It was, what it was was the D-day celebration by the troops. So uh—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you mean Victory Day.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Victory Day.

ROBERT BROWN: VE Day. Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Uh, VE Day. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Wow.

TONY VEVERS: Uh, so that was good because I, you know, I'd come across them after the frontlines where I was the—it was as close as I wanted to get because you knew that once you were up there that it only takes one bullet to kill you. And it's all so happenstance and so on. But it was very nice to know the war was over. And after VE Day, we pulled, got duty up there in the area near Dessau. One of the first things that happened, we all got hot showers in a setup that they'd organized in Dessau. It was the first hot shower we had in about two or three weeks. It was wonderful. [Laughs.] And uh, but I didn't get to see the Bauhaus unfortunately.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Which was of course, was there, but had—but I think the Germans used it as a stable or something.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, but you were pretty much restricted to barracks just then, right?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, well, we were living in, most of the time in German Army barracks of one kind or another. Any place that we could take. We took over schools. We took over hospitals. And we lived in farmhouses. We lived anywhere you could find a place.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. But did your fear of death abate a bit then, after VE Day? I mean, I gather you'd been rather fearful or––

TONY VEVERS: Well, anybody going up the front is going to be fearful if they've got any sense. [Laughs.] And uh, yeah. Because in coming up, you go up through, past the [00:04:00] heavy artillery, the 155––

ROBERT BROWN: Millimeter. Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: ––millimeter artillery, howitzers. And then you get down, next you go down to the one, 105s. And then you get down to the mortar sections. And then you get down to the infantry, you know, where all you had was a rifle. And you realize that you know, you have, you're getting closer and closer to the range of shot and shell, and odd pieces of metal flying around. And it's just not a very encouraging prospect. [Laughs.] To say the least. So it was nice to know the war was over and so on, but we stayed up north for, I think two or three weeks after the war was over. Um, and then around the end of April they put us down south to Bavaria. And then we stayed in the town of Freising.

ROBERT BROWN: This was in, also in 1945 or––

TONY VEVERS: Forty-four. What am I saying? No. It was '45. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Forty-five.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. It was the end—yeah, right.

ROBERT BROWN: Because the war ends in May of 1945.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah, right. You're right. I'm sorry.

ROBERT BROWN: So then you go to Bavaria from Dessau.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. In '44, I was in basic training. And then, yeah. We went down south to Bavaria to—and we were in Freising. We stayed there about six months, pulling guard duty and so on. And then we uh, then they organized the occupation. And we were all set for that. Uh, before that, I probably should mention that while we were in Freising, we were told that we were going to be lined up for the, to be in the invasion forces of Germany. And that division was a very, was a very sort of ace division.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, this is, but this is after the peace?

TONY VEVERS: After the peace in Europe. Yeah. We, we were slated to be one of the invasion forces of Japan.

ROBERT BROWN: Of Japan.

TONY VEVERS: They told us that. Yeah. So um––

ROBERT BROWN: [00:06:00] And you were—because you were in a very highly-trained division.

TONY VEVERS: Well, uh, regiment division, yeah. They'd gone all the way from North Africa through Sicily and all the way across Germany. And so then they—when that, when the A-bomb was launched over Hiroshima, we heard about it in this town of Freising. And we were getting a copy of the *Stars and Stripes* uh, newspaper, and seen this atom bomb, you know, being just—and we, nobody knew what an atom bomb was. And we realized with great relief that we wouldn't have to go to Japan. So, you know, lousy as it may sound, if it hadn't been for that, we would have landed in Japan, and probably would have left us—be left there, you know. Because the Japanese were pretty suicidal at that point.

ROBERT BROWN: In their resistance.

TONY VEVERS: During this resistance. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: But the Germans uh, you didn't experience that with. Well, you didn't, but I mean, with the exception, say, of the Battle of the Bulge, they were falling back.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. I missed the Battle of the Bulge by about a week. Um, I was in basic training when that was going on. And they were sending people out of basic training straight over to the Bulge. And uh, if I'd been a week—if my cycle had been a week earlier, I would have gone over, too. So I missed that one. I was very lucky in the army. I kept missing everything by about a week. [Laughs.] And uh––

ROBERT BROWN: What about the occupied population in Germany?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, they were very docile basically. Um, they were very, you know, they were just––they were still in a state of shock, I suppose. But they didn't bother us very much I don't think. Because I can't remember any kind of interaction with them that wasn't friendly. I mean, they had nothing to lose either, of course.

ROBERT BROWN: They [00:08:00] what?

TONY VEVERS: They had nothing to lose.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

TONY VEVERS: [Laughs.] And uh, so we pulled guard—and I was stationed out in—

[Audio break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Now, this is still in Freising? Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. We were stationed further out in the country and once in a while I was stationed on a farm to pull duty against the marauding displaced persons.

ROBERT BROWN: Wow.

TONY VEVERS: And uh––

ROBERT BROWN: I guess a good many of those people were just let go or they were just flow—fleeing and––

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. They'd come, they'd raid farmers and get food and so on. So we'd be stationed out—and there's nothing to do out there. So I used to do a lot of little landscape sketches, which I sort of, I think, modeled after Rembrandt's pen and ink sketches of landscape. It was quite, it was flat land and a few houses, and a few trees. And I still have some of those sketches, I think, that I did then, which was probably the most, you know, enterprising stuff I did while I was in the Army really. And by an odd, odd sort of coincidence, the company clerk of my company, our company, was an Englishman. And he read my papers. And he asked me, he said, "Would you like to go to England and see your family?" And I said, "Sure." And uh, about, about a month later, I finally got a compassionate leave to go to England, to go to London and see my family, see my father and my stepmother. My father got married during the war. And so I got—in order to get to London, you had to go through Paris and uh, but the, your orders didn't say anything about how long, how much time you had to spend getting to [00:10:00] London. So we spent two or three days in Paris. And I went to the Louvre and I saw Rembrandt. They'd just put on the first exhibition after the war. I remember seeing Rembrandt's *Flayed Ox*, which impressed me a lot. And uh, I suppose naturally after the war was over. I can't remember anything else that I saw at the time. But I was very impressed by Paris, of course, which I'd read about in Hemingway's books and so forth, which I devoured while I was at school.

But it was great to come back to England, even though I was a GI. And one of the things that happened to me while I was on leave one time was running into Richard Yates who became a great friend of mine. We were both,

had been sort of through prep school and we both had similar interests in the arts. And he was, he really wanted to be a writer. And we hit it off and we were very, very good friends during the two weeks we had leave in London.

ROBERT BROWN: He, he—you'd been to school with him at Hotchkiss?

TONY VEVERS: No, I hadn't. He, he went to Avon Old Farms.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, I see.

TONY VEVERS: But we sort of hit it off and uh, I remember that was perhaps one of the most important event in my life at that time because uh, I went back to my outfit and at that time I think the outfit had been moved to outside Dachau. So I got to see the inside of one of the worst of the concentration camps, the ovens and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: By then you [00:12:00] people knew of these, of course.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, yeah. We knew about it by that time. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: This was your first––huh. By then, were these—were they pretty well cleaned out and—

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. They were pretty well, pretty well cleaned, but some of the prisoners were still there, who would tell you about the life there.

ROBERT BROWN: Hm. People who simply had no place to go.

TONY VEVERS: I imagine that was what it was. Yes. They just, people who just—uh, displaced persons who decided to stay and be a witness.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. But it was pretty evident to you as a young soldier that—the horrific nature of the Nazi era.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, it was. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you think of the Germans who seemed so docile and had nothing to lose, as you were saying.

TONY VEVERS: Oh well, there was a mixture of civility and of secretness [ph] that was really rather unattractive. They, they were both very, very—they'd fawn on you. And you knew that they really didn't feel that way, that they really hated your guts.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: But uh, I don't think it was—it was hard for me to get to be very friendly with the Germans, but––

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. You were there then in Europe after your, after your leave in England.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: For what? Some more, more months or––

TONY VEVERS: For, for almost a year. A little over a year I'd say. About 15 months.

ROBERT BROWN: And your, your duty was in Bavaria by and large.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. It was. Yeah. Yeah. By that time, I was a sergeant, a supply sergeant. And uh, so I was—I had you know, pretty good rank. And I was able to save up quite a lot of money and send it back to my accountant in the States. And at one point I thought, I figured that I wouldn't pro—it was very unlikely if I ever went back there I'd be able to get into Yale as soon as I got back, so I thought I'd wait a while and maybe join up for another three years and stay on.

ROBERT BROWN: In the military.

TONY VEVERS: In the [00:14:00] military. Yeah. Because I probably have gotten a very good deal, you know, as a staff sergeant. And been able to save quite a bit of money to come back and have as a nest egg when I got

back to the States. But again, very fortunately, the army just decided otherwise and they sent me back the end of August 1946. I went back to the States.

ROBERT BROWN: I mean, at the time you weren't certain. You, you um––

TONY VEVERS: Well, I really didn't think I was going to be able to get into Yale. You know, in which case, I would have had to spend a year hanging around waiting to get in.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you weren't certain, even though you had been admitted—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —you thought perhaps that was no longer—

TONY VEVERS: There wouldn't be a place for me, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Uh-huh.

TONY VEVERS: Which, of course, wasn't the fact, but still. And I, of course, reapplied as soon as I got back. And they said, "Sure. We can take you." And they did. And we were housed in first—for the first week or two we were there we were housed in the gym, in double-decker bunks on the basketball court because they had this—uh, I was part of the largest class they ever had, the class of 1950. It was all veterans on the GI Bill. And of course, I got two years of allowance for college or university, out of my experience in the Army—out of my time in the Army. You got so many, so much for so many months' time overseas and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: Credit.

TONY VEVERS: Credit. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Towards the time––

TONY VEVERS: From the government, which was [inaudible] GI Bill payments I think. And so I qualified for two years for, you know, including tuition, which at that time was $500 bucks. [Laughs.] Yeah. And we all bitched like mad when, after the first year Yale put it up to $600. [Laughs.] [00:16:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Well, what was it like to be back and to be in an American setting and an American college?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, well, it was great. Well, the thing is, I've skipped something. I've miss—

ROBERT BROWN: Tell me.

TONY VEVERS: Well, before I—while I was waiting to go into the Army, I sort of hung around, I didn't a job doing [inaudible] work or anything, you know, in the three or four months I had to wait between being called up and being put right into the service. So I just hung around New Haven and Madison. And one of the things I did, I hung around—I visited my friends, last year's classmates who were already at Yale. And I got to sort of see what was going on and you know, see the—sample the life of an undergraduate through this period. And so when I got back, after being in the Army, I sort of fell right back into what I had already experienced. So it wasn't strange or anything like that. It was kind of—well, it was nice. It was really wonderful to be back, actually. And of course, all the rest of us, we were all veterans. And so we all had sort of this, you know, the same—we were all about the same age. And we all had a sort of similar background. It was very uh, it was very, you know, there was very sort of camaraderie, camaraderly [ph], comradely—wait.

ROBERT BROWN: Sort of a camaraderie, but also comradely.

TONY VEVERS: A lot of camaraderie. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Comradely. Yes. That's it.

ROBERT BROWN: And what about the faculty and all? Were they—did they—they must have had to adjust a bit to this new type of student.

TONY VEVERS: Uh, I think it was—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever sense that they, some of them were a bit overwhelmed, didn't know how to handle these––

TONY VEVERS: Oh, well, the older, older teachers—the older professors who, who did lectures, it didn't bother them I don't think because they just gave lectures and all the––

ROBERT BROWN: And they left. [Laughs.]

TONY VEVERS: And they left. They walked out the door. And the graduate students would do all the correcting and dirty work. But [00:18:00] I don't know. I think we––the worst thing that I thought was the way in which the graduate students who taught sections of things like [inaudible]. If they weren't good, they were just immediately rolled over by the students who just didn't want to listen to much of, you know, a bunch of stuff from a guy who didn't really know what he was talking about. And especially one or two graduate students who didn't, who weren't didn't have very good English. It must have been tough for them.

ROBERT BROWN: Really?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And I wonder why they were—they were graduate students and they had—well, they weren't, hadn't been—weren't veterans, I take it.

TONY VEVERS: No, they weren't. No. And they—

ROBERT BROWN: There must have been some feeling on that score, as well.

TONY VEVERS: Well, I don't think so. I think just that uh, just impatience with their lack of assurance perhaps, because we were all very self-assured I think probably. That's probably what distinguished us from the younger faculty perhaps. But I remember I had one, a class of one, a very interesting history class with a young Navy officer, ex-officer who was a very good teacher, a very nice guy. But I kept falling asleep in class and he used to get very mad at me. And uh, finally got up to him and said, "Look. I just got discharged about two days ago. I'm kind of tired, you know. I don't mean to fall asleep in your class." And I think he understood that, but that's about the only source, you know, which my army experience had anything to do with classes or anything.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Now, you, you'd been uh, very interested in painting.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you intend when you went to Yale—you said you were interested in it because it did have an art school.

TONY VEVERS: Right. Yeah. So I—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know a bit about that art school before you went?

TONY VEVERS: No, I didn't.

ROBERT BROWN: You looked into it? No?

TONY VEVERS: No, I hadn't really looked into it because I didn't anything much about art schools. Um, but I—

ROBERT BROWN: You said there was no pressure for you to return to your [00:20:00] father in England.

TONY VEVERS: Well, my father I think realized that it would be very hard to come back and you know, confront the British returning veterans and so on. And, you know, he knew that I had a clear sort of entry into Yale and it would have been very hard to get into Oxford or Cambridge or whatever. So he encouraged me to stay over here, which was fine with me. All my friends were here, and I knew what Yale was like, so I wanted to stay. And so I enrolled and then I signed up for a beginning class in art, which was sort of an *omnium gatherum* of drawing and so on that gave us an exposure of a little bit of everything. It was a funny class that was sort of given as an elective to undergraduates who had sort of interest in art, who didn't want to get involved with a professional course. And uh, but I took that. So we did a little bit of, we did—made a couple of charts and learned a little bit about rendering. And we did a, we had a graphic—we did etching or did linocut or something. So we learned a little bit about the possibility of technique and so on. And of course, the Yale School—it was part of the Yale School of Art and Architecture.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, it was.

TONY VEVERS: It was a professional school. And all the art students were actually graduate students in a way. So I, so after that, I signed up in my sophomore year and so on. After that, I took life drawing and painting, and so on with the art students, professional art students.

ROBERT BROWN: So you, they—you had, in effect, had a rather special program.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah, I did.

ROBERT BROWN: You left from this sort of indifferent preliminary [00:22:00] course for non—people who weren't intending to be artists—

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: —to taking courses with these full-time art school students.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: So you, yours was a hybrid education. I mean, just in terms of—

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Because it was, I thought, the best of possible worlds because I was taking life drawing, for instance, and on a very professional level. The man who taught life drawing was an ex-Bridgman student who knew the ins and outs of life drawing like nobody else. And uh, but at the same time, they had wonderful art history and so on. Uh, Vincent Scully, who—well, you probably—who you probably heard of.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he just beginning to teach?

TONY VEVERS: He was just beginning to teach. I think I took one of his first courses. I had the first courses he gave in history of architecture, which were fabulous. Um, and I would stay—I wasn't going to sleep in his class. They were just marvelous. And he was a great teacher because he inspired—a master of teaching. And so I took every, every class he gave me—ever gave. And the other major teacher was George Heard Hamilton, who taught modern art, hi-history of modern art, which was pretty sort of uh, cut and dry. Went up as far as Gorky, I think. And that was about it. We were, never heard of Jackson Pollock, never heard of de Kooning, anything like that.

ROBERT BROWN: You never heard—or they never talked about that.

TONY VEVERS: No. Never.

ROBERT BROWN: It's what you could see down in New York they didn't talk about.

TONY VEVERS: Uh, not really. No. I wasn't ready for that anyway. I remember I got exposed finally to Cubism and also to some of Matisse. I remember going to see a Matisse show in New York and having an argument with a woman there [00:24:00] who—she was the mother of one of my friends at Hotchkiss. And she would say, "This is impossible." And I said, "No, it isn't." You know, I was trying to defend him. Uh, I was aware that was very, you know, this is what I was interested in, was, you know, Picasso and Matisse, of course, were the two main people you studied in modern art. But I guess at Yale it was still, you know, the actual teaching never got into that much.

ROBERT BROWN: But you mentioned uh, I believe the art faculty included real conservatives like Deane Keller, who taught—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, Deane Keller. He was in life drawing. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: He's the one that taught using the Bridgman method.

TONY VEVERS: Well, he was—yeah. When he was teaching he had sort of square muscles like a mecha—like a machine. And—

ROBERT BROWN: He was a very nice guy you said.

TONY VEVERS: I liked him very much. Yeah. He was very tough. And very professional.

ROBERT BROWN: And then there was a man who had been a pupil of Rodin, an Italian.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, the little Italian guy. He was a little fiery Italian himself. Yeah. And he was down in the basement teaching sculpture. And he wouldn't let any of the painting students come down. He was very protective of his territory. [Laughs.] But—

ROBERT BROWN: And Eugene Savage.

TONY VEVERS: Eugene Savage. Yeah. He was, he was teaching composition. He taught huge sort of mural-like compositions. In fact, there was a huge Eugene Savage mural in the main sort of social—what do you call it?

ROBERT BROWN: The social sciences?

TONY VEVERS: No, not social science. It was a large building that had sort of uh, restaurants in it and, you

know––

ROBERT BROWN: Sort of like a student union or something.

TONY VEVERS: Student—exactly. The student union. That's, that's what it was. I couldn't think of it. Student union. Yeah. He had a huge—they had a huge Eugene Savage mural, which [00:26:00] [inaudible] started to teach at Hotchkiss—uh, Purdue. Um, it was typical of what Savage was teaching, which was sort of a WPA kind of mish-mash of symbol—you know, a hearty woman holding a sheaf of wheat. It was kind of like, you know, Soviet realism. And he used all kinds of, you know, looping, high tension lines, electric lines and so on. Symbols of progress, and agriculture, and steel, and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: And what was the effect upon you of uh, such things?

TONY VEVERS: I thought it was pretty corny [laughs] frankly. Yeah. But the poor old, the art students had to take this, this course with Eugene Savage. And I guess—well, the thing was I found out that all the art students weren't really art students. They were all, they all wanted to go into commercial art. That's what they were interested in. And well, some of them were quite talented as draftsman, as painters. The majority of them were all intending to become commercial artists. It was kind of a—

ROBERT BROWN: Really?

TONY VEVERS: —bummer. [Laughs.] But also, they weren't very smart either. They were kind of dumb. Uh. They didn't impress me intellectually in the least. Um, well, they were typical art students in a way, sort of like fooling around, and kidding and so on, you know. All the things art students are supposed to do. And I didn't really get involved with them until my junior year when I started to get to know them. By my senior year, I was spending all the time with the art students and even had a girlfriend who was an art student. Uh, you know, we used to get together and make spaghetti meals and have red wine, you know. A typical art school sort of thing. And it was really fun. You know, sort of being like an art student, kind of bohemian. And made me feel very, [00:28:00] very un-Yalie [ph] in a way.

ROBERT BROWN: That these students by and large were aiming to be, to have a, find a business like commercial art.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. There was one guy who—like one of the things they taught there was egg tempera and the technique and so on. And one of the guys there was specializing in egg tempera and also in gold leaf because he wanted to get into ecclesiastical decoration. That was his whole focus. And nobody in there was doing anything at all avant-garde except one guy who made a sort of a Christmas silver crucifix using a soap dish as the figure of Christ, which some people thought was quite shocking, which I thought was also very corny, very sort of jejune, you know, very uh, naïve.

ROBERT BROWN: But there were no, simply no teacher at the art school at that time who—

TONY VEVERS: There were no, there were no—no.

ROBERT BROWN: —who was uh, modern, right?

TONY VEVERS: No. There wasn't anybody. I remember I was there just the year before Albers came in.

ROBERT BROWN: He came in about 1950-51, didn't he?

TONY VEVERS: In 1951. Yeah. I was in '50. And uh, I remember the faculty then laughing at the idea of Albers, who had people, had people execute line drawings in metal form.

ROBERT BROWN: In? Line drawings in?

TONY VEVERS: When he did, he'd do line drawings and have them executed in metal as a product, which I thought was really crazy. They couldn't understand. They couldn't even fathom it, you know. Poor old Deane Keller was absolutely, you know, ballistic when he thought, thought about, heard or thought about Albers, I think. And that's the first thing Albers did when he got there was to banish all those guys up into the attic. And they had us all upstairs there.

ROBERT BROWN: And how was he able to get away with that?

TONY VEVERS: Um, I guess because—

ROBERT BROWN: Because he was head of the school?

TONY VEVERS: He was head of the school. [00:30:00] Yeah. And he was quite a—he was a pretty tough guy, I guess, too. And he wanted to, I think, turn it into a design school. And so they—

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you suppose Yale kept these—it's so very conservative and very limited. Do you think the administration didn't, hadn't paid much attention to the art school for a, for a while?

TONY VEVERS: The administration didn't have any idea what was going on. And of course, if they did, they would be very—naturally, be naturally conservative because they'd like realistic and academic material.

ROBERT BROWN: And then they wouldn't have had, realized what that meant in terms of education, that it—

TONY VEVERS: No. No, I don't—I don't know. I guess they figured that, you know, what was good enough for the 1890s was good enough for us. But it certainly was, you know, they taught you very strictly. It was a real Beaux Arts education, life drawing. And first before you did life drawing, you did, you drew, you know, plaster casts, and then [inaudible] cast shadows, and rendered things very carefully.

ROBERT BROWN: And did you go through these various steps?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah, I went through that and then I went into life drawing. And which was very strict. We'd take one pose and do it for a week with you know, with four-hour day—four-hour sessions. And uh, which didn't teach you to draw really. It just taught you to look very hard and render, which was very good, too, in a way, I realize now afterwards. I hated it while I was doing it, but I realized later on it really taught you to look at things carefully and analyze what you saw to be able to render it in terms of light and dark. But it wasn't anything like a Delacroix, to say the least.

ROBERT BROWN: You um, other teachers you mentioned are Rudolph Zallinger, Z-A-L-L-I-N-G-E-R, who taught figure painting and insisted on various uh, things and—

TONY VEVERS: Well, he, Zallinger did uh, many of the, [00:32:00] what do you call them? Uh, not a montage, but a kind of diorama.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, he did it in the zoology—

TONY VEVERS: Dioramas for the Peabody Museum, yeah. Dinosaurs eating, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Smaller dinosaurs.

TONY VEVERS: [Laughing] Eating smaller dinosaurs. Yeah. And you know, he had vegetation from the time and so on. Very exactingly done.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Was he much as a teacher or—?

TONY VEVERS: Um, no. He wanted you to—he always was trying to get me to––I'd do this whole, you know, a thin sort of wash and paint rather thinly, and work that way. That's the way I ended up working on my own. And he'd say, "Well, that's just underpainting. You're not really painting." You know, so I had to use more paint. But he really wanted you to paint in a sort of academic way.

ROBERT BROWN: But by and large, as you look back, that experience was a good discipline.

TONY VEVERS: Was—yeah. From a discipline point of view, it was the seriosity of the subject was certainly paramount. You realized you were doing something very serious and in a way very traditional. But if you looked at Picasso, you realized that you know, maybe—well, then you realize that Picasso would have gone through the same sort of thing as himself.

ROBERT BROWN: You—in addition to the art studio work that you've just described, did art history, which you've talked about with Scully and Hamilton. What other academic requirements? Are you—literature, for example?

TONY VEVERS: Well, I sort of was very—being interested in English, I did a lot—I took quite a few English courses and I sort of thought of myself as sort of an English minor with an art major. But although that wasn't how I graduated, but I used to take a lot of, as many English [00:34:00] courses as I could. And I took, because I thought I'd be interested in that, took a philosophy course, which was a disaster because I didn't understand any of it. [Laughs.] And then I always did an awful lot of classes. Of course, having, filling up a lot of my schedule with art classes, which took a lot of time in blocks, you know. I had a lot of time extra. So I used to audit English classes and audit history classes, you know, filling in any gaps that I felt I had, I needed to fill in. And I filled—they were very uh, that was very worthwhile. And I was interested in sociology from the, you know, for the political stance in a way.

ROBERT BROWN: In what? Political?

TONY VEVERS: Well, sociology in the sense that it told you about how people acted and reacted in their lives with things. I remember when I graduated I thought, "My God. I spent four years. I don't really think any of it was worthwhile." I wish I could have done it in three. Two or three.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. You said once you felt it was pretty anachronistic, you thought.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. And then I realized more and more actually that it was, really was terrific. It was a very good experience.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. And some of these, you've said, of course, that most of them were aiming towards a trade or something, a job.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Uh, on the other hand, there was—you said that Claes Oldenburg was a fellow student. What was––

TONY VEVERS: Oh, he was terrific. He—

ROBERT BROWN: What was he there for? And he was a diplomat's son, wasn't he?

TONY VEVERS: He was a diplomat's son. Yeah. His father was the Swedish Consulate in Chicago. Um, well, he was I think at that time torn between art and by—art and writing. And uh, he and I went to a discussion group with a graduate student in art history. And he used to demolish the poor writing student with the greatest of ease. And it was just pathetic how you know, [00:36:00] Claes was so bright. He could cut through anything. He was one of the most brilliant minds I've met in the whole realm of art actually, I think. I have tremendous respect for him and it was nice to see him up here in 1960. We sort of renewed our friendship in a way, but—although he was, of course, way ahead of me in the sense of being avant-garde.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. You mentioned the uh, his making mincemeat of a uh, of this graduate teaching assistant, Alton Toby [ph] I believe was his name.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Uh, they by and large didn't know much about modern art, these graduate assistants.

TONY VEVERS: Well, it wasn't one—I mean, things that Claes could, you know, if you could find a fault in somebody's argument, he would cut right through it, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Whether he knew, whether it concerned facts about art or not is another matter.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. I remember him being—we were having a discussion about modern art with him there actually.

ROBERT BROWN: The uh—you were pretty aware of it, though.

TONY VEVERS: Certainly—

ROBERT BROWN: And Picasso was sort of the looming, the big figure. Is that right?

TONY VEVERS: Well, he was. Yeah. He was for all the art students at that time. Yeah. Whoever they were. Picasso [inaudible]—I met a guy who was teaching at Purdue who grew up, as he said, in a de Kooning generation. Who—de Kooning was the Picasso of his time. I don't know who's, who's what. Probably Rauschenberg is the Picasso of his time. I don't know this time. I don't know which one it is.

ROBERT BROWN: But uh, at that time, yeah. Picasso was the towering figure.

TONY VEVERS: Sure was. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And you've also mentioned that your fellow undergraduates at Yale, because you majored in painting, felt you were a bit out of step or you were sort of different, or to some degree or just––

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. They didn't take––I don't think they took me very seriously frankly.

ROBERT BROWN: [00:38:00] Did you take them seriously?

TONY VEVERS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd been in the military. You'd been, you were a bit older than, at least the conventional undergraduate.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Well, I know—um, yeah. I guess I didn't take me seriously because they were all going—most of them were going into, you know––

ROBERT BROWN: What? Law or business?

TONY VEVERS: No. Most of the other art students were going into uh, you know, illustration or—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, the art students. Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. What do you call it? Um, you know, commercial art.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Which I, of course, understood and certainly then as I did later, that was, you know, sort of the real betrayal of being an artist was to go into commercial art. Yeah. But I never saw many—any of them again, except that I met a few of them at the Cedar Bar in New York later on, who I think were just—who out of it [ph] more than I ever was at Yale certainly. They were out of the uh, through the things [ph]. I don't think they had any idea what was going on.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. But you were um—what did you plan to do? I mean, you felt—you were, you were a little annoyed by the whole art experience at Yale. So what did you plan to do immediately? Didn't you right away think to get more schooling or travel or—?

TONY VEVERS: Well, yeah. I think at one time I thought, "Well, if I'm going to do—" at one point I thought, well—the whole thing at Yale was that they taught you a skill. And it was very like, you know, a vocational school. I thought, well, maybe I should—I would get into portrait painting like Portraits Incorporated, you know. [Laughs.] Um, which thank God I didn't get involved with, but I thought something like that would be the thing to do, because I knew I couldn't produce art to—for ads or for anything [00:40:00] else like that, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. As a lot of the others were going to do. Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Or, yeah. But what happened was actually, was another fortuitous thing. When I was 21, I inherited a small amount of money from my mother's estate, which was left to me when I became 21. It wasn't an awful lot of money, but it was enough to finish me up at Yale, and then to pay for two years abroad. So I went to Italy.

ROBERT BROWN: About, this would be about 1950 or so?

TONY VEVERS: Nineteen-fifty. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: So more or less after—as you left Yale, you were able to go abroad.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Well, before that, I went up to Newfoundland for the summer. I was working for Ella Manuel.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Who was uh, from there. Right.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. She was from there. And I'd re-established contact with her. And she asked me to come up and work on—she had a fishing lodge up there on the coast of Newfoundland, on the west, west—on the east coast—west coast. Sorry. And so I went up there. It was a very interesting experience because it was like going back into the 19th century or even earlier. The people up there had, you know, very, very subsistent style of living. They lived on fish and potatoes. And because it was all—everybody lost their teeth very early. And these beautiful looking women, young women, and they open their mouths and the girls had no teeth in their heads. And uh, one—what they used to do is they'd save up their money. As soon as they got right out of school, they'd go—so they get money, enough money to go to the mainland and have a set of dentures made. So they could get married. So it was a very, a very sort of backwards situation, but it was very interesting from that point of view. And I love fishing. So I, and I used to go salmon fishing there. And it was a very pleasant summer. And at the end of that, I [00:42:00] took a, got a student boat and went to, over to England. And uh—

ROBERT BROWN: A student boat. What is that? A special—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, they had these old liberty boats, liberty ships that had been troop transports. And they

realized they could take the students back and forth. You know, some American students were dying to get back over to Europe, you know. I think a lot of them had been veterans probably. Couldn't wait to get back. [Laughs.] And so for about a 150 bucks you could get a trip across the Atlantic on this liberty boat, on this––and they had like you know—like it was like a troop ship. Just had, you know, bunks and so forth. It was very sparse, very spare. And they—

ROBERT BROWN: What did you have in mind? You went to England first.

TONY VEVERS: I went to England first. What I wanted—I'd been very impressed by what I saw at the Museum of Modern Art, by a show of Italian art, Italian painting and sculpture.

ROBERT BROWN: Contemporary Italian painting.

TONY VEVERS: Which had been very impressive. Um, and I thought that was fantastic. Marini and—the sculptor, Marini and quite a few of the painters.

ROBERT BROWN: [Giorgio] de Chirico or—?

TONY VEVERS: Well, no. Earlier than de Chir—later than de Chirico. It was uh, I can't remember the painters who I liked at that time. The artists, the paint—the sculptors were the most interesting. And I thought it'd be fun to go someplace other than Paris, where I'd already been. And it turned out to be a very fortunate choice but I didn't know a word of Italian. I got over there by myself. I didn't know anybody.

ROBERT BROWN: So you, you were only briefly in England.

TONY VEVERS: I was just there for two days and I went over to Florence. I decided to go to Florence. And uh, Deane Keller had encouraged me because he'd gone to Italy as a student himself. But that was his last gift to me [laughs] in a way.

ROBERT BROWN: And in Florence, what—was there a natural school to which you gravitated or—?

TONY VEVERS: [00:44:00] Well, um, not really. Uh, I got there and I didn't know anybody. I sort of hung around and I met a bunch of art students and that. And they were all attending the Scuola di Belle Arti, the school of fine arts in Florence, which was sort of back in the academic uh, [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, it was. It was a conservative—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, sure. It was like right back—it was just like going back to Yale almost, I mean, worse. But so I signed up for that. And it cost about seven or eight dollars a year to, you know, academic year.

ROBERT BROWN: Really?

TONY VEVERS: Because it was very, very cheap. Yeah. So I signed up to study with Antonio Rosai [ph] who was a wonderful old man. He was doing a sort of a very simple kind of unembellished painting of people that was his own kind of thing. He was sort of like Giotto in a modern sense. He was trying to depict modern man in a, in his way, you know, in his own terms. His paintings are very effective. So I enrolled with him and did life drawing there. Mostly they had a model for figure drawing, which you could also paint. And I used to do, I used to do still lives in class, too. But that's what got me to focus. And once you're in a school, you sort—you can branch out from there. I got to meet people and I used to go to sign up with the—I got a student card so I could sign up to have meals at the student mess, which was very, very cheap. It was about 30, 50 cents for a meal with wine. And so I was doing that for a long time, quite a while. And finally I got to meet some older American students, like Steve Pace and Larry Calcagno, who were both breaking into [00:46:00] Abstract Expressionism.

ROBERT BROWN: And now, the teacher. Let me get—

TONY VEVERS: He ended up being a teacher and I think probably a very good one.

ROBERT BROWN: Lawrence Calcagno.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Yeah. He was very, very encouraging.

ROBERT BROWN: So you were old enough and mature enough by this time, you could make your way, and pick and choose your teacher, and––

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And take or not take uh—

TONY VEVERS: Well, I sort of apprenticed myself to those guys in a way.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, because they were a bit older.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. I—

[END OF TRACK.]

[Reel 2, Side A.]

TONY VEVERS: Okay.

ROBERT BROWN: Continuing an interview in Provincetown, Massachusetts with Tony Vevers. Robert Brown the interviewer. This is August 25, 1998. Is that right?

TONY VEVERS: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Tony, we were last talking about the time, couple of years you spent in Italy in the early '50s.

TONY VEVERS: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Uh, in, I guess largely in Florence. You went to the Accademia [di Belle Arti] there.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And then to the Istituto statale d'arte, or d'arti [ph], rather.

TONY VEVERS: Arte. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And can you—any further comments on that, the people you also, who were also there and the quality of instruction, and—?

TONY VEVERS: Well, um, mostly they were places to go to work and draw from the model and so on, because there wasn't much instruction involved. It was very laid back. And most of the time I was hanging around with some American painters who were older than I was, like Steve Pace and Larry Calcagno in particular, who were both breaking into uh, went back—shortly were breaking into a sort of Abstract Expressionist mode. And I learned a lot from them, in particular about the use of, the problems with the picture plane.

ROBERT BROWN: The problems of the picture plane, which is—

TONY VEVERS: Well, the involvement of the picture, of the picture plane and use of the pictorial space, and ideas about incorporating nature and transforming it, the ideas about nature and transforming it into art, which also, which sort of preoccupied me at the time. But they were—I was lucky they were there because I was able to spend a lot of time with them. And I got a great deal out of it, and I think probably more than I would [00:02:00] have if I'd been in Paris, for instance. Another friend—

ROBERT BROWN: Because you were more focused on smaller group of people?

TONY VEVERS: Yes. Oh, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: And were they also attending one of the other schools in Florence?

TONY VEVERS: Um, I think they were all on the GI Bill. And they were probably all enrolled at the, either the Accademia or the Instituto, but another friend who was there was a sculptor, who also kept up with—after I came back here—was Bill White. A wonderful guy, who unfortunately just died a few days ago.

ROBERT BROWN: Bill White.

TONY VEVERS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And was this a time for lots of discussion of art, [inaudible]?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, sure. Yeah. I think a great of, as part—in those days, everyone talked more about art than any other time. At least I did. And, or more about the ideas about art because I think we all knew that there was something going on back in the States that was important. I remember one time, I think, at the American Library, the American Institute. Uh, every town in Italy or overseas had an American library, which was supposed to acquaint the local people with literature and events in America. And they were very useful because they got magazines. And I remember looking at an *ARTnews* at that time and seeing a painting by Franz Kline, which

impressed me immensely. Although I didn't quite know what he was getting at. I remember seeing the painting and thinking it was really, really terrific. And that was my first introduction really to Abstract Expressionism out of the New York school.

ROBERT BROWN: Hm. Was there.

TONY VEVERS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that by and large—did they then, these American [00:04:00] libraries gave a fairly good picture of uh, what was uh, going on?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, they did. Yeah. They had all the latest books. I remember reading Paul Bowles' books and—

ROBERT BROWN: Paul Ball [ph].

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. And getting a lot from the art magazines that they carried. It was um—I forget the—it wasn't the American libraries they called—they were American, USIS.

ROBERT BROWN: The Information—

TONY VEVERS: Information Service. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Yes. And so you were, though you were in Italy and had gone there presumably to learn something from its traditions—

TONY VEVERS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: ––you were also, had one eye on what was going back in the States.

TONY VEVERS: Absolutely. Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: So did you—

TONY VEVERS: It was pretty obvious there was nothing very interesting going on in Italy.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

TONY VEVERS: In Florence in the early '50s, there was a group of young Italians who were trying to invent something called essentialismo [ph], which was—you drew a cup, you drew the essential lines of a cup that would be the essence of the cup in a sense. And perhaps a sort of offshoot of Futurism in some sense. But it was pretty pathetic. And most of the interesting people to talk to about art were Americans. And one of the things that was very rewarding for me was that I had a roommate, Walter, when I was in Florence, who was a German art historian, a student, studying at the Munich University, named Walter Witzdoon [ph].

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, yes.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. And he and I used to go around together and I'd get his reactions to all of the important sites in France. The buildings and the statuary and so forth. [00:06:00] And once we took a trip to Rome together and he hadn't been there, but he'd memorized the map of Rome and we took it all over the city, strictly from his own researches. And he was very thorough. Even though he was a fun loving and delightful person, he had a very serious approach. Uh, he was interesting because he—hard times as a German art student in focusing on something new. The only new, new artist he could find was an obscure muralist who had done a few frescoes in an obscure palazzo. And uh, they were on the ceiling of the large room, which later became the main room, main hall of a movie theatre. So that he had to go around to the movies if he wanted to study his artist. And wait till the lights came up in between films and study the ceiling.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

TONY VEVERS: But that's how he spent his days. He felt rather cynical about it, as you can imagine.

ROBERT BROWN: When you say that, that he was pushed to study older art, I mean, that—

TONY VEVERS: Well, he had to study—you know, he couldn't do Michelangelo obviously and he couldn't do Leonardo because they were all—

ROBERT BROWN: To study some historic Italian––

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: ––thing and he was reduced to looking at fairly obscure and out-of-the-way things.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. And this was about the most obscure person he could find, I suppose.

ROBERT BROWN: Did that, did that affect your attitudes toward art history at all?

TONY VEVERS: Well, no. I always—

ROBERT BROWN: By the, his example?

TONY VEVERS: I'd always enjoyed art history because I took a lot of it when I was at Yale and I got a lot from that. And I also met up with another art historian named John Sedgwick who I picked up with when I came back to the States. [00:08:00] And with Sedgwick, I took a trip down to Sicily. He had a car and he was a Fulbright student in Paris at the time, and he wanted to spend some time traveling through Italy. So he asked me to come along and split expenses with him, which I did. And we went down to, drove down through the length of Italy and over to Sicily.

ROBERT BROWN: And did that really open up a lot to you?

TONY VEVERS: Um, sure. It did, we got to explore a large part of Italy I hadn't seen before, though I had been down south in Italy before with Steve Pace and his wife on a similar trip to Paestum, south of Naples. And we'd spent some time there, which also quite a bit of the south of Italy. And of course, the art of the, some of the Byzantine art and so on, mosaics and Pompeii and Herculaneum. So I was able to get around quite a bit.

ROBERT BROWN: You um, stayed there then for two years until, into 19—through 1952 or into 1952.

TONY VEVERS: In 1952. Uh, I did. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And did you know what you wanted to do immediately thereafter or what did you, what did you do?

TONY VEVERS: Well, what happened was I met Kyle Morris, who was a painter who had been in New York. And he—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Kyle Morris.

TONY VEVERS: Kyle Morris. Yes. From the Middle West and he told me about the school that Motherwell and Baziotes and a few other people were forming, the Subjects of the Artist. And he suggested that might be a place to go and study.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the name of it?

TONY VEVERS: It was the, something called the uh––[00:10:00] Subjects of the Artists, of the Artist. It was a school which was active for about six months or so. And it finally folded up because they couldn't swing it financially.

ROBERT BROWN: So you'd met him in Europe?

TONY VEVERS: Kyle. Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And he said that was a good place to go and study. But then I found out from Pace that, Steve Pace, that I—that he was going to study with Hofmann and I knew a little bit about him. So I decided I probably would go to Hofmann instead.

ROBERT BROWN: So this, this entailed going back to the States, right?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, yeah. I was—

ROBERT BROWN: You were intending to come—

TONY VEVERS: I was planning—I had my ticket already. Yeah. I was planning to go back in the fall of 1952. And uh, so—before that though I met up again with John Sedgwick and took a trip from, through Holland and Belgium, and down through France, through the Loire Valley into Spain, and ending up in Madrid. Going to the caves and seeing much as we could of the Prado.

ROBERT BROWN: So you really got a very pretty comprehensive picture of a great deal, you know.

TONY VEVERS: I did. Yes. I was very lucky those trips were made available to me.

ROBERT BROWN: When you got back then, you went to New York. You stayed in New York, decided to settle in

there?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. I did. I got—frankly, after all my traveling around Europe I got sick of going to museums. I had this acute case of museumitis, I guess.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

TONY VEVERS: And I thought you know, I don't know if I'd just overdosed on the sort of historical point of view. [00:12:00] Although, I was very—always very impressed I remember by Poussin, whose compositions were very, very important to me. And of course, going up to France once in a while, I stopped off in Paris on the way to England always. And you got to see the shows, the big shows they had at the time—a lot of the shows that were going on.

ROBERT BROWN: In um––

TONY VEVERS: In Paris.

ROBERT BROWN: Paris. Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: These big salons.

ROBERT BROWN: Did these take—did you have a good deal of interest in what you saw in them?

TONY VEVERS: Um, not particularly really. I didn't see much—there wasn't an awful lot of contemporary art that I remember. I remember seeing the work of Hans Hartung in Paris, which I thought was very overrated. And also Vieira da Silva, who seemed to me awfully sort of mannered.

ROBERT BROWN: Vieira?

TONY VEVERS: You know, Vieira da Silva. Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And of course, I saw a lot of Picasso's sculptures which made a big impression because they were so vital. They had such, such vitality.

ROBERT BROWN: So you went to, then to England again, as well.

TONY VEVERS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And you had family there, of course.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. My father and my stepmother there. And I don't—well, last time my sister came over and I spent the summer of 1952 in England and got around. And of course, right about this time, earlier—I mentioned earlier that they had the Festival of Britain. A lot of attention was paid to British contemporary art and I remember in particular seeing the work of Victor Pasmore, which impressed me. And of course, they were showing a lot of Henry Moore, [00:14:00] who was just becoming very, very popular. Well, fashionable.

ROBERT BROWN: So that was a fairly memorable thing, the Festival of Britain exhibition.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, the exhibitions. They had several. Yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. In fact, I did some work a little bit reminiscent of Henry Moore while I was in Italy. Little bronze, I did some where I would cast a couple of full bronzes. One of them is right over there. And they are—they had sort of a flavor I think of Henry Moore probably.

ROBERT BROWN: So you were aware of him, had been for a bit. Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, sure. Yeah. Henry Moore at the time was probably the leading sculptor in the western world––Picasso excepted.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. When you got back to New York, did you just go to work painting? Uh, how'd you keep body and soul together?

TONY VEVERS: Well, I still had some money left over from my inheritance.

ROBERT BROWN: Your inheritance you got. Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Right. And uh, I found a basement apartment in the Village on Waverly Place. And shortly after, I was able just to share a studio, large studio space on Delancey Street on the Lower East Side. Above that was Steve Pace. So I was able to keep my friendship with Steve Pace and sort of be in touch with him, and see him as he worked, developed his work, day by day practically.

ROBERT BROWN: And was he someone whose work you admired?

TONY VEVERS: Uh, very much. Yes. I still admire. In fact, the—he had a show recently of work that he did in the [00:16:00] '50s and '60s, which looks extremely strong. Very, very, very, very good. And everybody I've talked to who saw it are still––echoed that.

ROBERT BROWN: They likewise were impressed.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. They were likewise impressed. And of course, now he's painting more figuratively in a different mode, but he was painting quite abstractly then. I think he was one of the—he was certainly one of the top of, rung of the second generation of Abstract Expressionists. And he also did a lot of watercolors that were unique in that nobody else in the Abstract Expressionist mo-movement—excuse me—was doing watercolors, as far as I know. And also through Pace, I heard about Provincetown, where he'd spent a summer previously. In 1951, I think it was.

ROBERT BROWN: So you mentioned earlier uh, deciding who you might study some more, or—at least take some classes.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And uh—

TONY VEVERS: Well, I enrolled—

ROBERT BROWN: This arises after having gone to uh, you mentioned the Motherwell, the short-lived school at Motherwell that others were involved with. And you—

TONY VEVERS: Subjects of the Artist. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You decided not to uh—

TONY VEVERS: Well, I—that sort of obviously wasn't available, but I—it was just around the corner fro Hofmann's school on 8th Street, West 8th Street and on 6th Avenue at Waverly Place. So I enrolled there in the winter of '52, '53. I went to class every day during the week. I was uh––so I was very involved with the, that for a while. I used to go to morning class where we drew from a figure in charcoal on paper. And obviously that's how you sort of introduced your students to the problems of using pictorial space [00:18:00] via the model. And I guess, I think there were probably many examples of that kind of work around, typical of Hofmann school treatment.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you profit from it right away? Did you feel this was a good—

TONY VEVERS: Well, I, actually I'd already been working pretty thoroughly in the use of abstract—in the use of positive/negative space and so on. So I didn't get much from that—I didn't get—I'd already anticipated that aspect of Hofmann's teaching. But I did get a great deal from his way of teaching, which was very impressive. And when I came—when I started teaching myself, I found myself perhaps picking up some of his mannerisms or some of his ways of handling a class. Because he was a superb teacher.

ROBERT BROWN: And how would you describe his handling the class?

TONY VEVERS: Well, it was very dynamic. Used to bounce into the room and then he'd get to work. And he'd always be—go around the room and he always—it struck me. He always seemed to remember who he talked to last. And he'd praise somebody one week and he'd tear them down the next week. And he, the ones that he'd knocked down the week before, he'd praise the second week. He always sort of gave you a sense of, you know, approval and a chance to regain his approval, which kept people going. But I also found that his class was very popular among sort of amateur artists, Sunday painters.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh. So was that a problem?

TONY VEVERS: Well, it ma—

ROBERT BROWN: For the rest of you? It must have been because it diverted his energy, as you mentioned.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Well, I remember one woman saying to another, you know, "I'm here because my psychiatrist sent me." And, and the other woman said, "Yes. So did mine, dear." [Laughs.] [00:20:00] And uh, that sort of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh.

TONY VEVERS: It wasn't very conducive to, you know, a sense of seriousity as far as I could see. Although I did enjoy working from the model and I enjoyed his responses and his instruction. And also it was interesting to meet some of his students, one of whom I still keep in touch with whose up, living up here. Haynes Ownby, who still, who lives here right now. And also I think having once been a Hofmann student, you're always a Hofmann student. It's just like a, belonging to a club. Whenever I meet another Hofmann student we have something in common right away.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

TONY VEVERS: Ah. Thank you. That's always enjoyable.

ROBERT BROWN: So you say that people who studied at Hofmann's schools, one here in New York or both, constitutes sort of a club. What is it that they feel they share?

TONY VEVERS: Well, I think they share the experience of having been exposed to Hofmann, and also, you know, going through something, an event you know, a big—not a ritual, rite of passage exactly, but a sort of experience which they wouldn't get any other way. I mean, it's not like going to regular drawing school, a life drawing school. It was much more eventful than that because he was—he used to talk a lot and he'd talk about art. And also he always talked about the history of art in such a way that you—he'd talk about Titian, and Rembrandt, and Velázquez in a way that he thought—made you feel that they were simply part of the continuum of art, of which modern art was simply the latest aspect of it. So you felt that art was always something which, you know, one did or was done that was very [00:22:00] impressive and important, but it was also something that was available to us as to what's to pass. And that, that impressed me very much.

ROBERT BROWN: And he would—was he very convincing in this? He apparently was, right?

TONY VEVERS: Well, he didn't express it, but that was what I got from it, the way he talked. Yeah. He didn't sort of state it, but it was sort of understated, but—and so one understood what he was trying to get at.

ROBERT BROWN: And would he come, hover around your work fairly frequently? Or how did he directly work with you?

TONY VEVERS: He'd, he'd come over and sit down, and you'd hand him your charcoal and he'd, you know, make corrections or he'd, you know, work on your drawing and show you what he wanted you to do. He was quite didactic in the way he taught. But he didn't want you to work in a sort of like a figurative way, but in a way that used the figure in an abstract manner in space. So it was always a Hofmann drawing, which is unmistakable. Using a rather small he—the figures would come down into the page. And always a great deal of emphasis on the relationship of the figure to the page, the edge of the page.

ROBERT BROWN: And so the figure tended to expand into the page.

TONY VEVERS: Yes, exactly. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Is that a matter simply of trying to get down his, the major points he was making or is it in fact the way he preferred the figure to be realized?

TONY VEVERS: Well, he wanted—he said that you've got to, you know, use what you see, use nature and use that in making your expression in a way. But he didn't make you, didn't want you to work in a certain manner, in the Hofmann manner, for instance. He never showed you his work or never did, never saw his paintings [00:24:00] except in very rare, rare shows. But he always uh, I felt he always tried to, you know, mold you in a way so that you ended up almost working in a Hofmannesque manner, which was very well adapted to what he was trying to get across, the point he was trying to get across.

ROBERT BROWN: In other words, it didn't uh, necessarily result in one becoming sort of a follower or a—stylistically of him.

TONY VEVERS: No. He didn't want, you know—

ROBERT BROWN: He didn't want that.

TONY VEVERS: No. He didn't want that. No.

ROBERT BROWN: In fact, I suppose some people did end up doing pastiches of—

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Some people would, somebody'd end up doing spaces around the figure or they'd, say, end up with three or four rectangles, which he would look at very approvingly sometimes. Um, and of course, there's a famous thing about him tearing people's drawings up and putting them back together, but—which I

never saw. But apparently he used to—once in a while he'd tear a drawing in half and put it back together upside-down so you could see that, you know, how the drawing could be made to work more effectively within the page, between the positive and negative spaces. But um—or what one would call positive and negative spaces.

ROBERT BROWN: So um, he was—was he really the big figure in American teaching at that point?

TONY VEVERS: I think he was the only person—only real teacher of, you know, which dealt with problems of modern art, with problems of plasticity, which he always talked about. And problems of pictorial space. And he did it using, you know, traditional methods, working from still life, working from the figure. And uh––[00:26:00] I think that was his––[

[Audio break.]

I always felt that, you know, I always think I thought—I always felt I knew what he was talking about. Um, and he was quite frank, you know. You never saw—he wouldn't praise idly. He would never—I never saw him condemn anything from anything but from a serious point of view. Or wouldn't criticize anything from anything but a serious point of view. And he was obviously absolutely dedicated to art and the idea of serious—very serious about it, which of course, impressed one very much.

ROBERT BROWN: At this time, were you attempting to show work or—and what kind of work were you doing at this point?

TONY VEVERS: Um, well, this time I was sort of, kind of working from a sort of, I guess a––from figures and spaces. I don't have any paintings here, down here which—from that period, but I have one or two which I can show you. I had developed in Italy when I was in Florence, paintings which incorporated a two-dimensional image, which I think incorporated most of the pictorial ideas that were consistent with, you know, the knowledge of what was going on. There's also—had a personal point of view. And I unfortunately didn't stick with that. I tried to become an Abstract Expressionist instead of working on what I'd evolved for myself. Not because of Hofmann specifically, but uh, I'm glad I was very impr—you know, you couldn't—it was hard not to be impressed by people like Kline and the other Abstract Expressionists one met. The Cedar Bar, for instance, where I spent a lot of time [00:28:00] hanging out with people like Steve Pace and John Holberg [ph], and, you know, Franz Kline, of course. A lot of people like that. So I was trying to get a kind of quick, you know, free-flowing way of working. And that sort of didn't gel for a long time until 1953, the summer of '53 when I went with Steve Pace on a watercolor trip, uh, expedition to New England in Maine. We had an old car, an old '39 Mercury. And we drove all over, all over the place and ended up in Maine.

ROBERT BROWN: This was in '50—the summer—

TONY VEVERS: Fifty-three, summer. Yeah. And eventually ending up on Monhegan Island where we found a place rent-free for the summer. It was an old sort of shacky place that was deserted. It hadn't been used. And it had a little open well next to it. And we had that for the summer.

ROBERT BROWN: It was okay in the summer, I suppose.

TONY VEVERS: It was okay. Yeah. We—and uh—

ROBERT BROWN: And what did you do? Paint there or draw?

TONY VEVERS: Watercolors.

ROBERT BROWN: Watercolors.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Steve was doing watercolors. He was an expert watercolorist. I mentioned before—I think I mentioned earlier that Steve Pace was an ex—was a watercolorist. And he was a—he'd done watercolors for years and he was really very, very proficient and technically adept at the watercolors. I learned [inaudible] from being with him at that time. And I also got into the sort of personal kind of [00:30:00] way of abstracting landscape from memory.

ROBERT BROWN: Okay.

TONY VEVERS: And so I showed quite a bit in New York at the time. I showed at various places. And I eventually even got a review in the *ARTnews* and a photograph of my painting, which was printed upside-down unfortunately. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: But you were feeling you were getting back a little truer to yourself after that summer.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, yeah. I felt like I really getting into something, you know. And I, the flow of the watercolor got into my oil painting, which I—which was very helpful at the time. And of course, when I was up there, I met Elspeth. And—

ROBERT BROWN: Where? In Maine?

TONY VEVERS: In Monhegan. Yeah. She happened to be there at the same time. And uh, we met and fell in love. And then we got married shortly after that in September of '53.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, was she also uh, beginning as a painter or what?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. She was, she'd been at the League and she studied with Zorach. And then she'd also been at the New School. And––

ROBERT BROWN: Studying with?

TONY VEVERS: With—well, she took a history course with uh, Meyer Schapiro. And also we lived in my studio down on Delancey Street for a couple of years in '53 to '55.

ROBERT BROWN: You lived in––

TONY VEVERS: In the studio. It was right in front of the Williamsburg Bridge, when they—

ROBERT BROWN: This was East Village, [00:32:00] I think. Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Well, it was—yeah. Lower East Side. Yeah. Very much the west—yeah. Well, it wasn't the West Village then. It was just uh—it wasn't the East Village then. It was just the Lower East Side. And because at that time it was all Jewish. Now the whole area is Puerto Rican, but it was very sort of different and kind of exotic.

ROBERT BROWN: At that time.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Because most of the people were immigrants, they were from—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

ROBERT BROWN: Eastern Europe.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. I remember we used to go to the Essex Street Market and you know, buy—to get food.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the name of the market?

TONY VEVERS: The Essex Street Market. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Essex Street Market. Which was a traditional large market hall sort of place.

TONY VEVERS: Yes. It was. Yeah. And about that time, after we got married, I got a job. At the time I didn't—I'd just spent my money on—I didn't have any resources. So—

ROBERT BROWN: You weren't marrying on your prospects. Or rather, Elspeth wasn't marrying you—

TONY VEVERS: No, she wasn't. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: —your prospects. [Laughs.]

TONY VEVERS: Definitely not. But uh, I—somebody told me to go to the Museum of Modern Art to talk to the employee office there. There was a very nice woman whose name I forget. And she said, "Well, I'll take your name," and she talked to me for a while. And said, "I'll see what I can do for you." And about a week later she called up and said, "Go down to West 57th Street, to the Sherwood Building," West 58th, West 57th. And uh, "There's a Mrs. Rufiates [ph] there who is looking for a gallery man." [00:34:00] So I went down and talked to her. And she was working on founding a gallery in the City Center building over on, I think it was 53rd Street, at the New York City Center. And here another sort of, you know, random bit of luck occurred. When I was in the Army on leave in England, on furlough, I'd run into a guy who I struck up a friendship with. He wanted to be—he was, at that time, working on a newspaper in England on leave from the Army. And his name was Richard Yates. And we got along very well. And uh, and he told me that his mother was a sculptor. And—

ROBERT BROWN: And this was?

TONY VEVERS: And this, of course, was Mrs. Yates.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was opening this gallery in the City Center building.

TONY VEVERS: And I said, "I know your son." And she said, "Oh," you know, "Richard Yates." I said, "Yes." And she said, "You're hired." [Laughs.] And it was kind of funny.

ROBERT BROWN: It was a new gallery.

TONY VEVERS: Well, it was—what happened with the—City Center had on the ground floor at the––let's see. On the west side of the building there was a long corridor that was a fire—you know, an emergency exit. And she had the bright idea that this could be a wonderful gallery because it would, you could get to it from inside the building, from the ground floor or from upstairs. You could walk down inside the building out into this corridor-like emergency exit, which led out to the street. And she had this [00:36:00] wonderful idea that it'd be a wonderful place to uh, a great place to have a gallery. And of course, people could see it from inside and they'd be a good, good audience because they'd be people interested in the arts, you know, the audiences at the City Center because that was when the ballet was coming in. And the City Center ballet attracted a lot of people who would be interested in the arts. And she'd been the head of the uh, what was it? The women's art––was it the New York Society for Women Artists?

ROBERT BROWN: Something of that sort. Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Something like that. She—at one time she'd been the head of that. So she knew her way around. And she got a board together with quite a few well-known people on it. And one of them were Vincent Price and the collector. His name was uh—who had a––

ROBERT BROWN: Ray Royden [ph].

TONY VEVERS: No. Roy Leiberger [ph]. Right.

ROBERT BROWN: So she was really a—was this to be a non-profit gallery?

TONY VEVERS: Absolutely. Yeah. And the idea was that they'd have, every month they'd have a juried show. Uh, and the jury would be an avant-garde painter and a conservative, and a middle-of-the-roader. So it was an interesting mix. And they—it was designed to be for, to allow—give a chance for young artists to show their work in a competitive way, and get a public or get the public exposure.

ROBERT BROWN: And your job was to manage this?

TONY VEVERS: Well, my job was to be the assistant to the director.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was Ruth Yates.

TONY VEVERS: Ruth Yates. Right. And I used to bring the paintings out, you know, show the paintings when the jury met, and go with [00:38:00] them and help them, take them out for dinner, lunch, whatever it was they—when they broke up at the middle of the day. So that was kind of fun because I got to meet a lot of people like Milton Avery, who I'd already met incidentally, but through Steve Pace, was a great friend of Avery's.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Avery a fairly accessible person or—?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, very.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like?

TONY VEVERS: Wonderful person. Yeah. And his wife was delightful. Uh, she still is. ROBERT BROWN: A number of older artists, but also then your contemporaries you would also meet, right?

TONY VEVERS: Well, I met—for instance, I remember one time they had a jury with Adolph Gottlieb and Jack Levine. And Jack Levine was a very, of course, very disturbed by Abstract Expressionism. And he and Gottlieb got off on a huge, sort of huge argument about the relative you know, worth of their positions.

ROBERT BROWN: And what—this was what? In the gallery there in the midst of—

TONY VEVERS: No. It was after the work had been shown and they'd made their selections. And we took them out to lunch and then after lunch I think, I remember they came back to pick up their hats and coats and so on. And they were go—they were in the middle of this big furious argument about, you know, the position of the Abstract Expressionists and whether it was serious or not, which of course, was Levine's position—he was a very,

very irate and very bigoted conservative.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Hmm.

TONY VEVERS: And I was—I felt very threatened by all this. Jack Levine, of course, had been a very, very noteworthy person back in the early—late [00:40:00] '30s, early '40s. You know, he did those portraits pictures of the sort of cartoony paintings with lots of impasto that a lot of people were, were very impressed by. And—

ROBERT BROWN: But you found—was this—you said this was frightening, his ire, his anger.

TONY VEVERS: Well, it wasn't frightening. It was sort of, it disturbed me because obviously he was so irate and he was obviously so upset that he—it was sad because Gottlieb was very, very cool. And he didn't get the least bit ruffled. He just sort of, immediately, you know, had all this argument in a very, very logical and a very sort of calm way. And he just made mincemeat of Levine unfortunately. But it certainly impressed me. But the other person who was the middle-of-the-roader, I forget who he was. But—

ROBERT BROWN: So you're—you, you listened to these things. You didn't enter into—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, no. I stayed out of it. [Laughs.] Sure. But I chanced to—another time they had a panel with Franz Kline and two other artists. I forget which, who they were exactly. And I was, I had to go to down to the Village and get a hold of Kline and bring him up to the jury thing. And that was sort of fun because I'd met him in the Cedar Bar. So I sort of you know, had a sort of nodding acquaintance with him.

ROBERT BROWN: But would a man—at that day and age, would a guy like Kline whose fame was pretty recent and growing, I guess—

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: But would he have been, in your mind, a towering figure or were these guys actually pretty approachable? After all, you said you first met him at the noted bar.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Oh, well, he was very approachable. Kline was the most, you know, gregarious of people. He [00:42:00] loved to talk and he loved to, sort of, hang out. He was a real––I don't know what you'd call it. He sort of liked to schmooze around and you know, chat. And he was very, very, you know, quite—he loved to—I think he grew up, not in a bar perhaps, but he grew up in a situation where, you know, used to talking and used to manipulate sort of the dialogue, public dialogue so he could handle himself very well. And he was wonderful to be with because he was so funny and so acute. And he had a wide range of things. He go off on long sort of riffs, like a jazz musician. He'd talk about something. The next thing you knew, he'd be talking about jazz. The next thing you knew, he'd be talking about baseball. And uh, you know, Jackie Robinson or something like that, or you know, the Dodgers. Or then he'd be talking about the Metropolitan Museum and maybe Chinese art, Chinese painting. And the next thing he'd talk about would be jazz music, jazz classics or something. And he loved to talk. And so he'd get around and he always ended up talking at the point to where he started out and it was a delight. Nobody, nobody had the foresight to tape him unfortunately in full swing because it would have been a wonderful document.

ROBERT BROWN: And he wasn't simply uh, an egotist or—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, no. I don't think so. No more than any other, any artist has to be. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Right. Did you sense—now, you'd been away in Europe for a couple of years—when you got back, had the status of the artist, at least in the—within the avant-garde, in that world in New York. Had it changed a bit?

TONY VEVERS: Well, you know, before I left New York, I hadn't—I didn't know what the [00:44:00] avant-garde in New York was. I had been around to shows and I'd seen the work of Matisse and so on, which were about as advanced as you saw then, but you never saw shows of anything but—like you never saw shows of de Kooning or Kline or anybody. Uh, I think the most advanced shows I'd seen probably were Karl Knaths at Rosenberg Gallery.

ROBERT BROWN: Sort of an American—

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. I'd never—I'd been to the Village and I'd seen the shows down there, but I never sort of—my idea of the Village was sort of the regular, you know—

[END OF TRACK.]

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ROBERT BROWN: —or establishment.

TONY VEVERS: The traditional part of the Village was really sort of bohemian and not very interesting. The—most of the people there were sort of hangers-on and living off the romance of the past. And nobody was doing anything very creative. But it's, I—then I quickly found out that the action was all on the East Side, near the Cedar Bar or over in the Club, in the famous 8th Avenue, 8th Street club, which incidentally actually sort of developed out of the, I think out of the school Motherwell and so on had been working on.

ROBERT BROWN: [Cross talk.]

TONY VEVERS: Subject of the Artist. Yeah. And so the Village itself, you know, really was sort of a dead end intellectually, as far as I could see. You had people like Max Ferdinheimer [ph] who was nothing but a—you know, was a really sad, alcoholic wreck. Uh, and Joe Gould and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: Joe Gould.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

TONY VEVERS: But I think most of the—and then most of the galleries were developing on the East Side. For instance, like the Hansa Ga—the Tanager Gallery on East 10th Street. So all the galleries and the—a lot of the other artists were moving downtown to the Lower East Side because that's where the rents were very reasonable there. And because the Village had gotten very expensive.

ROBERT BROWN: So you found uh—fairly quickly, you found where things were compatible and seemed genuine to you.

TONY VEVERS: [00:02:00] Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And in Ruth Yates, the City—what was it called? The City Center Gallery?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You had a marvelous perch, it seems to me, from which you could observe.

TONY VEVERS: It was fantastic. It really was. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: A lot of the older, the rising.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: The brand new.

TONY VEVERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then of course, I used to—during the—every afternoon I'd go down there and I'd set up a table and chair and I'd sit in the gallery. And I'd be the gallery guy, the gallery representative. So I'd get all the public coming in. And the first year I worked there, I spent my whole time talking to the public and trying to educate people about the new art and so on, you know. Uh, of course, I got, I really got sick of that. So after the second, after that, the second year, I used to go buy the *New York Times* on the way to work and I'd read the whole *Times* from beginning to end and do the crossword puzzle. Instead of trying to be the lecturer.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, I see. You'd sit there and let the people––

TONY VEVERS: Just come in. Yeah. And it was fun because a lot of people would come in and you know, you'd meet a lot of people. Some of the people who were connected with the City Center would come in. And I used to see Lincoln Kirstein, for instance, who used to come in and look at the figurative work. He wasn't interested in anything else. He was very limited in his response to art, I found. Uh, although rather a formidable person.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he, was he very demanding or—?

TONY VEVERS: No, he was just—

ROBERT BROWN: His manner was—

TONY VEVERS: His manner was strange. And also who—oh, Karl Malden, the actor used to come in a lot. And he always came in every, to see the show every month, almost religiously.

ROBERT BROWN: Because he had a great interest in—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, he, he must have. Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —contemporary art.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. And of course, lots of other um, lots of painters came through. In fact, some of the people who used to show, who showed there as young artists, more or less, were [00:04:00] Jules Olitski and the minimal artist—what was his name? He used to make boxes.

ROBERT BROWN: Joseph Cornell? No. Boxes. Donald Judd.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Donald Judd. And Olitski used to show in the City Center Gallery. Although I probably—I doubt very much if you'd see it on their resumes now. [Laughs.] Nowadays. But I have some—up here, there's a lady who used to show there. And she gave me a whole stack of her––

ROBERT BROWN: Brochures?

TONY VEVERS: Brochures and lists of artists who were in the shows.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, now, you're saying like these—who went on to achieve celebrity stature, like Judd or Olitski, would hardly acknowledge having shown there.

TONY VEVERS: I wonder, I wonder if they would really.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that because of the—why did they show there? Because at that time they needed it.

TONY VEVERS: Well, at that time it was the only place in New York where a young artist could have a chance of getting shown. I remember that there weren't too many galleries that were interested in American art to start with, and especially not young American art.

ROBERT BROWN: But now, like you mentioned though, the East Side places like Tanager and the like.

TONY VEVERS: Well, that's when they started, about that time.

ROBERT BROWN: About that time. They began taking up some of that.

TONY VEVERS: Yes, they did. And I used to show at the Tanager occasionally. But this gave artists a certain—it gave artists a chance, young artists a chance to show their work. And we used to have quite a few sales, too. I'm trying to think of some of the other people who'd come by.

ROBERT BROWN: But as I asked earlier, this was a great training ground for yourself. Is that right?

TONY VEVERS: Uh, it certainly was. Yeah. Yeah. I, you know, I certainly—I've always thought that I'd, you know, got a tremendous amount [00:06:00] out of it. Although the pay was very, very minimal.

ROBERT BROWN: And you continued to live near the Williamsburg Bridge.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You and Elspeth.

TONY VEVERS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And what was she doing primarily at this time?

TONY VEVERS: Well, I—she got a job as a secretary to Mrs. Yates and she'd come, used to work there in the mornings. So I'd do the housework in the morning and then work in the morning myself, and then she'd come. And then I'd go down to work, down to sit in the gallery. And she'd go down to work in the afternoon herself, down in the studio. She'd paint. So that worked out very well as a sort of a, you know, assuring of work and income and so on. We were both living on very little money then, of course. You know––in fact, I recently found a copy of the menu from the Cedar Bar. And the most expensive thing you could get down there then at that time was something like sirloin steak, which was $1.25 a meal. [Laughs.] The prices were quite a bit—little then. This was a time when New York was marvelous because the rents were very low and it was very cheap to live. We used to go out—we both made about, probably about $35, $50 dollars a week working part-time as we did. And we used to meet on Friday nights when I got through. And we'd meet in the Village and go out for dinner. And we'd, you know, for about $10 or $15 dollars, we could go out for dinner. And then go out, go down and go to the Cedar Bar and have a couple of beers. Or go to the White Horse Tavern, you know, for the literary scene. That

was also kind of fun, too.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that anything you got involved with, the White Horse Tavern? Or were you more of a spectator there?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, I was more of a spectator because that was really, really uh, writers. So I remember one time standing at the bar and having a drink next to Dylan [00:08:00] Thomas shortly before he died. I think it must have been about that time when he was over here. He was very—seemed very depressed and very despondent. And I always felt very sorry for him.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm.

TONY VEVERS: But there were a lot of English guys that used to hang out there. And one night when they, when the British climbed Everest, they had tremendous rejoicing there among the English crowd at the Cedar—at the White Horse.

ROBERT BROWN: But your own work, now. You're pretty busy. You said you're keeping house, but—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, I was, well, I was working. I was painting steadily. Yeah. And uh, I've got some examples for you. I was working really—I was working actually out of a lot of the experiences I had in Maine, of, you know, sort of surf and rocks and so on. The energy in nature. Because I was trying to get into my paintings by way of using them. And so [inaudible] you know, improvisation and fluidity in my work, brushstroke, which lasted for quite a while––

[Audio break.]

—very hand-to-mouth. A lot of the time I'd have to hawk a—I had a gold wristwatch left over from when I was in the Army. And I brought it back from Germany. Um, I got—I bought it at a PX before I was discharged. And I used to hawk that regularly because I could always get $15, $20 dollars for it. And it was always the end of the week when I ran out of money. I'd use that as a resource. And go up to 3rd Avenue and take it to a hawk shop. And that's how I was—I really had run out of all my resources at that point before. And I really was living on, you know, what [00:10:00] little I could earn. But also, before I met, married Elspeth, I was doing a lot of odd jobs in the Village. And I found this—at one point contemplated working as sort of an odd carpenter, you know, as an odd-job carpenter. Because I was finding that people, you know, always needed shelves put up or bookcases made for them. And—

ROBERT BROWN: And you'd had some experience—interest in manual—

TONY VEVERS: I had—

ROBERT BROWN: —skills, even when you were at Hotchkiss.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, sure. I had—not from there specifically, but from, you know—I think most artists have carpentry skills. You have to. So I used to do quite a bit of that. And I never took an ad in the paper or anything. But that would have been a, what I would have done if I hadn't been working for the City Center Gallery.

ROBERT BROWN: So that was just enough, by and large, to keep you going.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, it was. Just enough. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: You couldn't have counted on anything, say, from your father. I mean, there was no—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, no. No. I couldn't. In fact, my family didn't have anything. Uh, but once I was at the City Center, I used to—I'd show there, too, of course. I'd get my work—you know, I'd always send into the jury. And I often got in. And often, I often sold something. And once in a while I'd sell a piece and they never took any commission, of course, which was not a pleasant thing about the place, about the gallery. They didn't charge any commission to the artists.

ROBERT BROWN: Were um, what you could receive was fair—pretty small at that time or—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, well, it—

ROBERT BROWN: —were prices uh, for—

TONY VEVERS: Prices were pretty low.

ROBERT BROWN: Pretty low?

TONY VEVERS: Around a $100, $150. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And a top-level Abstract Expressionist at that time was making not an astronomical sum, but —

TONY VEVERS: No. I remember one time, I heard that Martha Jackson had [00:12:00] gone down to de Kooning's studio and bought a whole bunch of paintings for $2,000 dollars apiece. You know, that was—which wasn't much, but it seemed like an awful lot because he had an awful lot of paintings. But no, they weren't making much.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to know de Kooning at all during those years?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah, sure. Just to say hello to. Yeah. Not well. But we also got to know Louise Nevelson, who hung around the scene a lot.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, she did.

TONY VEVERS: She hung out at the Cedar Bar. In fact—

ROBERT BROWN: Was she particular—very well-known at that time? Not really yet.

TONY VEVERS: Well, she was, obviously she was well-known for her, you know, as a character. She still had those tremendous eyelashes and makeup and—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh.

TONY VEVERS: You know, great style. And she was very visible as a person. But nobody knew her work for—nobody knew her work very much, I don't think. She hadn't really gotten into the things that made her famous. But I went to, one time—what she did have was a series of sort of salons on—I think it was on Sundays where you go down to her house on the East Side. And she'd have a group of people in. And have a dialogue about aspects of art. And the time I went, I—it was a friend of her daughter-in-law, Susan Nevelson, who's married to Louise's—had been married to Louise's son, Mike.

ROBERT BROWN: Mike.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. So I used to go with Susan. And we'd go down to Louise's house and she had a lot of carvings which were very solid sort of abstract—as I remember, sort of abstract, figures of people, birds, and animals, and so on. All covered with plastic [00:14:00] bags to protect them from the dust, I suppose. Uh, she had—at that time, she had Max Weber and um––oh, Christ. Got into a heated argument about Modernism and so on. And—

ROBERT BROWN: One of Louise's salons?

TONY VEVERS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Max Weber and Richard Lippold.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Of course, I read about this in the Christmas magazine, in the *Provincetown Arts*. And Weber was sort of, you know, sparse in the course of humanism and so on. And he said that Lippold was mechanistic and non-humanistic. And he got very angry at him. And I thought it funny because you know, when, at one point, Max Weber had been sort of the main exponent of Cubism in this country. And when he was about the same age as Lippold was at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: But by the 1950s, he was––

TONY VEVERS: He was pretty old.

ROBERT BROWN: And he was getting kind of reactionary.

TONY VEVERS: He was certainly. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And what—did Lippold say much? Was there a retort?

TONY VEVERS: Uh, he didn't—he held his own. He didn't—he knew he didn't have to say anything much. So he didn't, you know, it didn't get heated.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this the time that the Abstractionists were carrying the day? It seemed—

TONY VEVERS: Oh, it certainly was. Yeah. Definitely. It wasn't long afterwards that the uh, a lot of figurative painters got together and wrote a famous letter to the *New York Times* complaining about this tendency.

ROBERT BROWN: And there was even a brief—a short-lived magazine, I think, that a group of these older ones like—*Reality* it was called.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. I think that's the—but of course, one of the things I got—that was interesting about working in the [00:16:00] gallery was that the critics would come around. People like Carlyle Burrows and the man who worked for the *Times*. Burrows worked for the *Tribune*, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, anyway, these reviewers you got to know.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Because they would—would they chat with you very much?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, sure. They were always asking me what I thought about it. Yeah. And uh, of course, I'd try and educate them. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: I see.

TONY VEVERS: But uh––

ROBERT BROWN: Were you a fairly forward lecturer in—you said you got tired of it after a while, but not with these critics.

TONY VEVERS: I got tired of arguing with the public, you know. People just walk up, in off the street and say, "What the hell's all this stuff?" you know, and try and talk to them. But––

ROBERT BROWN: It was too unexpected. I mean, the public sometimes would come in and be very—behave rather boorishly.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Well, some of the public were okay, but some of them were very, you know, interested obviously and they, it was a pleasure to talk to them. But sometimes I felt I was just really wasting my time. You know, this is why I just sort of just got tired of it. But Carlyle Burrows. What was the other guy's name?

ROBERT BROWN: When did you then begin going to Provincetown? In 1955 or so?

TONY VEVERS: Well, I'd been up here before. Um, back about 1950, my sister had a part-time gig with a theatre in—arena theatre in New Orleans.

ROBERT BROWN: She was an actress?

TONY VEVERS: She was an—well, she was a—yeah. A student, well, a student actress. She was sort of the leading lady for a year or so. And I used to go up and visit her in Orleans. And then I always kind of promised her—well, I had a good friend who lived in [00:18:00] Wellfleet, David Tsastavasy [ph] whose family lived—had a house in Wellfleet. And I used to go out—they always had wonderful parties on the weekends. And I used to go up there and we—once in a while we'd go to Provincetown. And it really impressed me as a placed I'd, that was very sort of conducive to being an artist for some reason. And then when I came back to Yale after that weekend in Wellfleet, and going to Provincetown, I did a drawing of a fisherman and his son just as a memory of the town. And it made a real impression on me. And I remember that when I was working at the City Center, I encountered somebody who—a guy who came in and started talking about Provincetown. I said, "Yeah. I've always wanted to go up there." And he said, "Well, you should." Um, and he gave me some names of people to look up. And of course, it turned out it was Napi from Napi's Restaurant, Napi Van Dereck.

ROBERT BROWN: He was the man who had spoke to you?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. And he was a painter himself at that time?

TONY VEVERS: Uh, no, he wasn't. No. He just was interested in art. His father was a painter.

ROBERT BROWN: But you met him in New York.

TONY VEVERS: I met at the gallery. Yeah. He just, he just walked in.

ROBERT BROWN: And he gave you some names.

TONY VEVERS: He gave me some—said you should come up to High Head and get a place on the dunes. And I sort of—

ROBERT BROWN: Sort of on the uh, edge, southern edge of Provincetown.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Yeah. But then, later on, we found out that Elspeth was pregnant. And we had and then—after the summer was—so we decided we'd get out of town because we felt we'd sort of been there long enough. She'd been living in New York before I—

ROBERT BROWN: And she was from the New York area, wasn't she?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Well, she lived outside of New York in Westchester.

ROBERT BROWN: So it was about [00:20:00] 1955—

TONY VEVERS: This was 1955.

ROBERT BROWN: —that you decided to move up here?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Stephanie was born and—but then at the same time, Fritz Baldwin [ph], who I'd known in Italy—gotten reacquainted with—also suggested I come up here. And then by chance, through a friend of a friend of the Averys, I heard about a house that was available in Provincetown. The owners had left suddenly to go to New York. And wanted somebody to come up and clean the house up, and you know, hose out their fridge, which they'd just left full of food. And in return we could stay there for the winter. So we came up here from New York State, where we were living in Croton Falls, near—

ROBERT BROWN: You'd moved out of the city already.

TONY VEVERS: Well, well, we moved out to Elspeth's mother's place outside the city.

ROBERT BROWN: I see.

TONY VEVERS: And we took uh, we had Stephanie with us. And we—

ROBERT BROWN: You had an infant with you.

TONY VEVERS: An infant with us. Yes. And we came up here and we knew the guy who was sort of the caretaker for the people who owned the house.

ROBERT BROWN: And this was in Provincetown?

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. And he was a very nice man, Maurice Lopes. And Maurice—

ROBERT BROWN: His name was?

TONY VEVERS: Maurice Lopes. L-o-p-e-s, which you know, from the Portuguese Lopez probably. A lot of Lopes's around. They call it Lopes. Yeah. And um, he said, "Well, you know, come on in and I'll put you up for the night and then we'll take you over to the house." Which was on the waterfront. Right on the water, on the harbor. It was a beautiful sight. It was right out of the middle of town, just west of the middle of town. And we felt very, [00:22:00] you know, very, very happy there because it was so beautiful. You could see out the window and there as the whole bay, the harbor.

And the people were very welcoming. And through Maurice we got to know a lot of local people. And of course, at that time, everybody—all the bohemians, which they called us, came up during the summer of course. And we were unusual because we came up during the winter. And they were impressed because they knew we were serious. So they were very kind. And so that once in a while you—we'd find little frozen can of scallops on our doorstep that people had left for us.

So I started working as a carpenter's helper around, just to get—we had some money saved up from occasional sales and so on. We ran out of money pretty, pretty quickly after a while. I think we had 500 bucks. And so we were forced to start working for a living. And Elspeth found a job working for the Portuguese baker in the middle of town. And she could take Stephanie with her to the baker's shop. And Stephanie would play under one of the baker's big panelas, pans. And so we had, you know—so we got bread. At that time, Portuguese bread was 19 cents a loaf. I think it's about a buck-and-a-half now. [Laughs.] Or something like that. But it was wonderful. And I finally got a job working at the Air Force Base in Truro where the radar domes are, on a crew to put in the concrete bases for the domes.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean you, you worked as a laborer.

TONY VEVERS: I worked as a laborer. Yeah. A real lumper. And it was very hard work because we were mixing [00:24:00] concrete and running the machine by hand. They didn't use, you know, concrete mix from the trucks. We had to mix it right there.

ROBERT BROWN: Because it had to be done just so?

TONY VEVERS: Just so. Yeah. They had to inspect it.

ROBERT BROWN: At very high, special specifications.

TONY VEVERS: Right. Yeah. They tested it continually. And we had to do it very quickly. You, you had to be done fast so that the whole thing would set up in one lump as it were. So––

ROBERT BROWN: But you were extremely lucky to have this delightful place where you were in effect housesitting, I guess.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Right. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And this was through the Milton Averys that you said—

TONY VEVERS: Well, it was through the Averys. Actually, their daughter, March, had a friend who was the object of Maurice Lopes' eye. And she heard about the house and told Maurice. And Maurice I guess told the Averys about it through, through this gal. And it was very sort of circuitous and it was perfect because there was no rent involved and it was certainly a beautiful way to come to Provincetown. And we didn't—we hadn't thought of anything about what we were going to do when the summer came. But all of a sudden I think we realized that we both wanted to stay here and that we loved the town.

ROBERT BROWN: Although, because there weren't the crowds in the summer as there are now.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, no. The thing was, people started coming up in the spring. Our friends from New York started coming up looking for places, people our age, you know, young artists in their 20s and so on. So we um, we thought that was terrific. Our New York life sort of continued on in the summertime with all these friends who came up.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned earlier that maybe the locals said the bohe—like they called them bohemians.

TONY VEVERS: That's what they called them in those days. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: [00:26:00] But they weren't—it's not to be confused with what you're, you're feeling about the Greenwich Village hangers-on.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, no, no, no.

ROBERT BROWN: They were sort of playing at being bohemians or they were has-beens.

TONY VEVERS: No. The locals used to call bohemians—instead of calling them hippies or anything like that the way they do now.

ROBERT BROWN: Called bohemians. Yeah.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Somehow that was the phrase they used. I don't know where, how come.

ROBERT BROWN: So who were some of the younger or people your age who were going to—you learned were going to be coming up? Uh, this would be the, in 1954.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, Angelo Polito [ph] and um, Miles Forst and his wife. And of course, Steve Pace came up that summer, too. By that time, we'd already met Myron Stout who—he was a very good friend of ours.

ROBERT BROWN: And he had been—

TONY VEVERS: He was living here—

ROBERT BROWN: Decided to settle in here about that time?

TONY VEVERS: Well, he'd come in earlier. But I met him when he had his first one-man show at the Stable Gallery in the city previous to coming up here. So it was easy to get reacquainted with him.

ROBERT BROWN: So you got to know him over that winter then when he was here.

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. Yeah. We did get to know each other.

ROBERT BROWN: What was it about Myron that attracted you to him?

TONY VEVERS: Well, Myron was very—he was wonderful. He was like an uncle. And I think a lot people—a lot of younger artists are very fond of him for that reason. He was very knowledgeable about art and was very generous, and was always interested in what we were doing. He didn't have any kids. He wasn't—he never got married. So he always loved having young people around, I think. And he sort of became like an uncle to us. And he was very fond of our kids. [00:28:00] But we became very good friends. And he used to go New York and we used to go to New York every winter—our children would stay with Elspeth's mother. And we'd go into the city for a week or so and see what was going on, go to the shows. And when we came back, Myron would always ask us, "Who did you see and what did you do?" and so on. And he did the same thing. We'd always ask him, you know, what he'd done, who'd he see. And of course, some of the other people we got to know who came up were people like Jan Muller and Dody, who became his wife, Dody James. So we really had a large complement of, you know, old, sort of Hofmann students and so on. And we used to go to the beach together and play.

ROBERT BROWN: So to Provincetown in the early '50s were coming, mostly on their own, not because—isn't that true? A great variety of up-and-coming artists.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that fair to say?

TONY VEVERS: Oh, absolutely. Because it was very inexpensive. I mean, you could get a rent for the summer for 100 bucks and you could come up, say, in June. And you could stay on into uh, you know, in August, September, into September until it started to get cold. And you'd have to leave, probably have to leave because the pipes would freeze. So that they'd—and the people were very, like I said before, very friendly and very open to having people, having young people I think.

ROBERT BROWN: But you felt your decision had been right to come to Provincetown.

TONY VEVERS: Absolutely. Yes. I often think what would happen if we hadn't. If we hadn't come here I probably would have stayed in New York and perhaps become more famous, but I left New York about the time I was beginning to you know, show a lot and get reviewed a lot. Because in those days, you know, [00:30:00] if you had a show, you always got reviewed, at least by the papers, if not the magazines.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean they did—they went assiduously around.

TONY VEVERS: Oh, very. Absolutely. Yes. I'm trying to remember that, the name of the man who worked for the *Times*. I know you'd recognize his name. I can't—

ROBERT BROWN: Howard Dubris [ph] was the—

TONY VEVERS: Yeah. He always, he was always very funny because he'd talk about the sort of—two of the big people who taught at the League and showed. You know, they always showed sort of slice of life. Reginald Marsh and Miller, which he called the Marsh/Miller School of Art. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Reginald Marsh—and Miller was uh, Kenneth Hayes?

TONY VEVERS: Kenneth. Yeah. Kenneth Hayes Miller, whose work I could never stand. I couldn't have, you know, I never could understand the thing about Kenneth Hayes Miller and those, those strange, dumpy women he always painted. But Reginald Marsh, I met once. Uh, and he seemed very nice.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. People like that, like Miller or Marsh, for you really held no real excitement, did they?

TONY VEVERS: No. Not, not really, no. Because I felt they were sort of like part—they were the past. And uh—

ROBERT BROWN: Likewise, you mentioned earlier, Jack Levine. I sense that he, too, is a—

TONY VEVERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. I, you know, I think as a young person I always was interested in the, in what was going on, the modern, the future. And certainly, you know, I had a book I remember of Reginald Marsh's drawings. And uh, which I liked at the time. But certainly didn't—that was it. He definitely was, he was a figure of the past, like Jack Levine. And of course, naturally like uh, John Steuart Curry and, [00:32:00] you know, all those people.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]