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Oral history interview with Sam Maloof, 2002 Jan. 10-11

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Sam Maloof on January 10-11, 2002. The interview took place in Alta Loma, California, and was conducted by Mary MacNaughton for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

SM: SAM MALOOF
MM: MARY MACNAUGHTON
BM: BEVERLY MALOOF

[SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE A]

MM: This is Mary MacNaughton. I'm doing an interview today - January 10, 2002 - with Sam Maloof and this is for the Archives of American Art. First, congratulations on your exhibition in Washington, D. C., which I was very pleased to see on Thanksgiving Day. All of the museums in Washington - the Smithsonian museums - were open on Thanksgiving so I was thrilled to go and see the exhibition and have it almost to myself with my family and friends. Your exhibition, *The Furniture of Sam Maloof* , is a beautiful installation and it's accompanied by this gorgeous catalog that we'll be referring to during our interview because it has wonderful reproductions of your works and it includes a exhaustively researched essay by Jeremy Adamson. I know it's based on many hours of tape interviews with you and I'm extremely grateful that you're willing to go through this process again. It won't be as long as Jeremy's but we hope to hit on all of the important points that would be good to include in an Archives of American Art interview. As you know, these go into their collection of oral histories which are available to scholars for years to come and it's a fantastic resource and the Archives is also really excited about ultimately having your papers for people to consult, as well. They're really focusing on building up their collection in the crafts and decorative arts. We only have hour hours so that's not long to cover your rich and full career but we will try to come up as far as we can to the present. What I'm particularly interested in your life in Alto Loma, your career here and the intersections you've had with so many artists in Claremont. So let's start with the beginning. In 1905 your father and mother emigrated from Lebanon to the United States, staying briefly in Rhode Island before coming to California to join your father's sister, Holla.

SM: Yes, Holla.

MM: Holla. And your father's name was?

SM: Nasif.

MM: First name was Slimen?

SM: Well, actually it was Nasif Nadir Maloof. And some people pronounce it Nadir or Nadir and my mother was his second cousin.

MM: Her name was Anisse?

SM: Anisse - Alice in English - and they were in Rhode Island for a short while in Patuckett. I just about fell over when my father said, "Well, we went to Patuckett," 'cause his English wasn't - he spoke English but sort of brokenly.

MM: Tell me the names of your brothers and sisters from oldest to youngest.

SM: My mother had nine children. The Mary was the eldest and then I had a sister that was a Sadie who died at childbirth and then my sister, Olga, and then Bea and then Rose. They all had Lebanese names like Rose is Zinen and - but - and then there was Sara and then myself - is that seven? I was the seventh child. I had six sisters. Then I was born and then I had a younger sister, Eva, who is now 84, and then I had a younger brother, Jack, who went away when he was only 40.

MM: And your father's sister was in Santa Barbara. Do you know why your parents chose to settle in Colton?

SM: Well, after being in Santa Barbara there was a large colony of Lebanese in Colton and, as it is today when people migrate to this country, they usually go where they have relatives and that's what it was. And most of

them were Maloofs. They were practically all Maloofs and that is when my dad changed his name over to Solomon, which is in Arabic is Slimen and my grandfather's first name was Slimen Nadir Maloof, and in Lebanon they usually take their father's first name for their last and, though in our family--the cousins that I met in Lebanon on two different occasions -- were all Maloofs.

MM: Then at your grandfather's request your father and mother went back to Lebanon for a time and then came back to California to settle their affairs.

SM: Well, actually my grandfather came in the late 1800's and then he went back and my Aunt Holla married and then my father and mother came over about 1902, 1905 - in there - and of course they went to Santa Barbara because he had a sister there and then my father came to this country and my mother did lace work and crocheting and my father peddled it and from that they opened up a store. They had a store in Imperial Valley in Calipatria and my mother ran a store in Chino and -- but even before the Calipatria thing my father and mother went back with my three sisters and my father had done very, very well. He built a new house for his father and bought more land and my grandfather insisted - this is the story anyway, the way I've heard it - insisted that he leave the three girls and that way they'd have to go back but my oldest sister, Mary, who is now gone, said that she could speak Arabic and she heard them talking. She hid and came back with my father and mother but my sister, Olga, and I didn't - I don't think I mentioned Olga. She was between Mary and Bea and stayed there. They were just children. And it was during the war and they lived under the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Lebanon and Syria were under the Turkish Ottoman Empire. They were ruled by Turkey. Bea remembers it very vividly but she said my grandfather and grandmother died and the two girls were pretty much left on their own.

MM: And then you were born on January 6th, January 24, 1916 in Chino?

SM: Yes. Yes. But my sisters got over to this country. The Red Cross intervened and a teacher friend went to New York and came across country with them to Chino.

MM: What a journey. What were your earliest divisional memories of Chino and your house?

SM: Oh, I can remember it very vividly. My mother had a ladies' dry good store and like most of the merchants lived either over the stores or they lived in back of the store. What my mother did, she rented the building next door. I remember it was divided with sheets so that you had privacy and the old wood stove and all, but we lived there until my mother closed her store and moved to the Imperial Valley.

MM: What kind of furniture did your parents have -- do you remember?

SM: Well, it was just ordinary furniture. I can remember the big wood stove very much like that one we took baths in. We had to bring a tub in and my mother would have a curtain around the tub and my sisters would bathe and I was the first boy. I remember before we'd go to bed - we took baths once a week, but before I went to bed my mother would wash our feet and all. She was very, very, loving, attentive. I can imagine somebody washing your feet now. I don't think very many people do that, but my life growing up was very, very good. We were the only Lebanese family in Chino and we had sort of a league of nations. I can remember very vividly that in the old cannery and a lot of farming. Just a lot of farming, and the big American Sugar Beet Company had their factory there. They moved to Oxnard and closed it down.

MM: What other visual memories do you have of your mother's handwork? Did you watch her make things?

SM: Well, my mother always crocheted and I have a lot of her crocheting, even now, and my mother sang beautifully. My mother was asked to go all over Southern California for funerals, for baptisms, for weddings and all. She could sing, like in a funeral she'd sing a soliloquy of the person and I recall very vividly when my brother died he was only 40 and there were just hundreds and hundreds of people. He'd been a school principal - and she'd asked me if I would ask the minister if she could say a few words at the gravesite. I was standing behind her and she was about 85 then and we just said that my mother wanted to say a few words. My father was still living, too, and I was standing behind her holding her hand and I said to her in Arabic, "Say whatever you want, Mom," and she says, "I can't talk," and then all of a sudden she broke out singing the soliloquy of my brother from the time he was born until he died. Even though people didn't understand it, everybody was in tears, but her voice sounded like she was 18 years old. I mean, it didn't crack or anything. I have a recording of her singing when she was about 80 - about 85, 86 that I still listen to, it makes me ... It's very touching, even talking about it.

MM: Yes. What do you remember of your father's dry goods store?

SM: Well, I really didn't know my father until I was in the 3rd grade because he ran a big department store, now or a mercantile store. He would come about twice a year to Chino. He was a very handsome man, but he was a complete stranger to me. I knew that he was my father and it wasn't until we moved to the Imperial Valley that I

got to know my father. Where my mother was very gregarious and all, my father was very quiet. But once we moved back to Chino, then I got to know my father much better. In fact, after I grew up and was out of high school, we became very close. My father was a very kind man, a very quiet person.

MM: How old were you when you began drawing? Do you remember?

SM: Oh, I could read and write when I was four years old. I remember getting up early in the morning and going to the corner where they threw out the papers and it was Hocan Jertburg Department Store and they had a men's department, a woman's and a soda fountain. The bus station had magazines and I'd go there and read. I'd break a bundle and read the newspaper. I can't remember when I couldn't read or write.

MM: Do you remember some of your first drawings? What they were?

SM: Oh yes. My mother would put out a little table in front of the store and I'd sit there by the hour just drawing, a lot of them were of airplanes and I recall the first time we ever heard of radio. The Rileys had a son, Malcolm, and we kids would all go over there and put on the earphones and listen to - I forget what they called it - a crystal set and we just couldn't believe that we could hear all this, but that was one of the outstanding things that I can recall.

MM: And as a boy you made toys?

SM: I made all kinds of toys. I made trucks and cars and I recall we didn't have aluminum then, I'd take old tin cans and I'd cut pieces about a quarter-inch wide and make springs on my trucks. We played cowboys and Indians, making guns and shot rubber bands. I remember very vividly, if you know how to put a rubber band, then you'd put one below it and you'd shoot and then let go. How many times it would snap back and usually it would hit me in the eye. It seemed like I had pinkeye all the time but I don't know when I didn't use my hands or draw. I did just as a little boy.

MM: Did your parents tell you that your grandfather had this interest? Did your father have this interest?

SM: No. I just don't know. I don't know what my father did in Douma. I think he farmed. In fact, I know he farmed, but as far as a trade goes I do not know. My father was like most Lebanese that came to this country through the United States. I've seen a lot of photographs and I'd say, "Well, that looks like Papa and Mama's store." They had photographers who would come out and the family would stand in front of the store. There were stories - one story that I remember, my mother had a two-wheel wagon and a horse and she had her valise with all of her embroidery in it. They were oiling Riverside Drive and 6th Street and Mr. Tebow, who was the constable, came up. He had his big old badge and all and he said something to her about her driving over this road that they were just oiling. She didn't understand English at all, but she just sort of panicked and the horse reared up and her valise dropped out and all of her lace goods were ruined. He got down off of his horse and helped her pick the things up. She was crying. They became very, very good friends up until the time that he died. The Tebows are one of the great pioneer families in Chino. But that was just a little story that she told and how she met Mr. Tebow.

MM: Now, did you take your first art class in high school or before?

SM: Well, in grammar school I always drew and they had everything - one teacher taught everything, but it wasn't until I got to Chaffey High School. We lived in Ontario during my seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth years. We had an art teacher, Charlotte Reid. I'd never seen an art class like it. But she had skeletons - a skeleton hanging and plaster casts of arms and hands and legs and all. We drew from that and we also had a model we'd draw from. Not a nude model, but one of the students would get up and sit. That was really my first experience where I had a class, they taught art. We went to that one class when I was a freshman and after about one semester she said that I should be in the junior class. So I was in the junior/senior class and then I went to Chino. I went back to Chino and the art teacher was hired as an art teacher, and I didn't know until later that she didn't know a thing about art. She told me this later. I had a room that was glassed in and she let me do just whatever I wanted.

MM: Was woodworking at Chino the first time you had done that?

SM: No. I didn't take woodworking in Chino.

MM: You didn't?

SM: No. I took it at Chaffey. We had a beautiful shop and all but it was during the Depression and they didn't furnish wood so most of us just - all we did was clean up the shop.

MM: You said your teacher, Mr. Dean, wasn't very motivated to teach you?

SM: Well, it was strange. It was very strange. We could have taken wooden boxes and made furniture, but it was only a 45-minute class. It was an elective class. In those days you either had a vocational or college type of courses

MM: Did you learn any techniques, though, in that class?

SM: Didn't learn a thing, and I remember after I had gotten rather established, I was asked to give a talk at one of the clubs. I didn't know he [Mr. Dean] was there, but I mentioned how I got four F's for woodworking and everybody just roared and he was there. I didn't even know it. But I hadn't had any training at all in woodworking.

MM: But did it whet your appetite? Did you think, "I want to do this again"?

SM: Not really. And then from there, I went back to Chino. I made a couple of pieces for my parents. I remember I made a coffee table and a kitchen table, but this was on my own. Then when I went into the army and was very fortunate. I made Master Sergeant in about three months, and came home to Los Angeles. I didn't like the furniture in my apartment, so I went to night school at Belmont High School and I made furniture for the apartment. I asked the manager and he said, "I need everything I can get so if you want to make some, go ahead." And then Loren Barton, who was an instructor at Chouinard, lived right across the street saw what I did and she said, "Sammy, I think people would buy this if you made it," and that was what really got me started and then after I left there I went to work for Millard Sheets. Millard knew I was back in town and he asked if I would work for him so I moved out to Claremont.

MM: Before we get to that period, you said you studied with another teacher, Eleanor Corwin, at Chino High. What did she teach you or what did you take from that experience?

SM: Well, Eleanor - I knew that she hadn't had any experience at all and she was scared to death and she told me this much, much later, she said, "You know, they hired me as an art teacher, and I couldn't even hold a pencil." And then she said, "So that was the reason I put you in a room by yourself." Well, I looked out at the class through the glass. There was a poster contest, and it was a national contest about smoking, so I did a drawing of a baseball player reaching up and catching a ball, then down below, "Great Players Do Not Smoke," which was like a hole in the head. It meant you're stupid but anyway it won the national contest. Then later the Pasadena Players were doing Oliver Twist at the Padua Hills Theater and they called them the Players. They were there on Wednesday and Thursday and then the Mexican Players were there on Friday and Saturday. Well, before that they were having a - well, for a better word a contest for high school students in Southern California and there weren't that many high schools then. Now, you have Alta Loma or [unintelligible]. My guess is five of them, I think, Chino, Pasadena and Long Beach and Claremont. She came to me and said, "Have you thought of doing a poster?" And I said, "Nope." She said, "Well, this is the last day and if you don't make one I'm going to give you an F, so there." She wasn't much older than I was. She was about seven or eight years older. So I sat down and I did a poster in about an hour and it happened to win the prize.

MM: This was your Oliver Twist poster for the Padua Hills Theater?

SM: Yes. Yes. And Millard was a juror and I didn't know Millard.

MM: Was that the first time you met him, at the reception for the poster?

SM: Yes. It's the first time that I ever met him.

MM: What was your first impression of him?

SM: Oh, I liked him an awful lot. I liked Millard an awful lot. I was only 18 years old and he was 10 years older, he was 28. He was 10 years older than me and I thought he was an old, old man, but I liked his exuberance and I really didn't get to know him until I got out of the army and I went to work for Harold Graham.

MM: First let's talk about Vortox.

SM: Oh yes, Vortox. I went to work at Vortox in 1934 and Mr. Garner . . .

MM: This is Herman Garner?

SM: Yes. At the dinner my teacher was with me and asked what I was going to do after I graduated. I said, "Well, I want to go to college but I have to have a job. My parents can't afford to send me." And he said, "Well, what are you doing in the summer?" I said, "Well, I have to find a job." And he said, "You come and see me and I'll see what I can do." A week before school was over, Ms. Corwin asked me if I would call Mr. Garner and I said, "Well, I haven't because we don't have a telephone and we don't have a car," and she said, "Well, I'll call." She called him, made an appointment and took me there in her little Model A Ford. She stayed in the car and after a little

while Mr. Garner said, "Well, do you like to wash windows?" And I said, "I love to wash windows." So for three months I washed windows inside and out. Then he asked if I would like to work in the art department. Well, the art department was nothing. They had his future wife run the department, but she didn't know anything about art at all, but she learned how to do photography. She was a good photographer and so I did that and, of course, I knew how to do engineering drawing because I had done it in school, so I did a little bit of engineering drawing and I did all the posters and all the graphics that came out through Vortox and also for Padua Hills.

MM: Speaking of Padua Hills, Sam, there were a number of artist's studios located up there. Can you take us back and describe what that was like?

SM: Well, it was very much like it is today. They had a little separate building where they sold Mexican artifacts and all and Mr. Garner was very much into that and then Bill Manker built a studio and that's where his ceramics studio was and it stayed there . . .

MM: What do you remember of his studio?

SM: Well, I remember they had a little sales room. They had a house where they lived and they had a sales room off Padua Avenue where all the houses are up on the hill and Bill built it over the years and that was really the only studio they had there where they had a craftsman working and Bill's business, you know, was quite a - it was a production ceramics studio.

MM: Did he have some assistants?

SM: Oh, he had a lot of assistants. His wife really ran it and . . .

MM: What was her name?

SM: I can't remember now but he was married to her, had two sons, and then they got a divorce and he married Marcia Forbes, who was much, much younger than he was. It caused quite a stir in Claremont. The gift store sold Mexican objects only, glass and that type of thing. But in later years after the theater was closed - maybe it was still open - they had the first craft show that I had ever known of and the painters. Millard and all of them hung their paintings on clotheslines. There were about six of us, and Harrison McIntosh. I remember when Paul Soldner came in.

MM: This was in the 50's?

SM: This was in the 50's - early 50's. And they called it The Living Arts and we all built little - I remember mine was sort of a tent-like thing built out of plywood and I had my worktable out in front and I worked and all and that lasted . . .

MM: Did artists demonstrate and . . .

SM: Yes. The craftsman did. The painters didn't. I mean, they were beyond doing that. And then, they thought they would bring it to Scripps College so we were under the arches around the in Seal Court. And we were under the porticos . . .

MM: What time of year was that held? Do you remember?

SM: Oh gosh, I don't know. It was in the spring.

MM: Was that an annual exhibition?

SM: Oh yes. And then the painters and sculptors used the line gallery to show, but most people were interested in the craftsmen throwing pots and that type of thing.

MM: Did that happen at the same time as the Ceramic Annual?

SM: No. No. I don't think they even - well, they did have the Ceramic Annual because that's another story but they felt that it was - what's the word that I wanted to use?

MM: They were interested in having all of the arts together?

SM: Well, no, no, no, no. It was sort of a down thing for the painters showing their paintings on a clothes line. So they had gallery shows and they had huge crowds, but I remember one of the very first ones. Paul had just been hired and he was doing these great big pots and all and, you know how Paul was, without and a shirt and everything and then Harrison, who was very neat and very precise. That was before Rummy Deese, and then they decided that they would have everything in a gallery and no demonstrations so the crafts things were put

in a very small gallery and that lasted two years and it just fell apart. I mean, I think the painters thought it was sort of beneath their dignity to be, you know, demonstrating and all. But it turned out very well. But that is the only time that I ever was in a craft fair and then from there it was . . .

MM: But you had many other exhibits and outlets. You mentioned something about a woodcraft shop near Padua. Was that Albert Stewart's studio?

SM: No.

[END TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SM: ...that was awful expensive when you were only making $12 a week but the shop was very interesting. It was in a garage that had been the Chevrolet garage and Harold Graham had bought it. I was just fascinated with what they were doing. I really didn't know what they were doing or what for, but I would stand there at the door and just look, every once in a while he would nod his head to me. I did that for about a year and I wouldn't do it every day but one day I was designing a great big display for the Tulsa Oil Show for Vortox and I needed a band saw. I got up enough and I walked into the shop and talked to the fellow that worked for him. I said, "I'm doing a display and I need a band saw. I wondered if I could borrow the band saw." I remember this little flighty guy said, "I would ask him." He said, "I've worked here for a year and sometimes he doesn't talk to me for two months," and just as he said that Harold walked in. I don't know if Harold heard him or not but Harold smiled and said, "Can I help you?" And I told him and he said, "Well, I noticed that you're very interested. You stand there in the doorway and look in." Let me show you around" I told him what I was doing and he said, "Have you ever used a band saw?" I said, "Oh sure. I know how to use a band saw." I'd never used one in my life but after the display was completed he came over to see it and asked if I'd like to work for him so I would work at Vortox until 5:00, walk across the tracks and work for Harold till 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning.

MM: You must've been exhausted.

SM: Well, I was young, and then we'd go into Los Angeles and there were displays for Bullocks downtown. We used to do a cosmetic window once a month, the window and the interior. Then at Christmas that was a big thing. I remember the one that I worked on had a sled that we made with reindeer that went up and down and Santa Claus going around and everything was animated. It's very commercial now. At Easter we made four great big top hats upside down that had a little screen and they would open up and show a scene of Easter rabbits and all, and Tony Duquette, who was sort of a prize for Elsie de Wolfe. She was the top interior designer or in those days, interior decorator, and she took him under her wing. He designed a lot of it and then we would figure out how to make it. After he left I would design some and Harold would design some. Harold was the one that always figured how to do it. No drawings, you just sort of work by the seat of your pants. But I worked with him until I left my job at Vortox and went to work for him steady and . . .

MM: What were the techniques that Harold taught you?

SM: Well, see I didn't know anything about working with tools and he never taught me. I mean, he would say, "Well, do you want to do this?" And I would look at the machine, but I kept looking outside. I could see how he did it and so I learned just by doing it.

MM: The apprentice system?

SM: Yes. He didn't take me in and say, "Now this is the way the saw works," or, "This is the way this works." I learned an awful lot from Harold and then he and Millard - I don't think very many people know this but I went to work for Harold, Millard and Bill Manker. Harold formed a little company - a design company - and they did the interiors for the Beverly Hills Tennis Club and other things. Millard did a lot of the designing. If it was ceramics, Bill was into it and then that fell apart after about a year or two. Harold was doing all the building, but they were still all friends. This is how I met Millard when I worked at Vortox, actually. I became very good friends with Millard.

MM: Did you learn joinery from the time with Harold?

SM: No, no. We didn't have that kind of joints in the stuff we did. We covered it all over with flocking and paint. And joinery - I just learned how to do it after I decided I was going to be a woodworker. I didn't go to any schools or anything, but, I think, after I got out of the army and went to work for Millard. Millard was the person that really brought me into the world of art. I knew about ceramics. I knew about weaving. I knew about sculpture and painting. It was a whole new vista for me, but I selected to work in wood. When Bill Manker gave me a big commission to do, he became the interior designer and I thought, "Gosh, how do I tell Millard that I'm going to leave?" He was very, very strong and he was really the only tutor I ever had, but I finally got my nerve up that I

was going to go to work for myself.

MM: This was in 1949?

SM: This was in 1949. I'd been married about -- what was happening I'd work till 2:00, 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning. Then one day Freda was just as gentle as all get out, her voice sort of broke and she said, "You know, I have dinner ready. You don't get home till midnight and all and, you could call me at least." And I said, "Well, you know," and she said, "Well, are you married to me or to Millard?" So the next day at 5:00 I left and I left because I'd sit there and wait until Millard got there and sometimes just start working again and right off the bat well, I'd rather be married to Freda than Millard. About two years went by when Millard was, rumor went out and I got it that, "Sam isn't the same person. He's changed completely since he got married."

MM: You weren't available as much as he wanted?

SM: No. No.

MM: Millard's studio and who else was there? Was Sue Hertel working there at the time?

SM: No. Millard asked me to move into the studio so I picked a little place where I had my bed and everything. I lived in the studio and I had breakfast, lunch and dinner with him so I was one of the family and there was no one else, just Millard and myself and I've never, ever said, "Well, Millard, I did this or that." I was his employee and Millard did all the designing. We did a lot of big murals. I'd do the under painting but Millard always came in and did the finishing.

MM: What form were his designs in? Were they very brief sketches or were they detailed?

SM: Well, they were small sketches. They were small sketches and then I would square it off on a big canvas and then I'd do the under painting, but they were Millard's things. We did that and then we started doing silk screening and that's the reason . . .

MM: Before we go to silk screening what murals - do you remember what specific murals you worked on?

SM: Well, one mural he was working on that just about killed him was the mural that he was doing on canvas for the Department of Commerce. He just struggled with those and I remember he had Art Ames come in and work on them. He had Bert Stewart work on them, but he came to a point where he just lost interest in them.

MM: This was between '47 and '49 when you were there?

SM: Yes, when I was there. In fact, they're in the Department of Commerce. Basically I did mostly the silk screening and he would make just a small sketch about so big, then I'd blow it up. We did screens that had 20, 30 colors in them. That meant a different screen for each color. Then Millard would come in and do the final screen to tie it all in together. But I've never said, "Millard and I did this or that," because Millard did it and all I was, was the employee. But when he went to Hawaii - he was gone for a whole year-- he left 10 or 12 sketches and I worked day and night on those to get them out. I didn't want him to think I was, but those I did from start to finish.

MM: You went on a sketching trip with him in December of 1946. Do you remember what that was like? Did he paint plein air, outdoors or inside?

SM: Well, that was in '47.

MM: '47?

SM: I had met Freda. I had met Freda in the previous summer in June, and I happened to be in the Seal Court. It was just packed with people and I was standing in the corner. I remember the exact corner and I looked up and I saw this beautiful girl sort of stretching her neck out looking and then she walked through the whole crowd and came to me. I remember I had boots on, Levi's and a white T-shirt and I needed to shave. She asked if I could tell her where the office was and I said, "I'll not only tell you I'll take you," and I knew I was going to marry her. I just knew I was, but I didn't see her for six months and I went to Mexico - well, no. I didn't see her for about four or five months. Then she came back in September and I was at the same spot and she was looking around. She came over and said, "Hello, Sammy," and I didn't even know her name. I said, "Where have you been all summer? I've been looking for you." And she said, "Well, I've been at the beach." See, her sister had a little shack of a beach house, and she had gone to USC to graduate school that summer. We never dated but I knew where she ate her lunch. Then we went to Mexico and I wrote her a note and said that I would be in touch with her after I got back from Mexico. She introduced me to somebody she was walking down the sidewalk with, and he put his hand on her shoulder and said, "I'm taking this young lady back to Illinois with me," and I thought, "Oh my God." I'd never dated her, but I knew, I just didn't want to be turned down and I was going with somebody

else anyway. I went into the office and Millard said, "What the ...," he used a lot of strong language and I said, "Do you know that beautiful Indian girl?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "She's marrying some old man and going back to Illinois." He said, "I told you, you idiot," and so I didn't go back to school for three weeks. I just stayed in the studio. Then one day I came back and there she was. She said, "Where have you been? I haven't seen you." And I said, "Well, I thought you were marrying that old man." She said, "Oh, that was Dr. Stevens, President of Verora College and he wanted me to go back and teach. I told him I had different plans." Then I said, "Would you go to an opening with me tomorrow night?" And that was it. That was my romance with Freda that lasted all those years. Let's see, the question - what did you ask me?

MM: I was trying to reconstruct that time with Millard and the trip to Mexico.

SM: Oh yes. Well, we flew to Guadalajara and I could have stayed for three years for what it cost us for three weeks. Of course it had to be the best hotel rooms and I had a room by myself. Millard and Muggs Van Zandt had a room together and we had to rent a car. They had a brand new Buick with a driver that drove us all over and we'd all put money in the kitty every morning and Muggs would be the banker and we traveled from Lake Chapala to Morella. We stayed there overnight and I remember Millard saying. "I speak Spanish." So we got in an old beat up taxi and Millard said, "We wanted to go to a restaurant where they have music and we can have a good time." I said, "We want to go to a restaurant where they have good food and dancing and singing and all," and he [cab driver] said, "Oh, Si, Si, Si." We drove out and we didn't know where we were. It was pitch dark and all of a sudden he [cab driver] stops and in his broken English said, "What if I make you get out here?" And it was a big joke. Well, finally we pulled up at this little place and I thought, "What is this place?" It was just pitch black and all with a few lights and Muggs Zandt said, "Oh my God, it's a whorehouse." And he said, "Let's get out." Millard said, "Nope. We're not going." He [Zandt] said, "You're chicken." Millard said, "I'll show you who's a chicken." And we got out and walked in. I had never been to a place like this before in my life except in the movies. We walked upstairs and sat down. These girls walked out and they were all big and fat and then he [Sheets] said, "How in the hell do we get out of here?" And the lady said in Spanish, "[inaudible]." I didn't know what to say, and she left. We went down the stairs and Millard said, "What if we can't get out?" But we got out and our taxi cab was still waiting for us.

MM: That was fortunate.

SM: Yes, because we didn't know where we were. To this day I don't know where we were.

MM: On that trip did he do any watercolor or tempera?

SM: Oh yes. We left and we laughed about it and he [Sheets] said, "Don't you dare tell Mary. Sam will shoot you if you do." Well, the story was when we got back was, first of all, they tell this story that I got them into. Mary knew better. It was an experience, but we painted. We went from Morella to Paxcuatl and we stayed in Paxcuatl for about a week and we had a great big room with three beds, a big bath and it was this beautiful lake with a little village right in the middle of island. And we painted there and Millard painted. I took hundreds of photographs, but Millard painted right directly on paper. He didn't make sketches. He painted directly on paper.

MM: Did you photograph the landscape?

SM: Oh yes. I have hundreds of photographs. I did two paintings and when Millard came back from sketching, he did a show that they had at Hatfield Art Galleries and that was my first date with Freda. We went to the opening and I knew that, when she held my hand, it liked to broken it. But Millard, that's what it was, it was a painting trip.

MM: Now speaking of other Claremont artists - Bert Stewart. How did you meet Bert?

SM: I met Bert through Millard. I lived there, and Bert would have me come over. Hoppy would call up and say, "Would you like to come and have dinner?" And I'd have dinner with them and we'd talk about different things. I acquired a piece from him. We were in the studio and I looked up and I said, "Bert, I like that piece very, very much." He had about 30 of them up on the wall. He gets a ladder and pulls it down and says, "Here you can have it but don't tell Millard because Millard has been trying to get this from me for years." I said something to Hoppy about it and she said, "Well, you go ahead and pick it up and put it right next to your plate because he'll have forgotten about it." So I took it home, or at that time, I was living in a little apartment over a carport. Let's see, this was before I moved into the studio, and Millard and Mary came over to have dinner. I had prepared dinner for them and the first thing he saw was this sculpture. He said, "Where the blankety blank did you get that?" And I said, "Bert gave it to me." And he said, "Well, I've been trying to buy it from him or trade, but I have his original plaster of it that I've made in bronze."

MM: Is that the piece that's illustrated in the view of your living room where you made the built in sectional? There is a Stewart piece right here.

SM: Let's see. Oh, no, no. That's Betty Davenport.

MM: Oh, that's a Davenport?

SM: That's a boar. There's a funny story on that. I saw the boar and I bought it but Millard said, "No, I saw that first, but she'll make another," so Millard has the original and I have the second one.

MM: Where was Betty's studio then?

SM: I think she was working at home on Euclid Avenue at the time. I have about three or four of her pieces that I liked and bought.

MM: Now that we have this sectional or this view here of your pieces of furniture that you made when you and Freda were living in your first apartment on Plaza Serena. Tell me about these pieces and how you came up with this design, which is a novel solution to a small space and gives you different uses for the area and connects things beautifully with the table attached to the wall divider.

SM: Well, Freda had just gotten out of the service. She taught first at Domingo and then was made Director of Arts and Crafts at the Center for Indian School. Then she went from there to the Plains Country and set up co-ops all through Montana, Wyoming and South Dakota. Then she went into the navy. Her mother was semi-invalid and they didn't have a house. They never owned a home, and she bought this little tract house in Ontario. She was working as a receptionist at the Orange Exchange just to get going, and then went to Scripps. She was able to go to Scripps through her G. I, I think, her income was about $95 a month. They were living just on a shoestring and had hardly any furniture at all, so I decided to make furniture, Roger Curtis, a contractor, gave me a bunch of plywood that he had used for cement forms and I thought, "Well, I can't use them with all this cement on them." Freda said, "Well, why don't you have them sandblasted at a tombstone place in Pomona?" So I took them and had them all sandblasted. Several years later, US Plywood came out with Sureform where they would sandblast the pieces. Freda always used to say I was their first living customer. But this is all plywood that had been used for construction and I came up with this and it didn't cost me anything for the wood.

MM: That's - the slanted legs on the bench and the table are so attractive. Was that a design that you thought of for the first time here?

SM: Oh yes. Oh no, no. All of this was just made out of scrap wood. No, the top was all plywood and the little chair that I had picked up I found alongside the railroad yard at the rail tracks at Claremont. I used a lot of shoring and that happened to be red oak, and then I painted it white and then I rubbed it all off. That's how you get the detail here.

MM: Wonderful texture in the wood grain.

SM: Yes. Millard's brother-in-law - let's see, what was his name, Charles Baskerville, I think, was looking for a house to photograph for *Better Homes and Gardens*. Mary said, "Well, why don't you go to Sam's and Freda's. They have wonderful things." So he did. Then I made drawings of all these and made patterns, and they sold them.

MM: Were you aware they were going to sell these?

SM: Well, after I'd made the patterns, they asked if I would do it. So I did them not thinking that one day when things were very, very bad and I didn't know where we going to get the money to pay the rent. The postal carrier always stopped in the garage, and when it was a hot summer day, and Freda always brought lemonade out. He gave me some mail and when I opened it , he said, "Any good mail?" And I said, "Look at this," and it was a check for $150. He let out a yell and Freda came running out and we hopped up and down. It was the biggest check I'd ever gotten and so that was three month's rent. I made the patterns and they sold for years. I still see patterns, they sold them for 25 cents, 50 cents and now . . .

MM: Who knows what they made on those?

SM: Yes, but that's where this all came from.

MM: And you designed the lamps, as well?

SM: Yes. I would take old pieces of wood that I found, and they would be four by eight, four by six and I sandblasted them, and then I had wire frames made. Freda and her mother, being an invalid, would wrap the cord around. We had all different colors. Then here's one that is just a piece of tubing and then these are Japanese characters that I silk screened and then wrapped those around.

MM: And the backing on this chair looks like fabric but that's . .

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SM: That's just string.

MM: Well, the string is such an elegant and simple way to provide support and must be very comfortable?

SM: Yes. It was a very comfortable chair.

MM: And you also have a wonderful pattern here.

SM: Yes. That just happens by light. Then this is a little painting here that Roger . . .

MM: Did you do the frame for this?

SM: Yes, I did the frame and Roger Barr did the painting.

MM: Is this of Freda?

SM: Yes.

MM: It looks like a portrait of Freda. So you really designed a whole interior, not just the furniture, but accessories, too. Now this is the piece, was your furniture commission in 1949 that you got through William Manker.

SM: Yes.

MM: But it turned out to be an expensive project for you.

SM: It was a disaster. I did that for $1,200. I did all the chairs, the table and the cabinet and the wood cost me $1,200. He wanted it stained so I stained it to the color he wanted and the lady didn't like it, so I had to bring it back. It was an awful job, that's when I was just going to quit and Freda wouldn't let me. I made for Jack Dunbar.

MM: This is an armchair in 1949 for the Red Hill Country Club?

SM: Yes.

MM: This shows, Sam, your distinctive combination of elegant design and comfort, and it looks as if it's a lower chair.

SM: It is. It's an occasional chair. I did quite a bit of furniture for them and then when they remodeled, God only knows where the furniture went to. For example, yesterday, and this just happened yesterday, I couldn't believe it, but this fellow had called and said he had two of my chairs and could he bring them over. They needed reupholstering. He came yesterday and they were early chairs of mine and the joinery was all perfect. Nothing was loose but they'd been left out in the rain. Why they didn't come apart I don't know. I said, "Oh, my gosh, I can't believe it," and he told me how he got them. This girl pulled up in a pickup truck and he gave her $100 a piece for them and I'll show them to you. I went "Oh, my gosh." I can sell them now for $25,000 as old pieces.

MM: How did you come up with the proportions of a chair like this? They're so comfortable.

SM: Well, I fit everything to myself. I'm not that tall but it seems that everything that I do, no matter if the person's 6'8" or 5'2", they seem to have very good support.

MM: Seems to work. I know I'm not very tall and so many chairs are too big and too long in the seat.

SM: No, that chair came out very well.

MM: This is a sofa in 1949.

SM: Yes. Jack Dunbar has it. Then I forget who I made that for, but this has all triple-mitered corners.

MM: Tell me about the triple-mitered corners. That's such a distinctive technique for you.

SM: Well, a triple-mitered corner, a lot of them are faked. They use veneer and all but this was solid wood on the corners.

MM: Where did you learn that technique?

SM: I just took it up and then I did a job for Howard Ahmanson. I did his office at Fireman's Insurance on Wilshire.

I had done triple miters and there was a group working for a big cabinet maker. I remember this old Swede was looking at it and I thought, "Uh-oh. I wonder what he's going to say," and he said, "Why did you do this?" At the bottom, I had triple-miter corners. He says, "No one's ever going to see that. You didn't have to do that." I said, "But I will see it," and so I maintained my integrity. I can't explain in words how you do it but, for example, this little piece in here at the corner is cut out of solid wood at an angle. Then you cut this, so that they all fit in just perfectly and it has to be perfect. But now they just use veneer, but this was solid.

MM: Now these were pieces that you made in 1949 and '50. And this is a time when your work is really coming to the attention of a wider audience through a series of articles that appear in the *Los Angeles Sunday Times Home Magazine* and then later in other magazines. For instance, the March 1951 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* publishes an article on your home that included the plans that people could order. Then you had this commission in 1950 from Ms. Maul of West Covina for several pieces that are illustrated here in the *L. A. Times Sunday Homes Magazine*. Did this kind of exposure lead to new commissions for you?

SM: Yes, I think it did. Her son was an architect and had seen my things. He designed the house for his mother and asked if I'd do furniture for it. I did, but a lot of times you just don't know. Even today I've never advertised or I've never solicited for work. I don't have brochures, business cards or anything and it's just all word of mouth. Today when you came in, I was talking to somebody from New Zealand. He called to tell me he was reading my books and seeing my furniture.

[END TAPE 1 SIDE B]. .

[SESSION 1, TAPE 2, SIDE A]

MM: This is Tape Two, Side A of the interview on January 10th with Sam Maloof by Mary MacNaughton. Sam, we were talking about your work getting

coverage in the *L. A. Times Sunday Homes Magazine* and the illustrations that appeared . People were beginning to know about you beyond Claremont. There were also exhibitions that seemed to bring you together with other artists from Claremont, like, William Manker, Harrison McIntosh, and Rupert Deese. The Ceramic Annual exhibitions that Ric Petterson organized at Scripps -- among the exhibitions that looked at design for living or the arts that one would find in the home. Can you remember how that exhibition came about? Was this an idea that Rick came to you with?

SM: Was that the one at the county fair?

MM: This was at Scripps, I believe. There were others at the county fair but . .

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SM: Well, I think that was when the artists thought it was below their dignity. What's the word?

MM: The painters were feeling superior?

SM: Well, that's when they decided to have shows rather than . . .

MM: Formal exhibitions?

SM: Yes. And that's when they had them at Scripps and those were very, very nice and all and they had about three or four of them and then they just died out.

MM: You were friends with Harrison and Rupert at that time?

SM: Oh right off the bat. Ric Petterson was head of the ceramics. Bill Manker was and then Ric Petterson took his place. Ric brought in people like [Shoji] Hamada and [David] Leach.

MM: That was in 1952. Do you remember that?

SM: Oh surely. I have one of Hamada's pots that he made there, and it was fired and all. I have one of them.

MM: He couldn't speak any English, could he?

SM: No, no. And Bernard Leach - I don't have any of his but I have several pieces by his son, David Leach. David Leach's son is about 65, 70 now but it brought me into a whole completely new world. I remember when Paul [Soldner] came, he was a student of Peter Voulkos at Art Center.

MM: Otis?

SM: Not Art Center, at Otis, and then Paul was hired. It was a complete departure from the way Ric Petterson worked and a whole complete departure from the way Bill Manker worked. When Bill Manker was there, they used molds and they were all his. I have two bowls. We had quite a collection, but Freda had given it to my daughter-in-law. After Freda went away, she took it, but there were two bowls that I kept. I didn't remember why until the other day, I looked at them and they had Freda's initials on them. They looked just like Bill Manker's bowls. All the girls did the same thing. Well, then when Ric Petterson came in it was a complete evolution.

MM: Was Ric more interested in Scandinavian design than Chinese?

SM: Well, no. He was born in China, I think, but he gave the individual the opportunity to do whatever they wanted to do. Then when Paul came in, of course, that was a complete new revolution. Then in the graduate school, it was the strongest when Paul was there.

MM: Do you remember Henry Lee McFee?

SM: Oh sure. I remember - he lived just up the street.

MM: How did you know him?

SM: Well, the same way. He was teaching at Scripps. He had quite a sense of humor in a very odd way, but I had dinner with him and his wife several times. Then I did a silk screen of one of his paintings. That was quite difficult, but I did the whole thing myself and I have one of the silk screens addressed to Freda and me. I liked him an awful lot. I don't think he received his due, really. Even now I don't think his pieces have brought in the prices that I think they should bring in.

MM: He's an extraordinary painter. Tell me about Jean and Arthur Ames.

SM: Well, Jean and Arthur Ames, he never taught there. He taught at Otis, out he worked pretty much independently. They were the first to do enamels along with the Wooleys, Jackson and Mary. I have some of their early pieces and then, of course, Jean painted very decorative type paintings but I got to know them very well. They lived right across from me.

MM: Was this in the Padua area?

SM: Yes. The house is still there that friends of mine bought from them, but there was a whole colony there. There was Albert Stewart, and Betty Davenport lives up there, Harrison McIntosh lives there, the Ames' lived there, Millard lived there. There were about eight artists, I think .

MM: Did Millard build his house around that time?

SM: Oh yes. Millard had just completed it. It was the first tamped earth house that was built in the area, and they didn't know too much about it. After they took the forms down and they demanded that he granite it, so it was granite. The house doesn't look at all like it used to look, I mean, they've done a lot of things to it. They've put a lot of stone on it and all. But Millard designed the house, the studios and the guest house. Then a friend of his bought a lot down below and Millard designed that house. Millard did all kinds of things. I'm very close to the family now.

MM: Well, you were certainly invaluable to him for those two years, from '47 to '49, when you worked with him.

SM: Well, I don't know how valuable I was to him.

MM: You did framing, silk screening and the mural projects.

SM: Yes. That's about all I did, really. But I had learned an awful from him. I would say that I had learned more from Millard than anybody I know. We remained friends right up until he died . I'm very good friends with Carolyn [Sheets] and then I was very good friends with David [Starry-Sheets] the whole time. Oh, and the older boy, of course, was in Hawaii and then Tony [Sheets] moved up north, but I've stayed very close to all of them.

MM: Was he your mentor?

SM: He wasn't telling me how to do things because in furniture, we work way off on different ends. Millard always wanted something very gutsy and heavy, and yet he has several of the pieces that I've made. I remember we were doing a job for Interpace. They'd built a new office in Persippany, New Jersey and the president of the company asked if I would do their reception area, which was huge. I did all the furniture for it and all and then he asked me to do another area and then Millard was named, well, he was always their in-house designer, and he took my drawings and called me in. He said, "Let's make them a little more gutsy," and he had decoration on them. I didn't really have to worry about where the next job was coming from and I said, "Millard, I

can't do it." I said, "I just can't do it." And he says, "Well, you know, we can do it," and I said, "No, I just don't want to do it." And it was a big commission for me and I just couldn't do it.

MM: Was that his way of working with other artists, too?

SM: I have no idea. Millard was very, very strong but I had my own convictions about furniture and then the furniture that he designed for them was very, very heavy, in the same way that he designed the building for the Masonic Lodge on Wilshire with the big sculptures. It's closed now. He wanted me to design the furniture for where they had all their rites. All he gave me were the drawings and I cut them down. Some of the legs were 10 inches square. I said, "Millard, I don't work this way. I'll go ahead and do the full-size drawings, and I cut them down a little bit. I have a friend that has a huge shop that would be glad to do it. I just don't have the room, and I don't have the equipment." So this friend of mine did it and it was just big, heavy stuff. Then with the thing at Persippany, I just wouldn't do it.

MM: Did that cause a rift?

SM: Oh no, no. We never had a rift there. I think the rift was when I left him for Freda.

MM: And you chose Freda.

SM: I chose Freda. We remained friends. After that he kind of cooled down and one time I took a chair to him for the exhibit at the fair and he said, "Who did this?" And Sue Hertel said, "Well, Sammy did." He said, "I didn't know you were making furniture." He knew better than that because I left him to make furniture but then we got to be good friends.

MM: Now what was your nickname at that point? Sammy?

SM: Yes. Everybody called me Sammy a lot. Carolyn is a minister of the Utilitarian Church and she married Beverly and me, when I was living there. She used to turn my bed and write love notes to me and leave flowers. She was about 10 years old. One morning after they had gone to school, I said, "Millard, I have to tell you and Mary what's happening." They said, "What?" and just about died laughing. They had known about it for a long time.

MM: She had a crush on you?

SM: Oh gosh. She said, "Well, you know, when you're 40 I'll be 20 and then we can get married." And I was going with another girl and that was the reason I never asked Freda. It was very platonic, but I didn't want to hurt her feelings or anything and I should have asked Freda right off the bat to go out with me. Carolyn cried for three months and finally Mary was just having a nervous wreck about it and so finally Carolyn says, "Well, you know, I'm glad as long as you're getting married that it wasn't to Emily but Freda because I like Freda an awful lot." So we married, Beverly and me. She said, "Well, I finally got to marry Sammy." And everybody just roared.

MM: Oh, that was a great story.

SM: We just saw Carolyn and Tom. We were together last weekend and went out to see Jim Hubbard, who has a wonderful place in Julian.

MM: Its Carolyn and Tom?

SM: Tom. Yes. It's Owen-Towle.

MM: Towle? T-O-W-L-E? Tell me then did Sue Hertel follow you? After you left the studio, did she come in?

SM: Well, no. I knew Sue, Sue and Jack Zajac. Everyone was afraid of them. They had a great big studio and they wouldn't let anybody in.

MM: They seemed to dominate the Seal Court area.

SM: Oh, they dominated it completely and I knew Sue and Jack Zajac from the very beginning. I was doing a commission in Long Beach, and these people were from Texas wanted a mural painted. They showed me a full page out of the *Denver Post* of a cowboy sitting on a horse and down below a fire burning. They wanted it painted on the wall and I said, "I think I can get somebody to do it." So I showed it to Jack Zajac and he needed the money,. So he painted it for $150 and it was about eight feet long eight feet high and about six feet wide. I'd lettered the poem and Jack got $150. He said, "Don't you dare tell anybody I did this, Sam." So he has a mural somewhere in Long Beach that he did. I was very good friends with him. I have quite a few of his paintings and Millard had about six people working for him after I left.

SM: I think there was Holland that worked for him for a little bit. I can't remember the names but then he hired Sue. Sue stayed with him for 37, 38 years. Sue was very, very good. She could paint like Millard or draw like Millard and a lot of those designs she did from scratch. She could paint just like Millard.

MM: And she worked a lot on mosaics. Did you do any mosaic murals with him?

SM: No. I did the table that he worked on when he was just starting mosaic. When I left, there was a huge table with a slot and roll of paper underneath it and it would roll up. Sue really was the one who did most of the mural painting. She could paint like Millard or she could paint the way she paints herself.

MM: She said she would select colors for the mosaics.

SM: Oh yes. From his sketches and then even some of the sketches she did herself because she could imitate what he did very, very well. But she devoted her whole life to that and in many ways I think that it broke up her marriage. She was there day and night. One time I went there and she was up on the scaffolding about eight months pregnant or she had the twins in a crib. I would say, "Sue, you shouldn't be up there on a scaffolding and all. " No one else does, but I think it destroyed her marriage.

MM: I know when we organized the exhibition of her work I was astounded to see how she really kept painting throughout her entire career when she had young children. She would put them to bed and go into her studio at night and continue to work. She was very disciplined that way.

SM: Yes, she was. When she went to New Mexico, she went there really to break away from Millard. Millard begged her to come back, and Sue said, "No way." I mean, he wasn't well and he said, "Just finish it," or "Do this or that." She knew, if she went back, she was defeated. She didn't really sell anything for a couple of years. She wanted to get down and sort of take in the atmosphere. There was one little story she told me. Well, she asked me what gallery I would pick if I were going to do it, and I said, "Elaine Horwitch." I remember that very distinctly, and so she made an appointment and she took two paintings, a small painting and a larger painting. She had an appointment at 2:30, and she sat and sat and sat, and no one paid any attention to her. She went to the receptionist and said, "Well, I have an appointment with Elaine." They would say, "Well, she's very, very busy." Well, at 5:30 they said, "You'll have to leave." And she [Sue] said, "Well, I had an appointment. I'm not leaving until I see Elaine Horwitch." And Elaine Horwitch passed her several times and just ignored her. Then she [Horwitch] said, "Well leave the two paintings and I'll talk to you later." The next day somebody saw the paintings and bought both of them. That was it, and she became the star [of the gallery]. What's his name?

MM: Robert Redford collected her work.

SM: Yes, but there was somebody else.

MM: Gene Hackman?.

SM: Yes, but there was somebody that was a star.

MM: Dyan Canon.

SM: He was a star painter. He was about 1/16th Indian. Fritz Scholder. He left to go to another gallery and Sue became the big star. Of course, she died when she was only 60, 61, right in the prime of her life.

MM: Her work is so strong.

SM: Yes. She could've been as important as Georgia O'Keeffe except she painted a lot better than Georgia O'Keeffe.

MM: Well, Sam, you collected her work all along, it seems.

SM: Oh yes. I never traded with her. Like one painting that I wanted and she said that I could have it. I was going to trade her. Who ran the gallery - Gallery 8?

MM: Tom Collins was there for a while.

SM: No. No. It was Barbara. . .

MM: Barbara Beretich?

SM: Did Beretich run that gallery? Yes, I think she did. And so I have the painting, but Barbara said, "Sam, really, she can't afford to trade. She needs the money." So I said, "Fine." So Herb Hafif bought it. I took Herb over and he bought it. When Sue found out, I told her what had happened and she was madder than a hatter. She said,

"Well, I'll paint you another one that's better even." And so I have a second version of it, which is better than Herb's. I ended up having about six or seven of her paintings.

MM: And we appreciated your loaning them to our exhibition of her work.

SM: Yes. But I like them an awful lot and I have some of her early little drawings. I don't know where they are, but she was the one that really had the very important part in the period that Millard was doing a lot of murals.

MM: Let's go back to the early 50's and those exhibitions at the L. A. County Fair that were so important in bringing the people of Southern California into contact with really extraordinary art. These were exhibitions that would happen with the fair and, as I recall, Millard would organize them and get artists to help him install them. I know Paul Darrow said he . . .

SM: Paul Darrow. Harrison McIntosh. What was Ivan's first name?

MM: Did Roger Kuntz help?

SM: Roger Kuntz. Sue Hertel. That whole era were students help set up shows and everything. Millard had an international group showing and then he would change it to American artists. They had a huge collection. They would have a purchase thing and the fair had some of the best paintings around. They had no idea what they had. Then when Millard was let go, they didn't have the courtesy to say anything, they just fired him. Period!

MM: I saw a passing comment in the Adamson essay about his being accused of Communist leanings that sounded so strange.

SM: Well, no. What it was, let's see, there was a writer that was blackballed, a very famous screenwriter. I don't know if I'm right or wrong on this, but Harry Baskerville, who was the photographer that did the photographs, his sister-in-law was married to this very well-known writer and he was in the Unfriendly Ten. I can't remember the names, but Millard didn't want anything to do with it because of his brother-in-law being married to the sister of - you'd know who it was if I could think of it but I can't think of the name. That was what it was. And Millard was very liberal when I worked for him, but then when he got more affluent he became a Republican.

MM: Oh, that's what I thought was curious because I hadn't known about Millard's liberal phase.

SM: Oh no. Millard was very liberal. I remember when Truman was running and we would listen to the radio. He said, "Give them hell, Harry. Give them hell." Then when he got in with Ahmanson, I think, he went too much to the right, but I didn't know him. I didn't ever talk politics with him, but in those early years at the fair, he started crafts and Ric Petterson was in charge of it under Millard and they had ceramics. Then Elizabeth Gordon of *House Beautiful* came to Millard and wanted to do an exhibit of rooms. They hired several different architects to do a kitchen, a living room, dining room. John Hill, who was an apprentice, not as an apprentice, but worked at Taliesen West, was hired by Elizabeth Gordon of *House Beautiful*. There were a lot of name architects, but it ended up that he designed everything. They had a little kitchen, dining room and somebody designed that. Somebody did the furniture. And then George Wright of Welton Beckett's designed the little entertainment center, I did all the furniture for it.. Then Kip Stewart and Stuart McDougal did a room.

MM: Who were they?

SM: They were designers. They were not wood workers. They were furniture designers and they did a nice little room and it seemed that the front area was all done by John Hill.

MM: The exhibitions at the fair in the early 50's.

SM: Yes. When Millard had Ric Petterson come in they had the craft section clear at the back of the building. They went through this whole thing where the whole building was used as architectural with furniture in it and whatever art objects: paintings, ceramics, whatever. And I think they did that for *House Beautiful* for one year. Then Millard carried it on the following year.

MM: But how did he attract something like a million people who would come through the fairgrounds?

SM: Oh yes. People were very interested in it. What they did after this was they invited craftsmen to demonstrate, for example, Bob Stockdale did wood turning. I did furniture and then he would have a display of furniture. This was 1940 - pardon me just one minute. Bev, what year did you go to the fair and see my table?

BM: About in 1954.

SM: Yes. In 1954 they would have craftsmen, potters, weavers showing their work and actually demonstrating and answering questions from people That's where Beverly saw my furniture.

MM: Beverly, what piece was it that?

SM: Beverly, come over and tell them. Come over here. Come here. Come here. Beverly Maloof.

BM: What would you like to know?

MM: The first impression you had in seeing Sam's furniture when you saw it at the fair. What piece did you focus on?

BM: Well, in the early '50's the furniture available was, in my opinion, it was ugly. We had overstuffed furniture that was shocking pink and black with gold prints through it, or we had sort of anorange-colored furniture they called Provincial and it came in blue and pink shades, ruffles and things. We just couldn't find anything that was very pretty. We went to the fair and they had showcase rooms and all of a sudden here was this beautifully proportioned, made out of gorgeous wood, lovely scale dining room table and I cried. I thought it was so beautiful so we wrote down the name of the maker and that's how we finally got to know Sam.

MM: And Sam, was this a table that had drawers underneath as some designs?

BM: It didn't have drawers. It had very straight lines and just beautifully proportioned. It wasn't small scale like the Danish furniture at the time. The light was shining on it and the grain of the walnut was glistening. It was just breathtakingly beautiful.

MM: Was that your favorite wood to work in at that time?

BM: Very simple.

MM: Walnut?

SM: It still is.

MM: What is it about walnut that's particularly satisfying?

SM: Well, I like the color. It's a very friendly wood to work with. I think it's quite sensuous, and it's a friendly wood. When I talk about friendly woods, you do hard rock maple or you do rosewood, those woods are very difficult to work, and you have to be very, very precise. Where with walnut you can make a tight joint and it sinks in very easily.

MM: It has a little more give?

SM: A little more give where the others are just no give at all so you have to be...

MM: Unforgiving?

SM: Unforgiving woods. And they have a tendency to move a lot more than walnut, too. Walnut is a very stable wood. Well, this table here you can feel it.

MM: This is the table we're seated at now.

SM: Yes. I made this table about 40 years ago and you can't feel a seam or anything in it.

MM: No. It's beautiful. Now this has dropped leaves for the distinctive design here.

SM: Yes.

[END SESSION 1, TAPE 2, SIDE A]

[SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE A]

MM: Today is January 11th the second part of an oral history interview with Sam Maloof by Mary MacNaughton and this is Tape Two, Side A. Sam, when we left off yesterday, we were coming up to the early 1950's and talking about your designs being seen more and more. I was reading in the Adamson essay that the designers at the time who probably felt that you were their competitor were the Scandinavian designers, Hans Wagner, Finn Juhl and Folke Ohlsson. Did they ever contact you or come visit you or look at your work?

SM: When I started out I had no idea, who they were or anything. Then I went to Oslow's on Wilshire just across the street from Millard's Wilshire. That was the Scandinavian store and they had all these different people, but even before that Henry Dreyfuss had bought a Hans Wegner chair. I designed the little chair that is in here right at the beginning. Let's see here.

MM: Looking for an illustration of the chair in the book, *The Furniture of Sam Maloof* with an essay by Jeremy Adamson. This book accompanies the retrospective exhibition at the Renwick Gallery, Washington, DC

SM: This little chair, I designed it for Henry Dreyfuss. And I did the same Scandinavian furniture before.

MM: This is a chair that is dated 1952 and accompanies in the picture a cork top desk from 1953.

SM: And I still own that. I still have that. This type of thing here that I did, I' had never seen anybody do that before or even after.

MM: What do you call this?

SM: Well, I don't know what to call it, but where the leg goes into the top it actually is all one piece. This is all one piece and I just don't know what to call it.

MM: We're looking at the back of the chair and the way the chair leg fits into the back rest in a really fluid, seamless way.

SM: The same way with this little chair. But after I did that, I went to an exhibit and was flabbergasted that someone had copied this that I had been working on 10, 15 years before.

MM: A Scandinavian designer?

SM: No, no, no, no, no. As far as Scandinavian designers go I have no idea. I went to Stockholm in about 19- -- when was it? Sammy was 10 years old (about 45 years ago) and I'd heard of Scandinavian furniture so I went to Dom Permanmente. It was a great big store and they really didn't have that much. Most of the furniture was typical of what you'd buy in the stores here, but they did have one section that was very, very elegant and I went to Mattheson's where he had a little shop. I don't know who designed the chairs but he had two or three chairs that were very nice and then I went to not Hans Wegner's but Johanesson's factory and they were all not factories they were small shops where they made Hans Wegners. In Scandinavia the designer was given credit as the architect and then the builder was also given credit, but none of that was handmade by the individual designers. They had people making the pieces for them but I had seen this stuff at Oslow's before. When you see my work and you see Scandinavian work a lot of times people say my work looks very Shaker. Well, if they really knew what Shaker furniture was there's a vast difference and the same way with the Scandinavian furniture.

MM: What are the qualities that you seek to imbed in your work that would separate your work from - besides your distinctive look - but the things that you care about most?

SM: As you say, I think my things have a very distinctive look and people that have seen them like them an a lot. I don't know if I told you or not but David Pyhe, who was a wonderful writer and taught at King's College in London. Most of the things he did were carved bowls by hand not on a lathe. I have a letter from him in one of my books and I didn't know if I had read it or somebody had told me, but I put the letter in his book and it wasn't until the other day, that I discovered it. He wrote me a letter and said that he thought that my little low back chair was one of the most beautiful chairs he'd ever seen. Coming from him, it was quite a compliment.

MM: Is that P-Y-E?

SM: David Pyhe P-Y-E. P-Y-H-E, I think. I'll find out.

MM: P-Y-H-E? Okay. Well, your pieces combine an elegance of design and a real way of fitting the human body and so they're immensely comfortable. I think that is what anyone knows who's sat in one of your chairs.

SM: I think design is really very, very important and I've always said that I would rather have a chair that was well designed and poorly made than a beautifully made chair of poor design. Of course, I try to do both and I have had people comment, in this little tape that I gave you, about how comfortable the pieces are and I think that's the criteria. A chair has to be comfortable to be a good chair, and it's really hard to find a chair that you can sit in and be comfortable.

MM: What are the things that you put into your design to focus on comfort?

SM: Well, the main thing is lumbar, the lower back. A lot of times you'll sit in a chair and you're sitting straight up. You can lean back in these chairs, any of them, and you get very good lumbar support. That is what the main criteria about a chair, it has to have very good lumbar support. I know Henry Dreyfuss asked me the same question and he said, "Let me show you how we design." We went down to the studio or up to the studio. That was in a carriage house. He had this great big clunky thing with automobile peddles with a spring and then a gauge on the seat. Then the same way on the back when you sat it fit your contour. Then they would take all the numbers down. I said, "Well, that's interesting." I said, "What are these for?" And he said, "Airliner seats and we

take the average and that's how we design the airplane seats." It was for . . .

MM: Trans World Airlines?

SM: Yes. It had a tail with three fins going up. I forget what it was but it was the first big old plane and I laughed and said, "Well, that's why the airplane seats are so uncomfortable." I've never sat in a seat in an airplane that was comfortable. Ever. So he said, "Well, how do you do it?" And I said, "I just cut out a spindle and I hold it to my back, then I sit down on whatever is available, and If it fits the lower lumbar part of my body. I have the first spindle I ever made, the first pattern I ever made and I still use. I think that's the most important part of a chair, upholstered or not.

MM: You also have done something interesting with the arm. Putting the level of the armrest at a different place, and understanding how you actually use the chair, getting in and out of it. Could you say something more about the low arm?

SM: Yes. The little arm there really isn't an arm. Instead of putting the stretcher between the two legs and across the front, I use that as a stretcher, but I notice, people sitting and the very first thing they do when they sit is put their hands on the arms to sit and then they grab hold of it. They do this rather than reach down under the chair. Then when they get up they put -- it's really a wonderful support. I don't know if I can get over there or not. For example, here just automatically this is what you do.

MM: Sam's sitting in the chair now to show . . .

SM: Then you do this and you're comfortable but when you go to get up instead of going like that all you do is just . . .

MM: And the lower arm is at the perfect level to push off from and to move forward.

SM: But someone in a review once said that the arms were so low that you had to have gorilla arms to use them and they're not an armrest at all. They're a stretcher. That turns out so you can ease yourself in the chair very easily and get up out of a chair very easily.

MM: I think also it increases the fluidity of the design because it's a single movement with the chair seat, parallels that.

SM: I went with a curved arm and, again, it isn't an arm, but it's a way of easing yourself into the chair and a way of getting out of the chair. But I've seen chairs that were so heavy in some of the craftsman type things that it would take two men to move them. But these, they're very light and they're very easy to get in and out of.

MM: Well, that brings up another combination of design in your work and that is lightness but strength.

SM: Yes.

MM: How do you embody strength in your chairs? Is the design a factor there?

SM: It's the design and I've worked it over the many years. The chair that I'm looking at now was just taking two side pieces, drilling a hole all the way through and then turning the leg and then attaching it with a bolt. I had to play around. I had to mark each one to be sure that they were the same spot. Well, then it evolved. I'd take the two outer pieces and clamp them together and I'd drill a hole about a third of the way through from each side and that left a little lip. Then before I turned the leg I'd cut a do dad in it and it would fit right into that lip. Then I'd turn them and there was no guessing or anything, they just fit in there, and gave it strength. Then from that I put the joint And the same way with the back leg, too.

MM: You mentioned at one point dropping a chair from a height to see what would happen when it hit the ground and it survived.

SM: Well, the first chair I did on commission. was so afraid that it wasn't strong enough. We were living in the little house in Ontario. I got a ladder and climbed up on the roof. Freda happened to come out at about the same time I was carrying this chair and said, "Well, what are you doing?" You're going to get hurt." And I said, "No, I just want to get back it in case thing explodes." She thought I was crazy. I dropped it on the driveway and it hit one of the front leg and snapped it off, but the joint stood up and it bounced back up. I could have just about caught it. It had a broken leg but at least I knew the joinery was good.

MM: I doubt that many other pieces of furniture would survive that test.

SM: Freda just thought I had gone out of my head but we've laughed about it many times afterwards.

MM: Sam, I know that so many artists are deeply familiar with their materials and you know wood probably better than anyone else. In the essay Jeremy talks about in the 1950's you were working with a number of woods, including teak, oak, ash and birch. Could you talk about each one and what you like and what you don't like about each one or how they're challenging to you?

SM: Of all the woods that I've worked with walnut dominates and I like the texture of it, I like the friendliness of it and when I say "friendliness of it" there's a little give to it and when you make a joint you can make the joint just a little bit larger and it goes right into where - where if you use maple, you use rosewoods or [unintelligible] or any other those woods they're very, very dense and your joinery has to be just absolutely perfect. You do not make the joint smaller or larger. It has to be just right on the button.

MM: Is teak that way, too?

SM: Teak is a lot like walnut. It isn't really a hard wood. When I say "hard wood", it isn't dense. Is that for me, I wonder?

[TAPE OFF - TAPE ON]

SM: I use very little oak. I use born oak that I bought in England and I have some huge slabs that I'm saving for tabletops. They're about four foot by about 10 foot long and then I use teak but the woods that I use right now the most of is fiddleback and, well, people call it curly, too. Fiddleback, quilted.

MM: How do you spell that? Quilted? . .

SM: Q-U-I-L-T-E-D, just like quilted. Maple, now that's a very difficult. It's probably the hardest of all of the woods that I use and then I've used McAsher ebony and Brazilian rosewood and Indian rosewood. Those are the exotics. And then Zircote, Z-I-R-C-O-T-E. It comes from Belize and from the upper Yucatan or lower Yucatan. It borders on Belize.. . .

MM: These must be very difficult to find?

SM: They're difficult to find, and all the woods are getting expensive.

MM: Have you ever worked with koa?

SM: Oh yes. I have koa wood, too. I have quite a bit of koa. I have some beautiful koa wood. I don't know where it is. It's in my shed somewhere. We'll have to move it all eventually. But I would say 90 percent of the work I do is walnut.

MM: Where do you find your wood, Sam?

SM: Well, I buy a lot of it from different lumber yards in Los Angeles and then a Peterman Lumber Company in Fontana. I buy a lot of it from them, but then dealers call me. They know if they have something special they'll call. I usually end up buying it. I have two pieces in my carport right now that are four inches thick. It's all fiddleback. [I] bought two matching pieces that are six foot wide and 12 foot long.

MM: What would you make with something that size?

SM: I'm making a big conference table out of one. And then I'm making a huge kitchen table for in here, because this is the room that we'll be living in mostly.

MM: We're now seated in the kitchen room, which is very large, spacious and obviously the gathering spot in this house. The other American designers, Jens Risom, Greta Magnusson with Glenn of California or George Nelson with Herman Miller, have they ever come to visit you?

SM: No. Let' see, name them again.

MM: Jens Risom.

SM: Well, he was back east. He designed for production. They're two different things.

MM: Greta Magnusson and George Nelson.

SM: She designed for production and George Nelson had an office with quite a few people working for him and I never met him. There's a difference between designers for manufacturing

MM: Of course. I always wondered if the designers for manufacturing secretly wished they could have a life like

yours.

SM: I think there's a lot of people who would like to. I remember, I have a very, very good friend who worked for George Nelson and he actually designed the marshmallow chair. I don't know if you know about it or not. But he made it out of a coat hanger and then he cut out little cardboard things and painted them. George Nelson went by and saw it and says, "Let me have that." I don't think it was very popular, but I saw in the paper that the original one was priced at somewhere like $500,000. But John Kapel designed it and then he met me or seen my things and said, "Well, I wish I could do this," and his wife said, "Well, why not?" He moved to Saratoga and a friend of his designed a house. John bought three acres in Woodside and the same designer designed a big house there and that's where he lives now. So he started doing one-of-a-kind furniture but he still had his. Glenn of California, for example. He designed a dining room set or bedroom for them, I forget which, that was still in production until they went out of business. And he got royalties from it and that design for production. I had three pieces in a big show in New York and they sold immediately but somebody called me -- a big company - they would buy the three pieces and have them reproduced in Europe.

MM: Was this the exhibition in 1964 in conjunction with the World's Fair [New York], the exhibition at the American Craft Museum?

SM: No. No. This was this was Art USA. And it was at the Coliseum. I even got all the letters from it. They said that once they did it, I would get paid around a $32 million, royalties on it. They were a very good company because they did this. They would manufacture something, flood the market with it and then that was the end of it. And I turned it down.

MM: You thought your designs would be compromised?

SM: Well, they said they'd do it as close as possible and I would d have the final say, but it was made for the machine rather than for the individual. They would have to make changes, but today the machine can do anything. I turned it down. Tom Holding, who was the Director of the Metropolitan, came out. He was head of [unintelligible] magazine for the [unintelligible] and it was a television thing. He said, "I want you to answer my question in just one word." I'm like, "Oh God. This is going to be difficult." But one of them was about this deal. "Why didn't you take it?" And I said, "Prostitute," and he just about fell off his - and that was it. I didn't want to prostitute myself. I think it would've changed my whole life and I didn't want to change. And my wife couldn't believe I turned it down. Another time a big beer company on the east coast called and I wasn't here. They told Freda what it was and she said, "I don't think my husband would be interested in that at all." And so when I got home and she said somebody called from New York, an advertising company, and they wanted to use you spokesperson.

SM: "We make rocking chairs and we also make a wonderful product." Then the name of the beer. So I called back and they told me just what I'm telling you. I said, "Well, I don't drink beer and so I'm not a bit interested." She thought a while and said, "You don't have to say you drink beer. We'll just say 'Master craftsman is proud of his product as we are.'" I said, "No, I don't want to do that, either." "Well, then we won't even use your photographs, just the real photograph of the rocker." And I said, "I'm not a bit interested." She said, "I can't believe this. You could make thousands of dollars." I said, "Well, I'm not interested in that thousand dollars or thousands of dollars." I turned it down and said, "Well, call a friend of mine, he might be interested." So I called him right away and said, "They may call you," but they didn't and he was a one of the very best, Bob Stockdale. He said, "Tell them that I'll do it if they just supply me beer." Well, they didn't. But I could have done this a long time ago but I didn't want to.

MM: Well, you've stayed true to what your goal is, I think.

SM: Yes. I knew what I wanted to do and Freda would have given me support. I didn't even have to ask her. She knew what I would say.

MM: And you knew she would support you in y our decision.

SM: Oh surely. I think she'd been very disappointed if I said, "Yes," to any of those. But it wasn't because I wasn't a bit interested and I'm not today.

MM: Now in 1953 you began working with Kneedler-Fauchere, a well-known furniture design company that's based in San Francisco and has a Los Angeles branch here. Harry Lawenda and his wife, Dorothy were the owners. That was a company that you had a long association with.

SM: Well, it wasn't that long.

MM: Wasn't?

SM: No.

MM: How many years were you connected with them?

SM: Well, let's see, I just got a letter from his daughter. He was Director of Admissions, Bill... I did furniture for him. Anyway I'd made furniture for him and this young fellow at [inaudible] College, his last name was Whitney, was manager for [inaudible] and wondered if I would be interested in letting them be my agents. I did but what it was, I got one third, they got one third and the decorator got one third. I was working for nothing. I did that for about two years and did furniture for a lot of well-known decorators. I did floor plans and made furniture, but after about two years of people calling me directly. . .

MM: Didn't need to go through them any longer?

SM: Yes. So I never went back to them. They were the only really outfit that I had when I first started but it was about two years. I think, if it were that long. Then, I just started working by myself.

MM: You didn't need them any longer?

SM: No.

MM: The essay talks about - in 1953 - Elizabeth Gordon, who was editor of *House Beautiful*, she saw your work at the L. A. County Fair and ordered your carved lace, curved lace bench.

SM: That was before that.

MM: Talk about how that and how bench came about?. . .

SM: Well, she saw my furniture in New York at Art USA and saw some of my pieces. She called and was all excited and I'm not adding words to this but she said, "I think it's the most beautiful furniture I've seen in the last 25 years, and I love it. I'd like to write an article about you." She asked me if I were Egyptian and I said, "No." "Are you selling Egyptian art?" And I said, "No." "Have you ever been in Egypt?" And I said, "No, why do you ask?" And she said, "It has a very Egyptian feeling to it." And so she came out and we did several articles on my work, oh gosh, about six articles in a period of two years. Then I saw the old bench at an antique shop where my sister lived. I walked in and I saw this and it resembled mine except it had the loop that went this way and this way and this way and that way. I asked what it was and he said it was early American. I said, "Is it for sale?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "How much?" He said, "$10." So I bought it. I thought well, it has a feeling of the little bench that I do, except mine just goes like this and . . .

MM: A gentle curve?

SM: Yes. So she saw one of those and that's why she thought it was very Egyptian. My chairs that were like this were very Egyptian looking. When I had a chance, I worked on a project with State Department in Tehran and Lebanon. We went to Egypt and this was right after the Six-Day Wa, and there was hardly anybody there. We had the whole museum to ourselves. We saw the King Tut collection, and lo and behold, here was this little chair that I had the copy. We found out that it wasn't early American, it was made during the World's Fair in Chicago and you could buy them in a kit. I still have it.

MM: Did you feel an affinity with Egyptian furniture when you saw it? Did you like it?

SM: I loved it. I loved it very much. They had a little chair that looked something like this except the legs were the legs of a deer and the hooves were inlaid with ivory. I could see where she was coming from, I'd never seen anything like it before. I do have several books on Egyptian arts.

MM: So the elegance of line and the lightness.

SM: Very much all of it.

MM: Well, that brings us to your fascinating experiences with ICA, the International Cooperation Administration that was a program begun by Dave Chapman in 1955. It was designed to send master craftsmen abroad to countries where craftsmen didn't have resources and access to techniques. But this was an opportunity for you to work with indigenous artists and you did this in Iran and Lebanon first.

SM: Somebody at the State Department [I don't know just what department it was] had an idea of doing a survey of countries throughout the world and their indigenous crafts. They hired a group of designers from all over the United States and David Chapman was one of them. They gave him specific countries to check and they found that there were very few indigenous crafts in these countries and they went all over the world.

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A]

[SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SM Dave Chapman is the person that I worked with, and he bought samples of indigenous crafts from different areas, and he listed everything. Russell Wright was the one in Okinawa with Ricy Petterson, Russell Wright was just a designer and designed pottery. They did ceramics there and Ric stayed on for a long time, and I don't know if very many people know that or not.

MM: Well, for you this was going home, wasn't it?

SM: Well, I'd never been in the Mid-East. They gave Dave Chapman Lebanon and Iran to work with. Roy Dinstrom was a weaver and he went to Iran for two years with the weavers, trying to bring back some of the indigenous designs. Then they contacted me and asked if I would go for wood, three months in Iran and three months in Lebanon. Freda and I talked about it and she could go with the children, too. So I said yes, I'd go. I called my different clients and said I'd be gone for about eight months and would it be all right. They all said, "Yes," and I had a huge job for Welton Beckett but they said, "Fine." So I knew I had this big job to come home to, and I went to my bank and they said, "Don't worry. If you're overdrawn we'll cover it," which banks wouldn't do today. At the last minute they said Freda couldn't go. It was too dangerous in Iran and if I had known that, in fact, I just about came back. I was in New York and I thought, "Oh God, this is the lonesomest time in my life." And then especially when I was flying over the Atlantic and I was supposed to have four days in London and four days in Paris and four days in Rome and then going to Lebanon but it wasn't at all exciting.

MM: What did you find when you got there in terms of the crafts situation in furniture?

SM: Well, when I got to Lebanon I had relatives there that I had never me. I met a young man, whose family had a very modern furniture facility. I went to the Embassy and met the Industrial Officer and he said, "There's a young man that I'd like to have you meet," so Akram took me in hand and we visited different shops and all.

MM: Akram, A-K-R-U-M?

SM: Akram A-K-R-A-M Abdul, A-B-D-U-L, Kahim K-A-R-I-M. They were Lebanese who had been displaced from what was then Palestine. They started a factory in Behrut. I got acquainted with him, but then I had to leave for Iran. When I got to Iran it was just all brown with patches of white snow. I thought, "What have I done?" Then I went to the hotel. They put me up in the best hotels all through Europe. I called up the airline and I said, "When's the next plane back to the United States?" They said, "Not for a week." Well, that kind of gave me a little chance to get oriented and then I thought, "Well, this isn't too bad." Roy Dinstrom met me and we had dinner together. I stayed in his apartment for one night and then I stayed in the hotel for the rest of the time.

MM: You designed some interesting pieces in metal because wood.

SM: Yes. These are some of the pieces I designed.

MM: You designed interesting pieces because wood was not available?

SM: Wasn't available at all. So what I did, I worked out of the Embassy and I had my office there. I made full-size drawings of everything, cabinets, coffee tables, chairs -- and we made full-size prints. Then I went to different shops and whoever wanted to make the pieces, you didn't have to be able to read or anything, I found a shop that was sort of modern and very primitive. The boys looked like they were 12, 13, 14 years old, and it was wintertime and their feet were wrapped in cloth and in gunny sacks. What do you call that?

MM: Burlap?

SM: Burlap sacks. And we worked inside and outside and I couldn't speak Parse or Farsi, and but I could speak Arabic. But they didn't speak Arabic. I'd point to the metal and they'd pull it down and I'd mark it, then I'd tell them where to saw it and I'd hold it. They would weld it without masks and all. I made about 40 pieces. This chair is one of them. I was told that they were just building a new hotel and these people did all the furniture for it. They didn't have any wood, they had a lot of wood they couldn't get to, but they had a lot of plywood that they made and then they covered it with plastic. It was manufactured in Germany. So everything was made of iron and plastic. On the chest of drawers, I used an angle iron so that the drawers slid back and forth. It was quite nice.

MM: I'm sure you had a major impact on them.

SM: Well, I think so. I worked there for two months and then I went back to Lebanon. They arranged for Freda to come, and I met her at the airport, and they didn't even go through customs. We just whisked them off. Ten we stayed there. That was a wonderful experience because I met a lot of my relatives that I had never met. We

went back to my father's birthplace.

MM: It was good for your family to meet your wife and son.

SM: They had very, very fine equipment. They had a saw mill in Romania and Yugoslavia and they had a beautiful factory on the Christian side of Beirut. They were Muslim and unfortunately, when the Civil War broke out, all of the equipment was moved out and the building was blown up. They still own the land. They're back in Beirut now, and when I was there about a year ago I they had come to this country and he'd spent his honeymoon for a week at our place. We've corresponded and I helped then his daughter get into Art Center, but she was way over. She should be a senior. But she had heard of Art Center, so she went to night school and ended up graduating with highest honors. She was doing graphic arts. Then she married a young man and they moved to Pittsburgh. She's just like a daughter to me. And then her father comes over every so often, and I did meet him a year ago and he took me all over the place. Later they asked me if I would go and do Nigeria or Ceylon, I think it was Ceylon then, for two years and I just couldn't. I said, "No."

MM: But you did go to El Salvador.

SM: I did go to El Salvador for three months, but I said I wouldn't go unless my wife and my children could go, too. So Freda taught rug making out of hemp and dolls, all kinds of dolls. They were very primitive and just really…

MM: Basket weaving?

SM: Not basket weaving but carpeting.

MM: Carpeting?

SM: And she came down with hepatitis and just about died. She came down with infectious hepatitis but she got over it.

MM: There was a danger of travel.

SM: Yes.

MM: Take us back, if you will, Sam, to your work on the case study houses.

SM: Oh, that was a long time ago and a friend of mine, John Elliott was the angel for *Arts and Architecture* and his father was the angel for the *The Daily News* at Manchester.

MM: Jeremy mentions a John Entenza. Is this the same John Entenza, the publisher of *Arts and Architecture*? . . .

SM: John Entenza was the publisher/editor. They did the case study houses and Charles Eames and a lot of the architects. They had a wonderful magazine and it was cutting edge architecture. The case study houses had very cutting edge furniture in them, but I did one of them and met a lot of the designers like (There's a big photograph in here) Kip Stewart and Stuart McDougal, who were partners and Rex Goode. This is Rex Goode, Kip Stewart, Stuart McDougal, myself, Hendrick Van Keppel, this was Green. Let's see. Hendrick Van Keppal and Taylor Green were partners. These two fellows were - most all of these were doing production type furniture. I'm the only one that actually was making hand-made furniture. Then here Ernest Inouye and Roy did work for, John Keal and Barney Flagg. I knew them all but Inouye, who designed for Brown Jordan and his chair is still being made to this day. Probably he was the most successful of all of the designers. This chair is still being made and then he made other things and he never has to work again in his life.

MM: Now the case study - the other architects on the case study houses, Raphael Soriano, and Pierre Koenig, who's style did you like the most of that group?

SM: Well, they were all in pretty much boxes and, you know, before that Richard Neutra, and Rudolph Schindler, it was so damn cold, really and even now they talk about the "Schindler Houses" or the King House, what do you call it? Well, it's on King Street, just off of Santa Monica and La Cienega, but they had a lot of innovations. It was sort of a camp. They had the design but were very, very badly built. They didn't have any money and it was sort of a campground really, but they were very innovative and all. Later came Craig Elwood and some of those people. John Lautner. But I knew all these guys and I did two houses for John Lautner. I got to know John Lautner quite well. I did a house that he did a remodel on in the area north of Pasadena. Oh what was it? Cheviot Hills, but anyway in that area, he remodeled part of a house that, oh, who was the very famous black architect?

MM: Of all the architects that were working at that time whose work did you like the best? Did you feel they had an affinity with what you were doing?

SM: I think that there was John Rex. He did a big ranch house for the Wyles - for Frank and Edith Wyle - and I did a lot of furniture with that house. That was just a big rectangle that was glass about two stories high and very, very striking at North Fork just before you get into Yosemite. But it had so much glass that it was an oven in summertime and an icebox in winter, but very spectacular. And then he built a house for himself that was in tune more to that area. I think that John Lautner was partners with him or worked together, but I thought Lautner appealed to me the most. Then there was, of course, the house that Ray and Charles Eames did out of industrial products. It was a very nice house but I don't think a family with children could have lived in it.

MM: Do you remember the architects who worked - who designed the houses that you worked on among the case study group?

SM: I didn't do any of the case study houses. I knew Ray and Charles Eames. I knew Ray very well and I knew John Entenza.

MM: What was Eames like?

SM: She was very warm and very outgoing. Charles Eames was very quiet, but Ray Eames was really very outgoing. They had a get together for John Entenza, who was not well and a lot of these old-timers came. I didn't think they'd even remember who I was, but they all did and we had a wonderful time. And Ray Eames died not long after that, but my period is when Cal Straub, Don Hensman and Conrad Buff were in their prime. They used a lot of wood and I did furniture for the Saltmans. They had a house in Pasadena. They just finished a house that my friend, Wally Cunningham, did that is probably one of the most cutting edge houses I've ever seen. That's in the Pasadena area. I did a lot of furniture for that house. Then I did a lot of work for Cal Straub, Don Hensman and Conrad Buff.

MM: So you like the warmth of their design?

SM: Yes. They were post and beam houses, but very much like the case study houses, but warmer materials. Then I did an awful lot of work for Welton Beckett for Perrira for - oh gosh, I tend to forget who the companies were - but in those days they would have a project manager for a certain job and they would give him say a budget of $100,000 and he'd go from there. If he wanted to buy a $50,000 Persian rug (I'm exaggerating) that would be half of the budget, and they would have to do everything else on what they had left.

MM: Sam, in 1955, '56 you were in two exhibitions in northern California: "Contemporary California Designers" at the Oakland Museum and "California Designed" at the de Young Museum in San Francisco. Was this the first time that you had exhibited your work in any quantity in that area ?

SM: Well, let's see. I had a one-man show at the American Craft Council or at American Craft Museum's west coast museum and I don't know just when that was. I don't think it's even listed, but I had a one-man show there. It was the first time that I'd shown at the Oakland Art Museum. Is that the one that you mentioned?

MM: Did you gain more collectors from northern California once those shows happened?

SM: Yes. And then at the de Young Museum, they purchased two pieces outright and they were the first craft pieces that they ever bought.

MM: Speaking of pieces your first double settee was shown there. Is that correct?

SM: I think it was in Oakland. It was in Oakland when they bought it.

MM: How did the double settee come about?

SM: Well, I learned to like the form of the chair and I thought well, I can make a double very easily and I did. People just wonder very often how it doesn't collapse in the center, but the spindles help it , also when I put the crests in. The little small one, the double low back, when the Metropolitan bought one of them that was sort of the high point up to that time. Freda would go with me to these shows when it was on display.

MM: Now here's the spindle back settee.

SM: This is an old one.

MM: This is 1959.

SM: I think I did this for Billy Pearson.

MM: This is a two-seater. Was this like the piece you did in northern California?

SM: No. No. It was a little different than that and I think I have a photograph of it in here somewhere.

MM: We're looking now at a low back chair designed from 1966 with an upholstered seat. This book, *The Furniture of Sam Maloof*, by Jermey Adamson, is not a catalog of my show at all. This is just a story about your life, actually.

SM: This contains much more, of course, than what is in the exhibition. And a lot of these pieces aren't in the exhibition. But, like I say, one chair begets another. Well, it all started with a double rocker. Herb Coyne in New York had just bought a great big estate with a old two-story house, maybe three-story. Just a mansion that had to be completely restored and all and he retired out there. He asked if I would do furniture for them and he said, "Sam, have you ever made a double rocking chair?" I said, "No, I haven't but I'd wanted to." He said, "Has anyone ever made one?" I said, "Not that I know of." And he said, "Well, why don't you make one with three legs in front and have three rockers. And I said, "Well, Herb, if I did that and the floor is not level it might crack. Let me make one that's just two rockers and we'll see how it works." And it worked beautifully and he has the first rocker that I ever made. . .

MM: Do you remember what year that was?

SM: 1987.

MM: What were the special challenges of that design?

SM: Well, you know, what's going to happen when two people sit on it hard but I made only 10 of them and I've never had trouble with any of them. Then the Metropolitan wanted a settee. Then the curator wanted the settee, so they accepted a settee as a gift in 1987, that they have . They were starting a crafts of a gallery.

MM: How long ago was that?

SM: Oh, this was 15 years ago or 20 years ago and the girl who was in charge of it left because they were cutting down and in 1988 R.Craig Miller wrote to me to thank me for the Settee. Then somebody else took over and they gave him a gallery but I don't think Philipe de Montebello, the director cares a bit about American crafts. They closed it up and made it part of the [Lyla Atchison] Wallace. And all they had then was a case in the hallway that was maybe six foot high and maybe six foot wide. You could get hardly anything in it. And then the fellow that was in charge left and went to Denver and started up a rather good program on American crafts.

MM: I used to work in the American paintings department at the Met and at that time Louis Sharp was there. He's now the director of the Denver Art Museum. His interest was in sculpture. There's a new museum, though, in and I heard it was in a bank building and I thought it was just, you know, like a one-story thing but it turns out to be about six stories if I'm not mistaking and the Bank of America moved their headquarters there and backed them up and it is the most beautiful museum - craft museum - I've ever seen or any kind of museum. Is this the Mint Museum?

SM: The Mint Museum. I was there just recently and they had a wonderful collection. It is coined "regional" but they're reaching out, but I was taken by it very much.

MM: Have they collected any of your work yet?

SM: They have one table and most museums either have a patron that likes furniture or a patron that likes this person or that person and they'll buy a piece and give it to the museum. I don't have very many patrons that have bought furniture for a museum. Most of them keep it for themselves. But I did a table like this, except for it was beautiful oval and Brazilian rosewood, with chairs. I made it for $6,500 for all of them and I thought that was a lot of money.

MM: Who was the original owner?

SM: The original owners were Blanche and Edger Pope. When he died she moved into a smaller place. We borrowed the table from his wife and she loaned it to them and later she asked me if they would like to have it .

MM: This is to the Renwick?

SM: And so they said, "Oh, we'd love it." And she said, "Well, I'd like a tax write off on it," and I think they appraised it - I may be mistaken - but I think it was $450,000.

MM: That's quite an appreciation.

SM: It is. It's better than the stock market, and a lot of people have told me that.

MM: But I can see how collectors don't part often with works because they're objects that they live with, they use, they, you know, interact with every day.

SM: See, and this was when they could write it off and they can't now. But now they changed that law so that when they give something to a museum, they can have it appraised and I think it's the only fair thing to do.

MM: Tell me about another design that's so distinctive, your music stand. We looked at one in your studio before we came down here. How did the idea for the music stand come to you?

SM: Well, actually the way it came about was that Rico Lebrun was very, very ill, and, oh, no, no, no, it was before that. Emil Kosa came to me and he said, "I'm very lazy when I sit in bed. I don't want to hold a book. I want something that I can set a book on, and then all I have to do is turn the pages. Can you make something for me?" And so I did. It was very much like this except it had a long extension and I made one for him and then later I came up with others. This is a little a little better. Then I came up with this one that is for two people.

MM: And both of them have this wonderful sculptural base with the curving, sloping legs.

SM: Yes. And then here this is one I made and mine is more complete than that. I don't know if they have the newest one that I make in the book or not. Let's see here.

MM: So, again, this is another example of your evolving design.

SM: Yes. And, one idea begets another. Like here now, this is a double music stand and this was a special chair.

MM: Is that a folding chair?

SM: No, it isn't. It's all laminated. I

MM: One of the wonderful things about this book is that it contains many photographs of you working, and close-ups of your techniques.

[END TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

[SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE A]

SM: … the Blackwell House and we did some wood furniture for them.

MM: Well, Sam, of the many designs you've come up with and worked on do you find yourself working on several pieces simultaneously? Different pieces? Or do you tend to focus on tables or chairs at a certain time?

SM: Oh yes. If somebody orders a dining table and six chairs I just concentrate on that and if they order a rocking chair, a buffet and I do that job all at one time. I don't make a lot of chairs or - it's all mixed up. Something will be in clamps drying and I'll go to something else.

MM: Things are at various stages?

SM: Yes.

MM: Now you say your design begins with the selection of the wood. Do you have an idea, when you look at the wood? Does the wood tell you about the kind of piece that you can do?

SM: The wood doesn't really tell me what to do.

MM: I guess what I'm getting at is there might be some special feature in the wood, a design or something, that you'd want to center or highlight in some way?

SM: What I do when I'm working, if I see a piece of wood that I especially like I set it aside until I find more wood like it and then I'll make something out of it. In the shop right now there's a couple of pieces of beautiful, beautiful oak that are matching tops, but they're not long enough, so what I'll do I'll put a strip of ebony in, like this.

MM: Oh yes. This is a beautiful design. Duet music stand 1998 and it's maple, ebony and purple heart.

SM: Does it say "purple heart"?

MM: Purple heart.

SM: Oh, the purple heart is on the stand. And this one goes back like this and this turns and this goes up and

down.

MM: So the stands are moveable and there's a color contrast. Wonderful detail between the maple and the ebony. The light and dark. Well, you do quite a lot with color in the woods

SM: Yes. Now this is a McAsher ebony wood. That's very handsome. I love this one.

MM: And the wood grain here especially in the base of the piece. The wood grain patterns as the leg meets the stand.

SM: They wouldn't let us borrow this unfortunately.

MM: This is a piece that comes from a museum?

SM: No. This is a private collection but they didn't want to loan it . See, this is a double chest. This belonged to Freda. And that I'd never sell. And this is President Carter's here.

MM: That's a beautiful table.

SM: Yes. That's koa there.

MM: A pedestal dining table out of koa. What are the woods that you love to work in but are becoming so rare and expensive that it's difficult?

SM: Well, Brazilian rosewood's very, very hard to find. Very difficult to find and McAsher ebony is very difficult to find, except for a price, but I have some four quarter that's about 12 foot long that is four quarter and that I'll make a beautiful cabinet out of it. But, see, this is fiddleback here.

MM: Beautiful pattern in the fiddleback. And you inscribe each piece with your name and the date?

SM: Yes. And here, for example, this one here says, "Number Two, 1999." It doesn't matter what it is, I will start with number one at the first of the year and put the date. And these are the boys, Mike Johnson, Larry White and David Wade.

MM: This brings us to the subject of your assistants. Larry White was your first assistant who joined you?

SM: Well, no. Sammy was. My son worked with me as a little boy and he worked with me until he was in his 20's. He went to college and he went part time. He was going to be a junior, and he asked if he could come to work full time. Of course, I was upset for about a flash and then I said why not? And so Sammy was my first paid employee. I didn't start paying him until he was married. And then Larry came. Larry White was 19 and worked for about eight years. Then he left and worked for himself for 25 years and then he came back. Larry's been working with me now all together about 20 years and then Mike came to work for me when he was 19. I think Mike had been with me 23 years.

MM: Yeah, I met Mike yesterday.

SM: Yes. And then David Wade worked for me in high school and he went to Junior College. Then he went to college and worked for me part-time and then he wanted to work full time. And David has been with me about 12 years and then Ken Briggs graduated in political science and he's worked for me off and on and he's a real nice person.

MM: Now of all your assistants do each focus on a particular area or are they involved in every step, every process?

SM: I still design everything and I put everything together myself. I shape roughly what I want and then they'll take it from there. For example, I'm putting some pieces together. They have done it, I mean, they do it better than I do because that's just about all they do. Mike is the only one that doesn't do things on the outside. Larry has his pottery and his sculpture and David does sort of art furniture, but Mike just devotes his whole time to what I do. He says, "I'm happy just being a good artisan." And he is very good, but they're all very good or I wouldn't have them. But right now I put together a rocking chair and I rough shaped it. Larry's finishing it up, and Mike is working on the chair.

MM: Let's take that piece as an example. How long would it take to go from beginning to finished chair?

SM: It takes about two to three weeks. It takes an awful lot of time. We could knock it out very fast, just knock this stuff out, but we don't. I won't let anything out of the shop unless it's the way I want it. And they know it, so I say, "Just don't worry about it. Just do it how I want it." And I don't look at it but I can just glance at a thing and

tell if it's all right. If I see something I don't like I'll just say, "Let's take a little more here or take a little bit more there." But we've worked so long that . . .

MM: They understand what you're looking for?

SM: Yes, they do. About the only thing that we do - even spindles. I could have somebody work for a week just doing spindles, but I don't do that. If we had a rocking chair we'd make a set of spindles, or eight spindles for that particular chair.

MM: So you don't store pieces ahead of time because that's not a modular thing that you just assemble?

SM: If you go out there I have about 10 or 12 seats that are the same chair. They're for a dining room and I'm doing, I think, 10 of them and they'll be all the same, but if somebody ordered the same chair next week I might change it a little bit.

MM: And the upholstery here - do you do that, as well?

SM: I have a friend that's upholstered for me for 50 years. He's retired and he isn't very well but he still does my work for me.

MM: Is he the one who did the wonderful yellow upholstered chair - the early chair?

SM: No.

MM: That's so striking.

SM: Let's see, where is it here?

MM: It's such a large back and beautiful to look at from the back. I think that's another aspect of your chairs is that from every angle they're interesting.

SM: Yes. The chair has to look good from all angles. You can't have a good angle, bad angle or whatever.

MM: They're not meant to be just seen from the front.

SM: No.

MM: In fact, many times when you photograph your chairs you show them from the back..

SM: Yes. Well, see I just don't like a chair from the corner front, but this is all right because usually this chair leg would be about up to here and this one would be small.

MM: Tell us how this chair came about.

SM: Okay. This is an oval chair. I was called by a lady, Ms. - oh God, isn't that crazy? Does it say who I made it for there?

MM: Arthur Raymond family.

SM: Arthur Raymond. And Arthur Raymond was a partner of McDonald Douglas and he designed the DC-3 airplane. He died when he was 100 years old. He and his wife had this beautiful house in Brentwood and they would have foreign students live with them. Their children were all gone. And she wanted a dining table that had drawers in it. Well, she had seen the drawers where each one would have a place setting. They were in and out and the kitchen was going the whole time. They'd go to the kitchen, serve themselves, sit, open the drawer, pull out their napkin, silver, and wash the plate. They were in there all hours of the day and night, so I made a huge dining table for her, that had two little drawers on either side. They had great big doorway going into the living and I made two buffets that fit onto the table so that they could have four more people sitting at it. I did a lot of furniture for her.

MM: That's such an interesting innovation. To make a piece that can stand on its own, but then when put with the table, extends the table.

SM: Arthur Raymond died about two days before he was 100, and his granddaughter-in-law was the executor. I got to see when Mrs. Raymond built the new house. What they did they sold their big, big house and built a more modern house that looks down on Eli Baldwin's house. She had everything out and I reupholstered these two chairs because the leather was rotted. And Mrs. Raymond sold the old house to this movie actress. Three people just really roomed at the house as she was redoing it, too, because she didn't like what they'd done to it.

They bought the lower house that was used as a guest house and office, and they had to get rid of all this furniture and so I appraised it.

[TAPE OFF - TAPE ON]

SM: We had to reupholster these two pieces here and Keith Dixon did that. He's retired, but he still does my work for me. I do not know what they are going to do with all the furniture. Rene Russo and her husband bought the house and she likes the furniture very much, but her husband is from Boston and likes antiques. I don't know what they're going to do with it. I think they ought to give it to a museum for a good tax write off if they need one. I don't know if they need one or not.

MM: At Scripps we're pleased to have your chair that came to us via Brooks Cavin. The benches which were in the Garrison Theater are now temporarily housed with us in the gallery and we're getting very attached to them so . . .

SM: What are you going to do with them?

MM: When the Garrison Theater is renovated they will probably go back there but that's going to take some time.

SM: You ought to have an exhibit of my stuff.

MM: Yes, I'd love to. I'd love to. I wanted to talk to you about that after the interview.

SM: So I don't know what they're going to do with these. I really don't. but if they need a tax write off...

MM: Now we haven't talked about this arm. This fluid soft design on the arm. This is on the yellow upholstered chair that we were discussing.

SM: I did those right off the bat. I just re-hand cut them on the band saw and I made them so that when I laid my arm on they just felt good.

MM: They follow the contour of your arm.

SM: I cut those out freehand on the band saw but one shouldn't do that. I was taking a draw knife and it was taking so long that whenever I do that, I have to explain that you're not supposed to do it. That it's very dangerous, but I did it not knowing that you weren't supposed to do it. I'm very careful about it. I just don't want anybody to cut a finger or a hand off or anything.

MM: What are the special dangers of doing that?

SM: Well, the thing is just one little point is touching the table and they twist and they twist it through there on the band saw and every piece of wood should be flat and you shouldn't be pre-cutting it like I do. It's very dangerous.

MM: You have to be very strong in holding it?

SM: Well, you have to know when to let go if it catches. You throw your hands back, and we'd rather have the chair arm cut in half than your own arm. But I very, very definitely recommend on the television things, they just say, "Do not try this yourself."

MM: Well, in 1961 you did prepare a wonderful manuscript for a book that showed your techniques and ways of working and at the same time you were making furniture. How did you do . . .

SM: Let's see. When was this? Well, a company, Chilton Publishing, came to me and wanted me to do a book on my life, really and how I worked. I said, "I don't want to do a book that is how to do it." I just would not do it, and so they said they would give me carte blanche. So I wrote a whole script about my life, how I worked and everything, and then Freda took most of the photographs. Freda took all of these pictures, but she didn't get credit.

MM: She was an excellent photographer.

SM: Yes. She just had a little camera. But Jonathan was so adamant, "Well, I don't want anybody else to have pictures in the thing." In my other book I do give Freda credit. So I let it go at that, but it was very nice. I have all of the manuscript and everything. Then they got a new editor and they gave me a $500 advance, which was like, $100,000 at that time. I sent in the manuscript, photographs, everything and they had a new editor and he said, "I like what you've done, but we want a do-it yourself book." I went back and I said, "But the agreement

was not a do-it yourself book." And anyway he said, "Well, I'm the new editor and that's what I want. If you can't come through with it, you'll have to return your advance," which I found out later that I did not have to because they were not living up to what they said. It really knocked me for a loop. I had to send $500 back to them, and so the book was never published. Then later another woodworker came out with a book, that was pretty much like mine; just a life story about how I did it and how I started. Then years later they sold Chilton Press to somebody else and again they came back to me. I didn't say anything and then I said, "Well, you know, I had a bad experience with your company quite a few years ago. " I told them what it was and they just about died.

MM: I can imagine.

SM: They said, "I don't know how you even let us come to talk to you." But I said, "I'm really not interested because I'm doing a book." And a lot of these pictures appeared in the last book.

MM: That was a beautiful book that Dana Levy designed.

SM: Yes. And Dana wanted to design this one but I had no say. I don't even get royalties on this book. We put up the money, my foundation put up the money, so we could get going on it and three people gave $100,000. I thought my foundation was going to get it, and I don't know whoever rigged up the thing . . .

MM: Now this design is really distinctive. This is the rope chair design. This reminds me so much of furniture I've seen in Hawaii.

SM: Yes. I couldn't find anything - I couldn't find an upholsterer, so I took clothesline rope that was a continuous thing and I just kept wrapping it. The first chair that I made I went the other way. What I did, I started up here and I went like this.

MM: Made a figure eight?

SM: A figure eight, but I'd come down and I'd do a figure eight and then I'd go to the seat and do a figure eight and that was real small cord and that took forever to do.

MM: I can imagine.

SM: Freda did that. And then this was furniture I did. This was a little table and this was chip board not chipboard but that brown, they didn't have chip board in those days. I got the idea from a Hawaiian bowl that had.

MM: This is a round table and does this have a cork top?

SM: No. It had a maple top. I still have this, by the way, around '51. This is the first chair I made for Henry Dreyfuss. This was another chair I made for Henry Dreyfuss. He didn't want a back in it because he didn't want his clients to be too comfortable and stay there all day long. And then this chair here was one that I made for Henry and I still have this.

MM: This is also 1952.

SM: Yes. This I own.

MM: And this has contrasting color and wood at the joints and the seat or rather the back.

SM: Yes, and then this shows how I do it, see? This is all one piece of wood.

MM: This is the fluid meeting of the chair back and the back, the chair leg and the back.

SM: Yes. And then here this is my chair. He was just showing comparison. And this is a Johannson chair and this is my chair.

MM: Well, Sam, after all these years of making furniture is there anything you haven't made yet that you still want to make?

SM: Not really. I keep thinking like in a show that they're having at the Renwick, there's a chaise lounge that hardly anyone has ever seen. I did the chaise lounge and I've done pieces that I've only made one-of-a-kind that I don't even have photographs of that I made for people. But I've designed about 500 pieces of furniture in the time that I've been working, which is a lot of pieces. Freda always wanted a glass case for her dolls. She loved to collect not the prissy kind.

MM: Kachina or Native American dolls?

SM: No, not Kachina, but the cloth dolls that the Navahos, the Hopis, and the natives in El Salvador made, the ones that were made in the Middle East. I was so going to do that and I had promised myself that I was going to make it for her. It wouldn't take me long to do.

MM: And now you're in your new home and new studio and does it feel comfortable? Does it feel like home?

SM: I go up to the other place and I look out of the office window and it's just as if I had never moved. It's exactly the way it was. And this is just between us. It was so lonesome being alone after Freda died.

MM: This is the story of Sam meeting Beverly again after many years of knowing her as a friend.

SM: I'd seen her because I had done furniture for friends. Then I did go to her house after she was divorced. She had a dinner party for a few people and I just presumed she was married and that was it. I would see her at different places but I wasn't a bit interested. I mean, I was married. Then after Freda was gone for about two and a half years, I happened to see her at Claremont and she called out my name. she gave me a big hug and I wondered if she'd go with me. I'm so damned old and all.

MM: You're in great shape, Sam. I don't think you have to worry.

SM: Anyway, I was having an exhibit in Riverside.

MM: At the Art Museum?

SM: Yes. She came to the opening and held my hand kind of tight, but there were so many people, and I didn't know if I were coming or going. Well, later I called her and said, "I have to go to the museum. Would you have lunch with me?" And she said, I said, "At the museum?" Sam, I'm very busy but why don't you come to the house and I'll do a little snack or something and we can visit quietly." because if you go to the museum you're not going to get a minute to yourself.

MM: That's right. Everyone will come up and talk to you.

SM: So we had lunch together and then about a week later I asked if she would meet me at the museum. I had to go back again for something. I really didn't but, so we had lunch there, and then I knew I was going to get married.

MM: You are a man who makes his mind up quickly. You know what you're looking for so . . .

SM: But I was going with a lady that I liked very, very much. We were in Claremont and she wanted to do get married in this house rather than the other house, and I can see why. I mean, there are too many memories in the other house and . . .

MM: This is such a beautiful location for you, giving you the closeness of your studio, but a separate space so that you have living and working next door to one another. Yet they're discreet areas.

SM: And she's taking over the whole garden. Beverly and Claremont want to do some of the little annex here and she loves gardening so she's doing that. She's really a wonderful person and I would be amiss if I didn't say she reminds me an awful lot of Freda. I call her Freda so often. I'll be sitting here and I'll say "Freda" and she listens to it and she doesn't say, "Sam" or anything. She just accepts it and then, of course, Freda's buried right here, but she talks about Freda, I mean, they were good friends.

MM: Well, it's so nice to have this friendship that's gone for years before, so you have that wonderful foundation.

SM: I had a lot of friends in Claremont. I was awful worried about [inaudible] and I've done a lot of work for different people and we're all kind of concerned about them.

[TAPE OFF - TAPE ON]

MM: We are discussing a recent interview with the PBS on November 31st, 2001. Sam's talking about people calling in from across the country.

SM: And it was nice. I won't talk about what they said, but listen to it and see what you think . I don't have trouble talking about what I do, but I'd never been on live national radio and I had no idea what she was going to talk about. We didn't discuss anything. We just started cold turkey. I think it came out very, very well. Listen to it.

MM: I'll definitely be interested in hearing it. Are you now, as an artist, concentrating on any particular area, or are you still working as you have in the past on a variety of pieces? Are you involved in several things

simultaneously or do you have a special project going right now?

SM: Well, I am in my shop. I'm working on several different things but then the main thing that I'm concentrating on, or trying to, is the house and it is not what I wanted. I didn't have much say. I designed it, but I didn't have much say about how it was going to be built. I'm of the habit of doing a drawing and then looking at it and then I design while I'm building and in this case that wasn't so. And, of course, being alone, I didn't care about the kitchen but we're going to a tear out the kitchen and redo it. The stoneware gets torn up because it was not done the way the model showed.

MM: You made a beautiful hand-carved stairway and that would be the kind of thing you'd like to put in this house.

SM: There were many things that were not done and I don't know if it was deliberate or what.

MM: There was a spiral staircase in your older house in 1997 that you did that went upstairs to a guest room and you.

SM: Yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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